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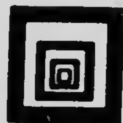

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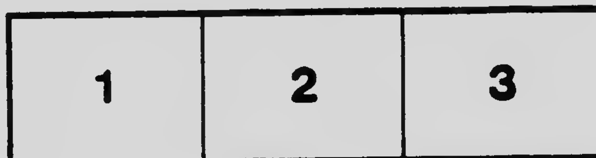

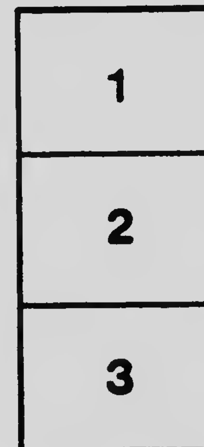

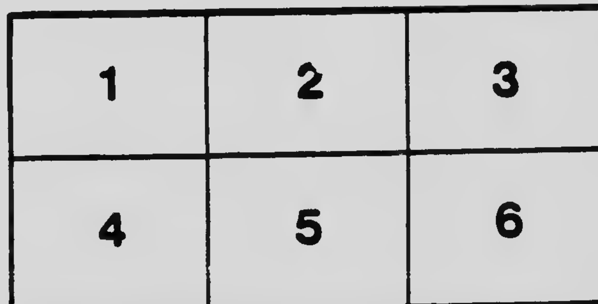

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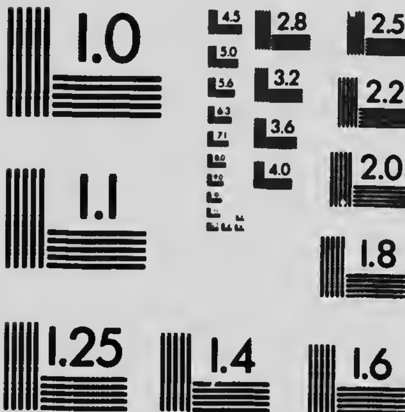

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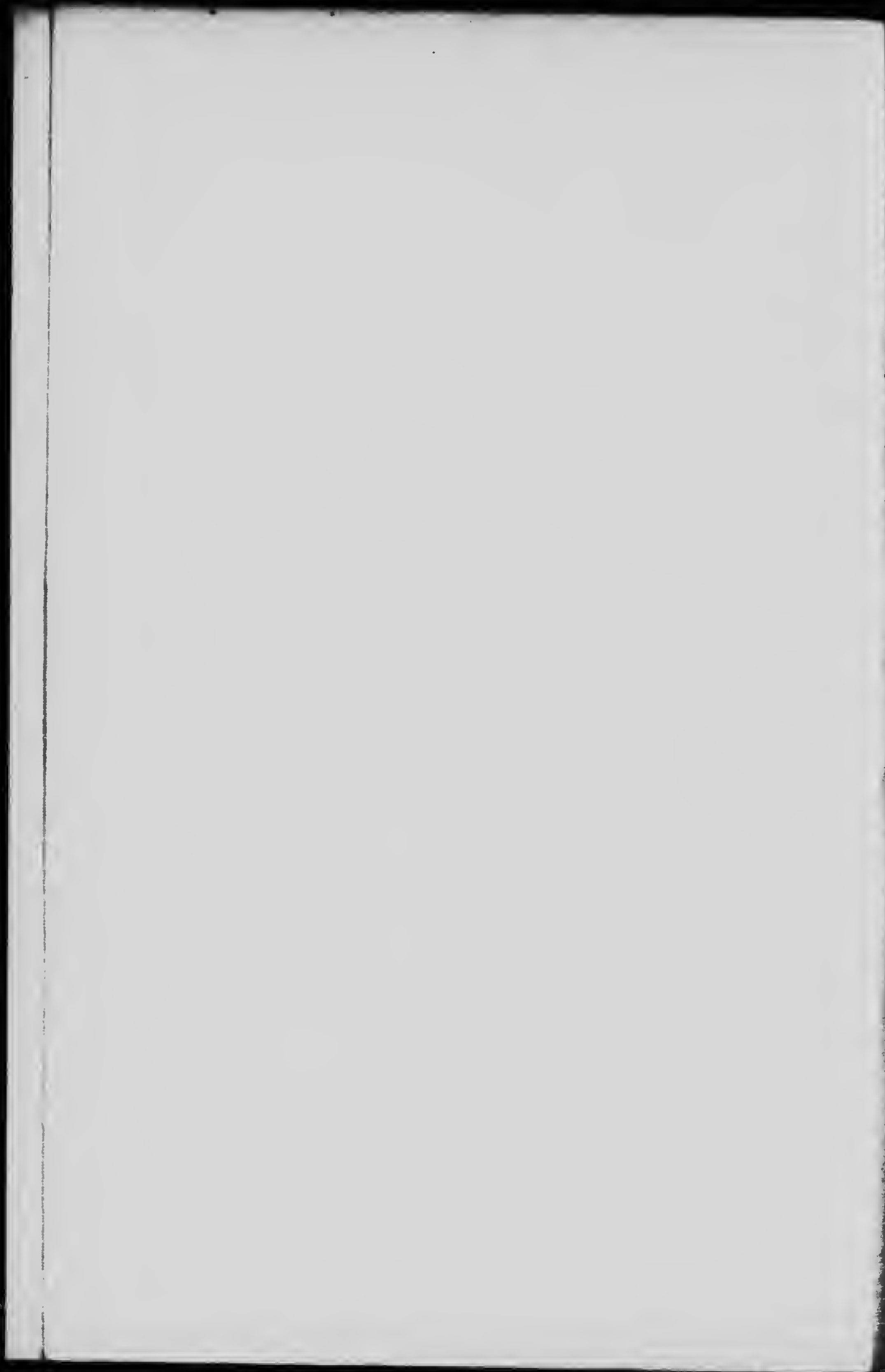

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SALOME AND THE HEAD

CHAPTER I

SUNLIGHT

A YOUNG man on his way to South Africa (do not be alarmed—this tale has nothing to do with the Boer war), and not knowing whether he will have the luck to survive it or only to become, after a very little time, one of those names in parallel columns on the tablet in the church at home. In such a young man family feeling runs high; the call of the blood is listened to with an attentive courtesy which it does not at all other times command. And relations in quite remote spots will, on occasions like this, receive farewell visits from young men of such families as *are* families—not in the county but in the patriarchal sense.

Therefore Edmund Templar went down into Hampshire to see his aunt and uncle. Edmund Templar, Corporal in the C.I.V.—I implore you to check your uneasy surmises: I give you my word of honour that there are no veldts or kopjes or Boers in my pages. Not an ox shall be outspanned, not a mealie baked.

