

The door was locked, but the key hung near by. It had been kept locked, Mr. Rackham testified, since her late ladyship—Sir Oliver's mother—had ordered it, so that no one should pass between the garden and the stables. But it had been kept oiled, not to spoil with the damp. Sir Oliver had forgotten the existence of this door: was there a faint hope in that, that he was still dreaming? But when the groom opened it, with a bit of a strain on the key, there was no fountain in sight. Sir Oliver passed through into the garden, and the door closed behind him.

The June sun was getting well into stride in the heavens, and the roses were enjoying it. The heat was not overpowering yet, but meant to be, even if those great white clouds came to the rescue. But it was not the heat that parched his tongue, and made his lips restless, and his eyes burn, heavy in their sockets; nor was the throbbing in his head caused by that slight cut. The pain of that was a little thing apart, that he could separate and make light of. He tried to think that nightmare dream was answerable. Why, see how it clung about him, even now! Even now he could recall distinctly the human-headed fish, and on the most conspicuous one of all the head of John Rackham the groom; quite one colour all over under water, eyes and all! And see how the mere meaningless jargon of the dream-image caught and clung about him, finding a shuddering application to some passing thing. It was going, he felt certain, to claim for itself the dumbness he knew he should feel, the padlock he knew would be on his tongue, should he try to speak to his woman-victim of her father's death. But it was the dream that would paralyse him, not the end of the sword-encounter to which he was not the challenger.

His manhood would come back to him in time; but his cowardice was on him now, with a vengeance. Else