

as I live. A cheerful outlook, indeed.'

"McDuff had been showing signs of incredulity several times during the story and now broke out: 'Do you expect me to believe that?' Why, to my certain knowledge, you haven't seen any such picture in the last twenty-four hours. Say, Asquith, that's enough."

"All right, gentlemen," Asquith continued, "you are not forced to believe me. As a matter of fact, you have heard only half the story. I have yet to explain how we got rid of the curse."

"All right, Asquith, no offence meant," said the Colonel, "let's have the rest of it. I would like to hear how you got out of the fix."

Asquith resumed as follows: Goldsmidt and I did some close calculating, and we decided to let McColl, for that was the name of our red-haired friend, into the secret right away. We took him aside, and then, Goldsmidt and I went about it as delicately as possible, explaining piece by piece the exact situation. McColl was a cool, quiet sort of man, with a quaint sense of humour, and he seemed to treat the whole thing as a joke. He hadn't slept, for two nights, and was destined to leave Berlin at twelve o'clock that day, but he threw up his appointment, nevertheless. He admitted all that, and more too. Gradually Goldsmidt brought him round to the serious side of the business, and we three put our heads together, the result being that Goldsmidt and I agreed with McColl that there must be some way of atoning for Donatelli's diabolical joke, and once we had done this, the power of his revenge would be no more.

For the next few days we five investigated high and low, and finally traced the course of the picture back from the gallery to the baron, from the baron to an uncle of his, who had left it to him when he died; then to a picture dealer, then back to one of the descendants of the Donatelli, and, after much tracing and worrying to the very abode in which the abominable thing had been conceived and executed.

Telling this, it sounds easy, but no such thing. We all had to travel in the same conveyance at the same time, so

as not to be separated; the wretched cause of the trouble, in the same conveyance aforesaid; had all to be on hand at noon every day to view the thing, had to live in the same hotels and houses. I tell you, it was no joke.

It once happened that I forgot to wind my watch, and when twelve o'clock arrived, I was far from the picture, in fact, it was in a Turkish bath establishment. You have by this time been wondering why we all went to see the thing at twelve o'clock. This little incident of the Turkish bath will give an idea of what happened if we did not turn up on time.

I heard twelve o'clock strike, and suddenly I noticed the attendants change, growing longer and thinner, grinning at me and digging me with their eyes; right into my very soul it seemed. They grew more and more like the man in the picture, more and still more, until I was terrified beyond measure. Rushing from the room I seized someone's clothes, not my own, and jumping into a pair of trousers, and with a towel around my shoulders, I tore to our lodgings like mad.

All the way the man in the picture seemed to chase me. I reached the picture, feasted my eyes, and gradually came to my proper senses.

Anyway, to make a long tale short, we managed to get hold of the room in which the picture had been painted, and, thank God, it was the same one in which Donatelli's masterpiece had also been created.

The Dubois couple could do nothing, so upon the rest of us depended the cure of Donatelli's revenge. The room in question was a big panelled affair, with a fire place, and a big picture over it, and a few bits of old furniture, including a bookcase with several rows of ancient volumes. McColl examined the books, Goldsmidt felt the panelling for secret pockets, and I contemplated the fire place. Suddenly an idea struck me. Taking out my penknife I stuck it into the picture above me, and to my intense joy, a big piece of paint flaked off, displaying the same texture as Donatelli's