Have courage, and read on. There is no fighting in the story, and it all happened in England. Most of it is very romantic, and some of it is rather horrible. If Edmund Templar, who is, I scorn to deny it, my hero, goes to South Africa, he goes alone. We will not, I pledge you my honour, go with him.

At present, however, he is not going to South Africa, but to Reka Dom, which lies on the border of the New Forest. Here again I beg to reassure you. There is nothing about Russia in this story: not a bomb, not a knout, not so much as a political tract. No samovar broods hissing over my pages, no secret societies whisper and explode. You are safe from vodka, from sledges, wolves and princesses who are spies. The house was called Reka Dom just because the Aunt in her young days had read Mrs Ewing, and because the house had grounds which, at some length, ran down to the river that sprawls among kingcups in the Ringwood water meadows, and runs under the bridge of many arches in that pleasant town.

Mr Templar wished, quite nicely and affectionately, to see his relations once again before he left England. Also he wished with all his heart and soul to see once more the New Forest: so he detrained—a military expression which I regret and will not repeat—at Lyndhurst, and walked through the greenness to his uncle's house.

You know what the New Forest is like? When you see it for the first time it teaches you the meaning of words you have never understood before. You

then for the first time know what glades mean, for example, and vistas, and mist and bracken; and "monarch of the grove," a phrase you always laughed at and still dislike, does yet begin to have a sort of meaning.

It was not for the first time that Edmund saw the forest, so he threw himself into its green embrace as a lover, home-coming, throws himself into his mistress's dear arms that have been waiting for him long.

"At last!" the forest seemed to say, proffering its green embrace.

Edmund thought of South Africa, and filled his lungs with the soft, sweet air of home; and presently he threw himself down to rest, and sniffed deep with great contentment. There is no scent like the scent of bruised bracken. He lay looking through the straight bracken stems that are themselves a forest. And to him came soft lights, little forest noises—the hum of a wild bee, the scutter of a squirrel, and the stealthy glide of something long and swift under dead leaves that hardly rustled to its passing.

All these sounds caressed his ear. Then among them came a sound that was not a caress but a challenge — the strangest sound: through the bracken forest, music, single notes, an air, familiar yet unrecognised. Thus and not otherwise might Pan have piped to nymphs, among other woods, in other days than these. Templar pleased himself for a while with the fancy of Pan haunting the forest through the long ages, revealing himself only to worshippers rare

and approved. Then he got up lazily and went towards the music — to see who the deuce was playing the Casse-Noisette waltz in the heart of the New Forest.

He could move, when he chose, as quietly as an Indian; and he chose now, so that he got nearer and nearer to the music without breaking it by any heard movement, and presently saw before him the gold of an open glade in sunlight, and knew that the musician was here. He let himself slowly down and lay under a bush; then very slowly he reached his head forward till between the hornbeam leaves he could fully see the glade.

A fallen sapling lay across the upper end of the glade, and on it, self-comprised orchestra of a sylvan theatre, sat a boy, barefooted, bare-chested, blowing at the gleaming silver pipe with at least all a Pan's energy, and—Templar owned it—a faint touch of the very magic of Pan.

He piped, and he did not pipe to solitude, nor only to his unseen listener. He piped to a nymph, and she danced. Between smooth, short turf and arched oak-branches she danced, and the dance was the dance of the wild wood-nymph, and the music was the music of the Valse des Fleurs. And the flute of Pan was a penny whistle.

Of course you guessed, as soon as I mentioned nymphs, that Mr Templar would come upon a girl dancing in the forest. That was just because the story is called Salome,—and of course you knew it would be about a dancer. But Mr Templar did not

know at this time that *his* story would be called Salome, and he was very much surprised, lying there under his bush. It is very seldom, except in novels, that people think that they "must be dreaming," but Mr Templar really for one moment thought it—or something like it,—and of course he had no idea that he would ever be in a novel. "Am I really awake?" he quite thought of asking himself. Perhaps the recumbent position under the bush helped the thought.

The dancer's straight, limp black hair hung in hanks on each side of a narrow brown face that broadened suddenly at the brow where large dark eyes were. She had a wreath of the delicate white-flowered weed called Our Lady's bedstraw—a twisted rope of it, thick as your two wrists. Her lips were g and pale, her cheek smooth and brown. Brown were her arms, that waved and wove the air about her into arcs and circles . . . . and curves that are not in the books; her ankles brown too, and the bare feet that touched the mossy turf in such swift, soft caress. She wore a scarlet skirt and a white chemise that fell away from the small square shoulders, and looped low, like a holy-water stoup, in front of the young breast, flat as a boy's. As the hidden spectator gazed she cast away the wreath, threw back her hair, lank like seaweed, and shook shivering fingers imperatively to the flute-player on the fallen tree. The music quickened, the brown feet moved faster and faster—the muscles of arms and legs stiffened squarely. The eyes that had flashed to the first quickening of the music grew

dull as the heavy lids drooped over them. The mouth stretched to a pale red line, the white teeth catching the lower lip.

"Beautiful!" said Mr Templar under his bush, "beautiful—beautiful!"

Without taking his eyes from the linked rhythm of her dance, Mr Templar was aware that shoes and stockings and a straw hat lay among mossed oak roots, that a blue gown hung from the branch of a chestnut tree.

The dancer suddenly seemed to tire of her lonely dance. She approached the blue dress, bowed to it, smiled to it, menaced it, scorned it, relented to it, sidled up to it with shy allurements, retreated from it with bold defiances, reached up her arms to it, danced away from it with gestures of desperate farewell; and at last, from the far end of the glade, with one fleet, dazzling rush, reached the hanging thing; stood an instant with arms outspread and face raised in worship, and, as the music approached a pause, sank on her knees before it, burying her face in its folds.

The music ceased.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Pan, wiping his whistle on his coat sleeve. "It's outlandish, that is. I don't like it."

"Why?" she said from among the blue folds.

"You know why. It's like as if you was dancing to a dead man—one that's hanged by the neck till he's dead, like it says in the papers."

"Perhaps I am," she said: "perhaps it really *is* a

dead man, Denny. Perhaps I've just done some magic to make you think it's only my old blue linen. You know I'm a witch, don't you, Den?"

"Ah!" said Pan gloomily, "I know that well enough. But I won't 'ave you talk about it—see? If you do I shan't whistle for you no more—I ain't goin' to whistle for a witch, not even if it's you, Miss Sandy."

Mr Templar was now fully awake to his own indiscretion. Yet he could not move, without deepening that indiscretion to the blackness of the chimney-back. To watch is one thing; to listen is another. A really high-souled young man would have said "Ahem," and made his presence known, so as to be quite sure of not being an eavesdropper. But Edmund was not sufficiently high-souled to intrude the knowledge of his presence on a girl in her petticoat and shift, even though that girl were only a slip of a thing who could not by any chance be a day older than her first teen. So he lay still, and knew that still he must lie till the scene was over and the actors gone, and the woodland drop-scene fallen once more on their sylvan stage.

