

wrinkle in her face gathered itself together, as though to repulse an enemy; her sharp nose looked eager to stab him. She showed her teeth, and Malherb noted that they were white and strong.

"Still harping on that gimcrack; still babbling to the world that 'twas I stole it! What a fool must you be—an' not the first Malherb as was that—to think I've got your fortune. Look around you. Put your nose in that cupboard. You'll find barley bread an' rancid grease—not the Malherb amphora. Do 'e see thicky wall? 'Tis piled o' peat, an' I live 'pon one side an' my donkey an' pony an' cows 'pon t'other. They save fuel in winter; they keep the air warm with their breath. I often go an' sleep with 'em when 'tis too cold to bear my bones. But they say that your glass toy was worth twenty thousand pounds. Even a thief might have got rid of it for thousands. An' should I be here—should I make a jackass my pillow, an' live on berries and acorns like a bird, an' stew snails to my broth, if I'd gotten thousands? One dirty thousand I did have—may your faither roast for his mean trick—an' this here slack-limbed great boy, Jack Lee, to keep with it. But——"

"Hear me!" interrupted Malherb. "What you say would be true enough if it was not Lovey Lee who spoke. D'you think I don't remember you and your ways—you that sold your good food and lived on orts; that bartered your clothes and hated wearing any raiment that was better than a scarecrow's? Possession of my vase would be the light of your life. Not because it is lovely; not because the genius of man never devised nor his hand fashioned a nobler thing in such sort; but because it is worth twenty thousand pounds, and because to be able to hug that wealth all at once to your evil heart would be paradise to you. That is why I believed you were the thief; and still believe it."

She snarled at him, then made a slow answer.

"Believe as you please. I'll be very happy to hang for it—when you find it. An' ban't no joy to me to see you under my roof, for you hate me an' think evil against me, though I served your parents so faithful as the humble can serve the great, an' nursed your youngest brother at my own breast."

"'Twas chance, not intention, led me," he answered. "A few years ago I longed to meet you, and make you an offer. Now the opportunity has come. I'll be reasonable, as I always am.