

CHAPTER VIII

AT ten o'clock he found himself in a corridor of the Jubilee Variety Theatre. The young girl had vanished.

For a moment he stood debating whether he would go home and work out some ideas he had. Or whether he would pursue the young Joy, the fugitive actuality, to the very threshold of the dawn. Whether, in short, he would make a night of it.

He was aroused by the sound of a box-door opening and shutting; and a shining shirt-front and a shining face darted suddenly into the light. At the same moment a voice hailed him.

"Hello, Razors! That you?"

Voice, face, and shining shirt-front belonged to Mr. Richard Pilkington, Financial Agent, of Shaftesbury Avenue.

"Razors" was the name by which Rickman was known to his intimates in subtle allusion to his youth. He responded sulkily to the hail. Dicky Pilkington was the last person he desired to meet. For he owed Dicky a certain sum, not large, but larger than he could conveniently pay, and Dicky was objectionable for other reasons. He had mysterious relations with the Management of the Jubilee Theatre, and consequently unlimited facilities of access to Miss Poppy Grace. Besides, there was something about him that was deadly to ideas.

Ideas or no ideas, Mr. Pilkington was not to be evaded. He bore down on Rickman, shining genially, and addressed him with an air of banter.

"Couldn't have arranged it better. You're the very fellow I want."