"Ah!" said the girl, swaying the blue folds to and fro, her face still hidden in them, "you didn't believe in witches when you came from London—did you?"

"No."

"But I've made you believe in them, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"And in all the good things too. God and His angels and the blessed saints?"

"Yes."

"And you're a good Christian?"

"Yes."

"And you're very frightened of me?"

"Yes."

"And you love me very much?"

"Yes."

"And you'll always do what I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Then wait till I get my frock on, and then you shall say your creed and I'll give you the sixpence and you can go."

She picked up the dress and turned towards the thicket farthest away from Templar.

"Where you going?"

"To put on my dress. I don't mind dressing with you here—you're just the same as my faithful dog—aren't you, Denny? But I'm not going to dress with strange men about, and there's a man under the bushes looking at us."

"Where? I don't see him!"

"Stay still. *I* don't see him. But I know he's there. And I forbid you to look for him. Perhaps he's invisible to you; anyway, I won't have you look for him. I shall tie my sash round your eyes."

"No," said Pan, jerking his head back as she came towards him with the long blue linen streamer. "Honour bright!"

And he shut his eyes.

She parted the green screen and disappeared behind it.

"You, man," came the voice from behind moving green leaves, "don't you dare to stir till I say you may."

There was a pause. Pan kept his eyes tightly shut. Templar under his bush changed to an easier attitude.

When in blue linen, with bound hair, she came back into the filtered sunlight, he saw that she had at least two years more than he had assigned to her. Her face now was grave, her eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Now!" she said. "Denny, you are to keep your eyes shut. Perhaps there isn't any man here at all. Perhaps I'm only trying your obedience. But if you look I'll never let you come here and play for me any more."

"I won't look," said Pan, and covered his face with his hands.

"Now, you man," she said, "come out. But you're not to speak. If you speak I shall know exactly what to think of you, and I shall tell my grandfather that you are a poacher."

Nothing, Templar felt, would induce him to enter that grassy arena on his stomach. He drew back through the bushes, resumed the upright, and stepped out. When he was quite out he bowed very formally. But her bow was yet more formal.

"I don't wish you to speak," she said, "but I wish you to know that you ought to be torn by dogs like Actæon." Denny growled. "Be quiet, Den. You man, this isn't *common* dancing."

Templar shook his head earnestly, and she frowned.

"It all means things. It's the only way I have of saying what I mean. If you go and tell it'll be stopped."

He shook his head to express trustworthiness.

"Of course," she went on thoughtfully, "I could bewitch you."

He did not nod there, though he wanted to.

"I could make your cows go dry, and your pigs have swine-fever, and your horses go lame and your chickens have the pip."

He spread deprecating hands.

"But I won't. And you won't tell. You couldn't—you're a gentleman. No gentleman would be a sneak. And if you did, there's Denny. The only thing he cares for is his whistle and . . . . and me.—Isn't it, Denny?"

"You knows it is, all right," said Denny, muffled.

"You won't tell, will you?" the girl insisted.

Templar shook his head again. He wished the child would have let him speak. He could have been so adequate, light yet deferent, condescending a little to her youth—respectful to her genius. As it was he shook his head, then nodded. It was the best he could do.

"Thank you! That's decent of you. And I don't

like being indebted to people. I must do something for you. Shall I tell your fortune? I always carry the cards. A gipsy taught me—one of the Lees," she added proudly, and her dark eyes met his with limpid assurance.

He was glad of anything that delayed the moment of parting from her. She motioned him to sit down on the turf.

"Now, shuffle, and cut into three heaps. You must wish all the time you have the cards in your hands. Wish for something you really want—not just that it may be fine to-morrow, or that you may be asked to a dance or something."

He shuffled the cards slowly, with his eyes on the lanky figure almost prim in its neat blue. And through the disguise of the school-girl he saw the nymph, and he wished, and his wish was like this: "I wish that I may meet you when you're a woman, and that I may kiss you then." (I wish I could say that he wished that she might love and marry him, but he did not. He wished just what I have told you.) And with that he cut the cards and laid them in three heaps on the moss between the tree roots.

She picked them up, held them in her hands, frowning a little.

"Oh, well," she said, "I'll lay them out for you." And she did, in four rows of eight, and two alone below. Out of doors, in the sunshine, cards are very red and white and black, like old women of the town with last night's rouge on their cheeks and last week's

dye in their hair. Templar moved impatiently. The cards were spoiling the scene for him.

The child was sitting sideways leaning on one hand, her head bent over the cards. After a silent minute she flung her chin up, looked straight skyward, and then quickly began to gather up the cards, taking them one by one from rows alternate, and from opposite ends of the rows. Her lips moved, but she did not speak. When all the cards were in her hands she looked at him, almost furtively, then suddenly shut the cards together tightly and slipped them into her pocket.

"I won't tell your fortune," she said definitely; "it's all nonsense, really. Good-bye!"

He shook his head, and looked imploring.

"Good-bye!" she said again. "Go."

Slowly he got out card-case and pencil: wrote, and laid the card on her knee, for her hand would not come out to meet it.

"If you do not tell my fortune," he said, "I shall speak."

"Coward!" she said, and stopped short on the word, reaching her hand for the pencil.

"It is because of Denny: it's all nonsense, but it would frighten him," was what Templar read in an angular, fierce, half-formed handwriting.

He thought a moment, then handed her another card from his case, and the pencil.

"Write it," he said voicelessly, with lips elaborately forming the syllables.

She hesitated, shrugged lean shoulders, and wrote:

"You will go beyond the seas. There is money for you; and love. But you'll—something dreadful will happen to you. Something terrible. And it will be the person you wished about's fault. I mean through her."

When he read it, he wrote: "Do you mean I shall be killed—wounded?" And she wrote under it: "I do not know. You'll be in danger—frightful danger. But it's all nonsense, really."

Templar smiled with his lips, but the smile went no further. In his heart he was uncomfortable. He was, you see, on his way to South Africa, where men were being wounded and killed. Of course it was all nonsense,—but it was uncomfortable nonsense, and it did not rhyme with the hour or the scene.

She took his hand, looked eagerly at the lines, and nodded in reluctant confirmation.

"Your hand says the same," was what the nod and the raised eyebrows conveyed.

"Is he gone — may I open my eyes?" said Denny.

"No—not yet. He is just going. There is no fortune to tell you," she said. "There are foreign countries and a woman, and something I can't understand, about a Head. The head of a college, perhaps. It might be a bishop or a king or the Pope or a millionaire. But it's all nonsense, really. Good-bye! Silence to the death?"

"Silence to the death," said Templar, voiceless and elaborate of gesture.

"Now go," said the child. And he went.

"I heard him go. He's gone now," said Pan. "I may look now, mayn't I?"

