

of his attention to such things for about twenty years. Since I have known him, he has transformed himself from the rather rough, uncouth—though always spiritually minded—man he was when I first met him into an educated gentleman whom anybody would be glad to know; but he has made very few acquaintances in that time, and has kept almost none of his old friendships. He has lived alone in the house on Astor Street with only one servant—the same one all these years.

"THE only house he has visited with any frequency has been mine. He has always liked my wife; he had—he has a great affection for my daughter, who, when she was a child, ran in and out of his home as she pleased. He would take long walks with her; he'd come here sometimes in the afternoon to have tea with her on stormy days; he liked to have her play and sing to him. My daughter believes now that his present disappearance—whatever has happened to him—is connected in some way with herself. I do not think that is so."

Sherrill broke off and stood in thought for a moment; he seemed to consider, and to decide that it was not necessary to say anything more on that subject.

"Recently Corvet's moroseness and irritability had very greatly increased; he had quarreled frequently and bitterly with Spearman over business affairs. He had seemed more than usually eager at times to see me or to see my daughter; and at other times he had seemed to avoid us and keep away. I have had the feeling of late, though I could not give any actual reason for it except Corvet's manner and look, that the disturbance which had oppressed him for twenty years was culminating in some way. That culmination seems to have been reached three days ago, when he wrote summoning you here. Henry Spearman, whom I asked about you when I learned you were coming, had never heard of you; Mr. Corvet's servant had never heard of you."

"Is there anything in what I have told you which makes it possible for you to recollect or to explain?"

Alan shook his head, flushed, and then grew a little pale. What Sherrill told him had excited him by the coincidences it offered between events in Benjamin Corvet's life and his own; it had not made him "recollect" Corvet, but it had given definiteness and direction to his speculations as to Corvet's relation to himself.

SHERRILL drew one of the large chairs nearer to Alan and sat down facing him. He felt in an inner pocket and brought out an envelope; from the envelope he took three pictures, and handed the smallest of them to Alan. As Alan took it, he saw that it was a tintype of himself as a round-faced boy of seven.

"That is you?" Sherrill asked.

"Yes; it was taken by the photographer in Blue Rapids. We all had our pictures taken on that day—Jim, Betty, and I. Mr. Welton—for the first time Alan consciously avoided giving the title "Father" to the man in Kansas—"sent one of me to the 'general delivery' address of the person in Chicago."

"And this?"

The second picture, Alan saw, was one that had been taken in front of the barn at the farm. It showed Alan at twelve, in overalls and barefooted, holding a stick over his head at which a shepherd dog was jumping.

"Yes; that is Shep and I—Jim's and my dog, Mr. Sherrill. It was taken by a man who stopped at the house for dinner one day; he liked Shep and wanted a picture of him; so he got me to make Shep jump, and he took it."

"You don't remember anything about the man?"

"Only that he had a camera and wanted a picture of Shep."

"Doesn't it occur to you that it was your picture he wanted, and that he had been sent to get it? I wanted your verification that these earlier pictures were of you, but this last one is easily recognizable."

Sherrill unfolded the third picture; it was larger

than the others and had been folded across the middle to get it into the envelope. Alan leaned forward to look at it.

"That is the University of Kansas football team," he said. "I am the second one in the front row; I played end my junior year and tackle when I was a senior. Mr. Corvet—?"

"Yes; Mr. Corvet had these pictures. They came into my possession day before yesterday, the day after Corvet disappeared; I do not want to tell just yet how they did that."

Alan's face, which had been flushed at first with excitement, had gone quite pale, and his hands, as he clenched and unclenched them nervously, were cold, and his lips were very dry. He could think



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of no possible relationship between Benjamin Corvet and himself, except one, which could account for Corvet's obtaining and keeping these pictures of him through the years. As Sherrill put the pictures back into their envelope and the envelope back into his pocket, and Alan watched him, Alan felt nearly certain now that it had not been proof of the nature of this relationship that Sherrill had been trying to get from him, but only corroboration of some knowledge, or partial knowledge, which had come to Sherrill in some other way. The existence of this knowledge was implied by Sherrill's withholding of the way he had come into possession of the pictures, and his manner showed now that he had received from Alan the confirmation for which he had been seeking.

"I think you know who I am," Alan said.

Sherrill had risen and stood looking down at him.

"You have guessed, if I am not mistaken, that you are Corvet's son."

The color flamed to Alan's face for an instant, then left it paler than before. "I thought it must be that way," he answered; "but you said he had no children."

"Benjamin Corvet and his wife had no children."

"I thought that was what you meant." A twinge twisted Alan's face; he tried to control it but for a moment could not.

Sherrill suddenly put his hand on Alan's shoulder; there was something so friendly, so affectionate in the quick, impulsive grasp of Sherrill's fingers, that Alan's heart throbbed to it; for the first time some one had touched him in full, unchecked feeling for him; for the first time, the unknown about him had failed to be a barrier and, instead, had drawn another to him.

"Do not misapprehend your father," Sherrill said, quietly. "I cannot prevent what other people may think when they learn this; but I do not share such thoughts with them. There is much in this I cannot understand; but I know that it is not merely the result of what others may think it—of 'a wife in more ports than one,' as you will hear the lakemen put it. What lies under this is some great misadventure which has changed and frustrated all your father's life."

Sherrill crossed the room and rang for a servant.

"I am going to ask you to be my guest for a short time, Alan, he announced. "I have had your bag carried to your room; the man will show you which one it is."

ALAN hesitated; he felt that Sherrill had not told him all he knew—that there were some things Sherrill purposely was withholding from him; but he could not force Sherrill to tell more than he wished; so after an instant's irresolution, he accepted the dismissal.

Sherrill walked with him to the door, and gave his directions to the servant; he stood watching, as Alan and the man went up the stairs. Then he went back and seated himself in the chair Alan had occupied, and sat with hands grasping the arms of the chair while he stared into the fire.

Fifteen minutes later, he heard his daughter's footsteps and looked up. Constance halted in the door to assure herself that he was now alone; then she came to him and, seating herself on the arm of the chair, she put her hand on his thin hair and smoothed it softly; he felt for her other hand with his and found it, and held it clasped between his palms.

"You've found out who he is, father?" she asked.

"The facts have left me no doubt at all as to that, little daughter."

"No doubt that he is—who?"

Sherrill was silent for a moment—not from uncertainty, but because of the effect which what he must say would have upon her; then he told her in almost the same words he had used to Alan. Constance started, flushed, and her hand stiffened convulsively between her father's.

They said nothing more to one another; Sherrill seemed considering and debating something within himself; and presently he seemed to come to a decision. He got up, stooped and touched his daughter's hand, and left the room. He went up the stairs and on the second floor he went to a front room and knocked. Alan's voice told him to come in. Sherrill went in and, when he had made sure that the servant was not with Alan, he closed the door carefully behind him.

THEN he turned back to Alan, and for an instant stood indecisive as though he did not know how to begin what he wanted to say. As he glanced down at a key he took from his pocket, his indecision seemed to receive direction and inspiration from it; and he put it down on Alan's dresser.

"I've brought you," he said, evenly, "the key to your house."

Alan gazed at him, bewildered. "The key to my house?"

"To the house on Astor Street," Sherrill confirmed. "Your father deeded the house and its furniture and all its contents to you the day before he disappeared. I have not the deed here; it came into my hands the day before yesterday at the same time I got possession of the pictures which might—or might not, for