"Oh, yes—you may look now, Denny. Oh, Denny dear, I can make you believe anything I like, can't I? You really thought there was someone here, didn't you?"

"There *was* someone here," said the little Pan; "and when you said that about the dogs tearing him, I wished as I was your little dog really like what you says I am sometimes."

"There was no one here at all," said the girl deliberately, and laughed in his face: "no one at all—I made it all up. There was no one here. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," said Pan slowly—"yes, I believe you; but I know better, all the same."

A wing of silence seemed to sweep through the woods.

"I know," said the girl-child. "But it's I who make you think you know better, too. Do you understand that, Denny?"

"It's you that makes me go on being alive at all, I think," said Pan; "making me think things ain't much 'longside that."

"Nonsense!" she said briskly. "Where's your little friend?"

He reached his hand down behind the tree trunk

on which he sat, and pulled up the "little friend" that had lain there hidden.

It was a crutch.

. . . . .

Mr Templar was the soul of honour. He never told anyone about the sylvan scene, and Pan, or the child-nymph who danced and told fortunes and was altogether so wonderful and impossible. But he did say after dinner, for which he had only the barest time to dress:

"I say, Auntie, who's the little girl in blue, with hair like a black horse-tail, who walks about the forest?"

And the Aunt replied:

"Oh, that's poor little Alexandra Mundy. Runs quite wild. It's a dreadful pity."

"She looked quiet enough," said Templar, deliberately thinking of her in the blue frock of her demureness, and not in the red and white of her dance.

"Oh, well," said his Aunt, "one hears very odd things."

"Such as——"

"Oh, well—she's always about with a crippled boy, one of those 'Happy Holiday Fund' children—came down for a fortnight, and then old Mr Mundy—her grandfather, you know—sort of pensioned him permanently into the family he was staying with. And now he's having the boy taught music—the violin, and all sorts of things. And Alexandra spoils him completely."

"But who are they? — I don't remember the name."

"He's very rich—tallow, I think it was. Son married an actress," said the Uncle. "Nobody knows them, you know."

"I expect if all were known that's why poor Alexandra's so peculiar," said the Aunt, "the actress mother, I mean. We mustn't disregard heredity nowadays, you know, Edmund." She spoke with the respectful solemnity due from those who name the names of the new gods.

"But doesn't the old gentleman look after her?"

"Oh, he's always away—in Athens or Venice or somewhere, collecting rubbish. She has governesses, of course, but she sets them at defiance. You mark my words, that old tallow man will live to regret it."

"Is she so *very* naughty?" Edmund asked lazily.

"She's outrée, my dear," said his Aunt firmly, "outrée. She's eccentric—flighty, and I'm very much afraid that when she grows up she may even be not respectable."

"Do you think she's pretty?" Edmund asked warily; and the white and red and brown of her dancing shape danced again before the eyes of his memory.

"Pretty, my dear boy? thank Goodness she's not *that*. I really am grateful for her plainness: t may be her salvation. Providence moves in a mysterious way, you know. I suppose you only saw her a long way off?"

"Now *I* should have said," the Uncle put in, "that the girl had the makings of a fine woman."

"Ah, yes," said the wife, with affectionate scorn; "but then you'd say anything if it was about a girl—wouldn't you, Henry?"

. . . . . .

It was the very next day that Edmund Templar joined his regiment and went out to South Africa. I should like to tell you how he distinguished himself there, but a promise is a promise. I keep mine. You trust me. And hand in hand, in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, we proceed to the story of Salome and the Head.

CHAPTER II

LIMELIGHT

"AND what," asked Mr Edmund Templar on his return from Africa, "has become of that girl? What was her name?—Alexandra Something or other."

It was not the first thing he said, of course; there were inquiries about the health and happiness of relations—and answers to their inquiries. He told them many things about South Africa and the war, and what he had been doing all those eight years. He was an engineer, by the way, and he had been making railways in desert places. He had had all sorts of adventures, and the Aunt and Uncle found these enthralling, so that it was not till quite the end of the first evening that he was able to say the first thing, of all the things he said, in which we have any interest or concern.

"Oh!" said the Aunt, stretching her fat, kid-slippered feet to the fire, for these May evenings were still chilly, "you mean that dreadful Mundy girl! Of course I'm sorry for her and all that, but really!"

"Why—what's become of her?"

"Ah!" said the Aunt impressively, "that's just it. What has become of her? That's what everybody's been asking—and nobody knows. *He* lost all his money, you know—or nearly all,—and when he was dead—it was most painful. He took an overdose of chloral, and of course if you're charitable you can say it was an accident. But you have a right to your own opinion."

"Nonsense, my dear," said the Uncle. "Accident: not a doubt of it. Hard-headed man of business."

"That's just why," said the Aunt.—"Do throw your cigar end into the fire, Henry, if you've quite done smoking it. You know how it makes the curtains smell in the morning if you leave them in the ash-trays."

"All right, my dear, all right," said the Uncle testily. "I don't know what *you* think, Edmund, but I think I shall turn in."

Edmund put it that the return of a really respectable prodigal should be celebrated with yet another cigar and sitting up a little longer; and the fire so jolly, too—applewood, wasn't it?

"Yes—I never let them waste the orchard thinnings. There's no wood like it.—Thanks—no, I never use a match." When the cigar had been lighted from a glowing flake of red-hot wood Edmund tried again.

"What makes you think that Mundy man did it on purpose?"

"Well, you see, the money was all gone. It went in some bank or other."

"Unified Westrallan," said the Uncle.

"And the girl?"

"How you do go on about the girl! Well, that was what I was telling you when your Uncle interrupted. After the death—whether it was suicide or not—I have my own opinion about that—and how anyone can think anything else——"

"After the death." Templar permitted himself to interrupt, with patient impatience. The years that rob us of so much are in some things generous, and the old gain in words where they lose in ideas. Templar saw this, and said:

"After the death?"

"Well, as I was telling you—after the death it was most painful. She never waited even for the funeral or to see her guardian, a very worthy man—our own family solicitor, as it happened. She never waited to see what was left out of the wreck, or from the sale, or anything. Just took all her clothes, as well as other things, and *went*."

"Where to?"

The Aunt's shoulders shrugged nearly to her ears in the expression of her complete dissociation from such "goings on."

"Ah!—where, indeed? She and her old nurse—and that lame fiddling youth who was not quite right—they all went, like the folded Arabs in the hymn: only, of course, they went by train. Two fly-loads of

boxes and things, besides a cart, and no one at the station had the sense to stop them."

"No one had any *right* to stop them," said the Uncle, "except Wigram and Bucks, and they weren't there."

"Well, anyhow, they went. But that's not the worst. That heartless girl sent all the servants away, and of course everyone thought she wanted to be alone with her sorrow. But not she. My dear, that abandoned girl just wanted to be alone, to *take things*. She stole everything valuable she could lay her hands on—books, silver, linen, furniture even, curios—all the jewellery. . . ."

"Well, come," said the Uncle, "that was her mother's anyway."

"Well," said the Aunt, not influenced, "whether or no, she took it, and she and the housekeeper packed it all up, in dozens of boxes, and packages—regular bales some of them were, the stationmaster told your Uncle. Deliberate robbery of the creditors, as Mr Wigram most properly put it."

"But there was enough to satisfy the creditors, and a little bit over; you must remember that, Louise."

"Ah! but she didn't know that. It's the principle I think of. Well, of course, Mr Wigram set detectives on to her track, and they found her. She set him at defiance, said the things were hers, and she was of age and wouldn't have a guardian. And he said he was trustee for the little that was left. And she told

him to keep it, and have a beano with it. He looked as if he needed one, she said. But the odd thing was that she got round him somehow in the end—made him promise not to tell where she'd gone, or what she was doing, and to let her keep her stolen goods."

"Louise!"

"Well, the principle's the thing, Henry. And some very nice people have taken the Mount—retired Indian people; she goes in for archery, and he's a great gardener—most desirable neighbours. . . ."

When the Aunt had talked herself into sleepiness and retirement, the Uncle said:

"That girl, you know, I'm sorry for her myself. She never had a chance. The old boy left her to herself till she got into mischief, as she was bound to do—bound to do; it's only human nature. And after that he never let her alone for a minute. Strict school—like a convent—bars to the windows and no holidays—'Difficult or backward girls,' you know. I'm not sure they didn't flog the girls. Anyhow, everyone thought he'd broken her spirit. She came home about three months before the end. They say he never spoke to her, though he was living at home then."

Templar saw the free grace of the dancing girl in the forest glade, and he saw the school for difficult and backward girls, with the bars and the rest of it. He felt a pang of the soul so keen as to be also a pang of the body—the kind of fine thr[illegible] of physical

sympathy that pierces you when you see a child cut its hand or squeeze its finger in a door.

"I don't wonder she bolted," he said. "What *was* it she'd done?—The mischief she got into, I mean?"

"Well, no one knew exactly. Your Aunt has her own opinion. I expect she thought it was too shocking to talk to you about. . . . Contaminate the young, what? The man was her music-master—a black, curly, oily, fat-nosed little beast, like a half-bred wet retriever. Deuced clever at his beastly music. No other good points. He lodged at the baker's. Old Mundy came back just in time, or just too late. Some people think one, and some the other. Anyhow, there was a blazing row. He'd only himself to thank for it all. Unforgiving old ass!"

"It's jolly hard lines on the girl," said Edmund, and experienced a sense of guilt. Quite unreasonably, for how could he have helped? He had never even spoken to her. He might have spoken something—might have written something. "You have made a friend to-day."—"If ever you are in trouble count on me!" No! One does not do such things except in books.

"And no one knows where she's gone?" he asked.

"To the demnition bow-wows, your Aunt thinks—but I don't know. If she went, she went with her eyes open. The girl was no fool. And I thought her not bad-looking. In fact, there was a sort of a

something. And she had a way with her — I'm not sure that she isn't the sort of girl a man loses his head over—perfectly straight, what? It seems a waste of good material. If she'd had a decent home!"

"If you and Aunty had adopted her," said Edmund, and wondered.

"As a matter of fact," said the Uncle, looking disparagingly at his cigar, "I did suggest something of the kind when she was quite small. She was an engaging little thing. Old Mundy cut me for two years after that."

Templar's heart warmed to his Uncle.

"And Aunty?" he asked.

"Oh, she'd have liked it. You know we only had one child, little Louie that died. Your Aunt wanted it more than I did. I think, perhaps, that's the reason why she's so bitter about the girl—feels what one could have made of her, and all that. Let's toddle now: shall we?"

Next noon Templar made a little pilgrimage to that glade in the forest which had held the child dancing. At least, he set out on that pilgrimage. But he could not find the shrine. Eight years loosen the outline of undergrowths, as well as the tongues of aunts. There were many glades which might have been the glade, but none that indubitably was it. He went down towards Ringwood with mixed emotions such as—he was hungry; it was nearly luncheon time; eight years was a good long while;

and "what a damn shame! Poor, pretty, brave little thing!"

He thought of her again in the train later in the day, looking out through vistas of forest. It was annoying to remember a person after nearly forgetting her for eight years—or seven, was it?—and then to find that there would be nothing more to remember than there was seven years ago—or eight. And he was sorry for the girl.

The discerning reader will not waste any pity on him. The discerning reader knows perfectly that I am only dwelling on his slight disappointment in order to emphasise the slight pleasure he will feel when he does meet her. Of course he will have to meet her. It is not likely that anyone, out of a lunatic asylum, would take the trouble to describe the first meeting between a man and a girl unless there were to be a second meeting. And quite soon, too. You can tell that by the masterly way in which I have dealt with all that happened to the two of them during that eight years. I might have made chapters and chapters out of that, and it wouldn't have been exactly padding either. It would have been quite legitimate development of character and elaboration of incident. But this story is not a problem novel, nor a study in realism. It is just the story of the way things happened—the most curious and unlikely things, some of them.

He would have liked to see her again then and there—but things like that don't happen. Of course

there had been girls,—but the thin, bare-armed nymph of the forest hadn't been girls, nor come at all into that province of a young man's fancy over which girls reign. She had been a child, a witch, a wonder.

"Well, it's a pity," said Mr Templar, and leaned back in his corner.

Perhaps I have been too reticent; perhaps you would have liked to know more about what happened in those eight years; and I, who thought to spare you, have really only irritated your curiosity. In case this should be so, I will tell you more than Mr Templar's Aunt knew—much more. Indeed, if she could have lived to read these pages, she would not have felt that she had lived in vain.

Well, then—it really was true about the music-master who was like a wet retriever. There had certainly been a something. The retriever had taught the lame youth music, and then Alexandra had wanted to learn. And the retriever, nosing about in the forest, had sniffed out the sylvan theatre, and seen the dance. Quite a number of people in the neighbourhood knew that little Miss Mundy went for walks on Sundays with the music-master. And one of these people wrote an anonymous letter to the grandfather, which brought him back from his vague Venetian haunts just in time—or just too late. Anyhow, the retriever was kicked, and retired growling. But the village post-mistress could have told you that Mr Mundy, to the time of his death, every Christmas

—a feast which he always celebrated at home—did send a letter addressed to the retriever at his kennel, which was somewhere in Highbury New Park. It was, by the way, at the railway station that Mr Mundy had come face to face with the retriever—and there is no doubt that Sandra was with him. Quite half a dozen people knew *that.* Some people said they had first-class tickets to London, but this could not have been, because the retriever always travelled third-class instead of in the dog-box where he belonged.

"It *is* a pity," Mr Templar, in his railway carriage corner, told himself. But the pity of it did not distress him acutely. After all, as the late Robert Louis Stevenson aptly puts it, "the world is so full of a number of things," and it is not empty of them just because you saw someone once when she was a child, and feel that you are not likely to see her again now that she is a woman. But Mr Templar had a life of leisure before him—his godfather had just left him a very handsome competence, so that he need not go on making railways in desert places unless he wanted to,—and he could quite well afford to spend one or two of his leisured hours in thinking about the child who had danced in the wood.

So, in due time, he reached London. And he found London vibrant with the resonant insistent echo of his thought.

You know how oddly these things happen. A fresh idea strikes you—or a Latin tag is happily

quoted, and from that moment every book you take up, every newspaper you throw down, will present your idea—misquote and misapply your tag. It was thus with Templar.

In the train he thought of dancing, and when he got to London he found London talking of nothing else. He dined with the Browns—and the talk was of Miss Matilda Solitaire and dancing. He lunched with the Joneses—and dancing and Miss Peggy Pirouette were served with all the courses. He had tea with the Robinsons—and their talk was of dancing and Dorothea Donald. Whatever the talk began with, it drifted to the dance, and whoever was talked of as a dancer, the tribute to that dancer's gifts and graces always ended in one way:

"But you should see Sylvia—that's all!"

His friends did not take him to see Sylvia, because tickets had to be booked far ahead. But they took him to see the other ladies, and he found their dancing quite charming, but—well—quite charming; that was all. He felt a secret pleasure in remaining calm amid the transports of his friends. London was quite mad about these dancers, bare behind their veils, or with no veils at all, who strove to reproduce the spirit of the old classic measures. London was quite mad. He, proudly, was sane. For he had seen a dancer to whom these others were as wooden puppets jerked by strings almost visible. He knew, better than anyone in the world, what dancing should be. He alone, in all London, knew it. For he alone had seen a little

brown dancer in a forest glade. So he remained critical and aloof, wondering at the enthusiasm of the town and not sharing it.

He was quite prepared to find Sylvia just like the others, only more so—and his friends in vain assured him that she was quite different. She was—and when at last he was dragged to see her, the difference struck him in the face like a blow. For when the curtain went up, the scene was a forest glade, painted with all the tender brilliant genius of Mascarille, the prince of scene-painters, delicately tinted, lighted faultlessly. The leaves moved as in a gentle breeze—moved and rustled. A bird twittered, trilled, uttered one long sweet note, to be answered by a pipe, clear and piercing sweet, in the first notes of Mendelssohn's "Spring Song."

On a tree trunk at the side of the stage Pan sat, goat thighs tucked under him—no, not Pan, or if Pan, Pan when he and the world were very young—a beautiful, fair-haired youth, with the reed to his lips and his eyes on that enchanted opening in the leaves which fronted the audience.

The leaves shimmered and shivered, parted to the touch of hands, and Sylvia stepped delicately through the leafy screen on to the smooth velvet carpet that lay spread in place of the moss of the forest.

Her dress was of some sort of vague gossamer stuff, light yet clinging. It hung its delicate films about shoulders and knees, and where it hung loosely it was diaphanous as a spider's web. But where it clung

about her figure it was grey-opaque as spiders' webs are if you crush them close in your hands. Little points of light—dewdrops of paste, gemmed the spider's web. Her hair hung lank and limp, in black hanks on each side of a narrow face that broadened where the eyes were, a face to haunt the thoughts of a man—eyes to haunt his dreams. The reed notes wooed her feet, the orchestra only contributed a background of muffled undertones to the vivid notes of the reed. It sounded as the sea might sound at the end of some tropical glade that reached down to the very seashore.

She paused, her slight arms hanging by her sides while her public clapped and shouted, a little, half contemptuous smile on her lips, a little waiting droop stooping her slender shoulders as though beneath a light burden. She stood so, waiting, till the applause died down—died away, and the notes of the pipe leaped up as a flame leaps that has been for a little time checked by ashes.

Then she danced: and it was the spirit of the woods in spring. Amid the applause that came at the dance's end, Templar got up and stumbled out.

"Hold on," said the friend; "you haven't seen her Salome yet."

"Some other time," said Templar, and pushed on against resentful knees, over martyred feet. He did not want to see Sylvia dance Salome. He had seen her dance in the wild wood. For Sylvia was Sandra, who had been a brown witch-child, and

was now a white witch-girl crowned with beauty as with a diadem—a girl with the eyes that you never forget.

The friend shrugged his shoulders and, following, caught up with him on the stairs.

"Who is she?" said Templar abruptly.

"That's just it. Nobody knows. The charming Sylvia knows the value of a mystery. I say—come back and see the Salome. You're not seedy, are you?"

"No," said Templar, "I've just remembered an important letter. See it some other day."

"She doesn't dance every day, you know," said the friend. "Only four days a week, and only two weeks in every three."

"What did you mean about mystery?" Templar asked, arrived at the lounge.

"Why, no one knows where she lives, or what her real name is, or anything about her. She's just Sylvia. She won't be interviewed, won't give her autograph. No one's ever seen her to speak to, that I know of."

"She's straight, then?"

"I hope so, I'm sure. Everybody's most awfully gone on her. Some of the fellows are quite silly. She gets heaps of flowers, and lots of other things—chocolates and jewellery, and fur coats and things. One old chap sent a motor for her—a present; but she'd got one already, so she sent it back. She takes all the rest of it home, though."

"I suppose she sends them all back—sooner or later?"

"They say she sticks to everything. A journalist chap I know got all that out of the box-office man—one night late, don't you know? But he couldn't get anything else. There's the music—so long. *I*'m not going to miss the Salome. Not if I know it."

Templar walked up and down the street where the stage door was. He was rewarded. In about half an hour a shrouded figure came out, beside an elderly woman with her arms full of parcels. A man in livery followed. He also was laden. Then came a figure pitifully trailing a helpless, misshapen leg from the support of a crutch. The uniformed man put the three, with the many bundles, into an electric brougham, that slid away down the lighted street.

Templar went home alone. He would have liked to go to her home. He would have liked to see her face with the powder and rouge washed off—to see if it was like the face of the brown witch-child—to hear her voice, whether it was like the voice that had told his fortune.

He assured himself at the end of an hour's unprofitable reflection that sooner or later he should go home with her and see and hear these things. It was, he assured himself, only a matter of time.

The legacy that had set him free to leave engineering and come home was big enough for luxuries.

Detectives were luxurious. Well—he could afford them.

"One must have some object in life," he told himself, all alive with joyous excitement and interest; "what better object can I have than to investigate, in a purely scientific spirit, the mystery of Sylvia?"

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE WITH NO ADDRESS

If Mr Templar could have had his wish and could have gone home with Sylvia, he would have gone to a house that had no address. He would have entered it, following Sylvia and two others, by a very odd and unusual way, and he would have found himself in a series of rooms opening one from the other by draped arches, and forming together three sides of a rather large square.

The rooms were furnished with an almost savage simplicity. The floors were bare and scrubbed. In the first of the rooms there were rugs and carpets—the uncostly Japanese kind,—some comfortable square chairs and couches, useful tables, book-shelves, books. But the effect of severity was at once marred and emphasised by a number of more or less ornamental objects, such as one finds in the houses of people who are rich, and not newly rich—the carved, embroidered, lacquered, and inlaid adornments of a well-ordered middle-class home surviving from the mid-Victorian period: a set of carved ivory chessmen, a banner

screen, a good deal of fine old silver and Sheffield plate; cushions covered in Berlin woolwork; Chinese lacquer, the like of which you shall never find at Liberty's; an Empire clock, with cupids and a half-impudent Venus half-decorously draped in flowing lines of gilt and ormolu; work-boxes, desks, and a blotting book of papier-mâché inlaid with mother-of-pearl and sheathed with discoloured gilding; a Buhl cabinet; in it and on it old china set out with an obvious pride; there were little footstools of the kind that only linger in families where the house has not been disturbed for at least two generations; portraits on the walls—some half-dozen in heavy scrolly gilt frames; no other pictures; a low Eugénie chair of carved walnut and Aubusson; portfolios of engravings, bronzes, lustres. These were all in the first room. In the second were gray oak armchairs with rush seats, and a large deal table smooth with scrubbing. There was only matting on this floor, and on the green walls no pictures. The third, and by far the largest room, held nothing but a grand piano and a stand for music, a music-stool, and, on shelves, violin cases. The floor of this room was carpeted with the softest, thickest velvet carpet of the colour of dark green moss; its walls were entirely of looking-glass. Electric lights hung high against the ceiling cornice, and in front of one mirror-lined wall—the longest unbroken wall-space in the room—was a row of footlights. Dark curtains hung to each window.

It was into the first of these rooms that the three

came. Sylvia, a shapeless bundle, fumbled at her wraps, and, dropping them, stood up from the fallen heap of them like a beautiful flower from its rough calyx. She wore a plain white linen frock, close-belted to her straight, clean-cut shape; her hair hung in a thick plaited tail to her waist; and by the candid, innocent eyes of her, she might have been a sixteen-year-old *pensionnaire* just home from her convent for the holidays.

"How much for the bouquets to-night, Denny?" she said.

He told her, and she shrugged her shoulders in the white frock.

"Three pounds! And I know they cost twenty-five," she said. "Ah, well! it's a good thing we don't have to live on flowers. Undo the bundles quickly, Aunt Dusa, darling. Uncle Moses will be here directly. Never mind the letters. We'll attend to them to-morrow."

She led the way to the dining-room.

A black cloth, unfolded, showed letters on letters in uneven strata. Sylvia shot them skilfully into a deep square basket that stood ready.

The lame boy who had been Pan set a chair for her, and himself climbed into one of a different height and shape—his own chair, one could see, and be sad in the seeing.

The three sat down at the table. Had Mr Edmund Templar had his wish he would have wondered, because he had not realised how completely Sylvia

was, for the moment, the idol of London ; nor, even knowing that, would he have guessed the number and richness of the gifts that London can, and will, lay on its idols' altars.

The floor round the table was presently a sea of brown paper, blue paper, tissue paper—pink, white, mauve,—and the heaps of shapeless parcels on the table lessened as, on the table's other end, the array grew of naked gifts.

If you have not lived in the world which sends, or the world which receives such offerings, you would have wondered, even as Mr Templar would have done, that there should be so much money in the world—money unearned, money just flowing, like an exhaustless stream, into the pockets of those whose utmost efforts could not spend it all, so that in the exuberance of their unearned affluence men willingly spend hundreds of pounds on an offering to an unknown goddess—a popular dancer or actress, on the mere chance of getting for it some day some reward to their low liking ; just as they stake their hundreds on a race, for the excitement of "having something on," and for the chance of winning what they do not need. For of all the men who had sent these things, as earnest of what they were prepared to give for value received, if so be that Sylvia were for sale, not one of them had spoken to her, heard her voice, or seen her face except through the disguise of pearl and rose which the stage lights exact.

"That's a pretty necklace," said Sylvia carelessly—

"no—not the emerald one—that's just barbaric, and I like it too. I mean the diamonds and opals."

"I expect that's Uncle Moses again," said the middle-aged woman with smooth drab hair, whose quick fingers were casting off string and paper with the ease bred by constant practice. "There's no letter with them."

"I like the pearls," said Sylvia, holding up a slender string that glowed with a faint pinkness—"very much I like the pearls. The pearls want me to go to supper at Verrey's. That pendant is nice too. It is going to Ostend at the end of the season. What's that?"

"A photograph frame."

Sylvia laughed, picked up the letter that came across the table, bit her lip.

"Keep that," she said, reaching for the frame craftlessly carved in a design of oak-leaves and acorns. "The photograph frame's a dear. My dancing made it think of the Black Forest where its father and mother live, and where in youth it so happy was, so it made itself for me. A card, please." A pile of printed cards yielded one that said in plain block letters:

"Sylvia thanks you very much."

There were only four more of such cards needed, and these were claimed by an olive-wood paper-knife from a school-girl, a box of chocolates from a school-boy, and two books of verse by quite dull authors.

All the rest of it—furs, jewels, gloves, fans, bonbons, lace—were laid out on the big table as the work of the faithful is laid out at church bazaars. Sylvia feasted her eyes.

"It's a very good haul to-night," she said greedily. "I hope Uncle Moses will think so too. Oh! it's a fine thing to have one talent, Aunt Dusa, dear. If I hadn't, you'd have been looking out for a situation, Aunt Dusa, dear, and dropping your precious sixpences one by one like salt tears in novels."

"I'll put on the milk for the chocolate," said the mature woman, and went.

"And where would you have been, Denny"—she leaned towards him caressingly,—"if I hadn't had my little talent?"

"In hell, I expect," said Denny. "I shouldn't have been anywhere on earth if I couldn't have been near you, princess." It was the voice of the boy who, in the wood, had hidden his face at her bidding, but it had the timbre of manhood and the accent which we term cultivated. "But I wish it was all over." He leaned his hands against the table and pushed his chair back from it. "I'm sick of the whole beastly show——"

"The beastly show? Playing for me?"

"Playing for all these apes and goats. Seeing you dance for all these goats and geese. There ought to have been some other way. There *would* have been some other way if I'd been like other men . . . . if I hadn't been a crooked idiot that can do nothing for

you except worship you. And worship's cheap nowadays, isn't it, princess?"

"Not real . . . . whatever you call it. That's not cheap. And you've got your music."

"Oh, it's a sweet destiny," he said grimly, "to feel inside you that you could conquer the world, and to have a body that will only let you play the flute and the fiddle and live on charity."

"There's your symphony," she said.

"I'm sick of my symphony," he said. "I shall never do any good with it. And if I do, nobody will want to hear it. And if they want to hear it they won't pay me for it—not till I'm dead, anyway. And I'm alive now—alive all over. And all those people's eyes on you every night!"

"There are worse ways of earning a living than mine, Den. Suppose I had to sew rabbit-skins for fourteen hours a day, and die of consumption? or get phossy-jaw making matches? or have my pretty teeth drop out and my pretty nails drop off with lead-poisoning at the potteries?"

He refused to consider these alternatives.

"You ought," he said, "to be in a glass case, and no one allowed inside except the people who love you—the people at home. If I'd only been straight I could have done something really amusing and profitable for you—cut purses on the high-road—or gone in for burgling—or been a company-promoter. As it is——"

"As it is you're writing the symphony of the

century: and you play like no one else in the world. I've told you a thousand times that I couldn't dance to any playing but yours."

"Take care," he said, smiling, "that's dangerous. If you tell me these things, one of these days I shall cut my hand off, so that you can't ever dance any more." He laughed. "And talking of cutting, sometimes I'm like the old Roman Johnny—I wish that your audience had only one throat, so that I might cut it. I'm like a bear with a sore head to-night, princess. I'm sorry. There was another of them in the stalls to-night—a real one. He went out after the Forest dance. I suppose he couldn't stand the Salome. I expect he thought it was like all the others."

"Don't," she said, and, getting up, came behind him and touched his hair lightly. "Don't *you* begin. You know I hate the Salome, too. It's not so easy for me, either. You know I have to ask two things from you, Den—courage and music——

"And love . . . ? That doesn't count?"

"Oh!" she said lightly, "that doesn't count. I don't have to *ask* for that, do I? But sometimes . . . . You think I'm as hard as nails, don't you? Sometimes I'm as weak as a kitten: it only needs a strong push to make me chuck dancing—to send me toppling over the edge into the hopeless hell where the typewriters and shopgirls live. Don't push me over, Den."

"It isn't hell to them," said the young man. "Sometimes I wonder——"

An electric bell thrilled.

"There's Uncle Moses," she said, ran to the door, and opened it. A man, large and Jewish, in a fur coat and crush hat, stood in the doorway.

"Well, well, my pretty pigeon," he stood there and said, "and how goes the nest? More gold and silver linings, eh? More little stones for Uncle Moses to turn into downy feathers and straws and sticks in the building so useful, eh—eh?"

With that he took off his hat, and, having bowed very deliberately and profoundly, shut it up with a bang, put it under his arm, and entered the room on feet noiseless as a cat's, closing the door behind him as an accomplished nurse closes the door of a sick-room. He came forward rubbing his hands.

"You're late, uncle, aren't you?" she said.

"Better late than never, my dear," he answered. "I stay a little to hear the world clap its hands and say, 'Who is Sylvia?' as Schubert in his song—or Shakespeare, to be just. And now—how many little fishes in Sylvia's pretty net?"

"There's the whole silly lot!" said the girl, pointing to the table.

The Jew stood by it, leaning lightly on the points of his podgy fingers, his little eyes bright, mobile, keenly appraising.

"Good—very good! Lord, what fools these mortals be! I would not have believed it. No—never would I it have believed. All this for nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"It isn't nothing," said Denis.

"Eh?" said the Jew.

"It's the chance of thinking that perhaps they're not giving it for nothing," he said very low, picked up his crutch, and limped away. The crutch made dots of sound in a dejected silence.

"Uncouraged, my girl?" said the Jew.

"No," said Sylvia, "but——"

"They tell you you do wrong? I know. This fool-boy who adores you—oh, I think only of him for it the better. Or my sister-in-law—she think it not quite nice, eh? Pah! What know they? Of the world what know they?" He snapped his fingers. "Not that. So hear what they say, and give it *that* of value. But me, old Moses who know the world, I say you are right. I say you do well. You are a brave maiden, like Deborah—like Miriam. Spoil the Egyptians, my maiden—spoil the Egyptians! Take all and give nothing. Take from those that only wish you ill, and presently you shall give to those who need it. Thus says old Moses to you. And he knows."

"Yes," said the girl, but her tone was flat.

"Courage, courage, courage!" he went on; "*de l'audace, et de l'audace, et puis encore de l'audace.* Never a girl has had the courage of you—never a girl has had the luck of you. The Fates are for you. I am myself one who can read the stars, my child, and I say to you, 'All goes well if you love not.' Once you love, the misfortune begins to remember you.

Earnest-working to one end, that is not the love-goal: you pass unnoticed in your work-dress. But if you shall put on the red love-roses, then Fate says: 'Ha! ha! here is a beautiful one that I have overlooked,' and straightway down come the thumb—so!"

He ended a semi-circular movement of wide-spread fingers by the planting of a thumb heavily downward on the table.

"I'm not likely to have anything to do with that sort of silliness," the girl said rather bitterly. "For one thing, I never see anyone."

"Ah! and that is so good," said the German simply. "Keep so, my child—keep so. And now, business. The emeralds I myself send—to encourage the others. The jewellers, they tell these things. And I like it to keep to look at. It is old, and good. See, here is the bill. For the rest—the pearls are good—the opals also. It will be three hundred at the least, my pigeon. Now I go to make the inventory. You write? Good! So!"

She kneeled at the table and wrote, at his dictation, a list of the gay uselessnesses lying heaped there, the Jew touching and replacing them with deft fingers, at home among such costly trifles.

"At the least, three hundred," he said: "it may be more. The diamonds and the pearls I take—so, also, the emeralds—and the pendant—the bangle too with the garnet heart, so bloody-full of Schwärmerei. The rest the good Denis bring in the morning to Miss

Steinhart's, the useful Gertrude. And now—business is far. To the familie joy!"

The family joy was a white spread table, where the dancer, Pan, the aunt, and the Jew made merry over white bread, grapes, chocolate, little French cakes, and a sloping-shouldered bottle of Rhein wine.

"To the achievement!" Mr Mosenthal cried, raising the glass topaz-shiny with wine; and the others, echoing the toast, raised blue Chinese basins of chocolate.

"While the sun do shine
Make the hay thine,"

he went on. "There is no princess like our princess, and we three are her prophets, and if there was in this world a prophet to play the violin like the Archangel Gabriel his trumpet, thou art that prophet, my Denis."

"*I* want to drink to Uncle Moses," said Sylvia, turning her eyes on the eyes of the three adorers in turn. "To Uncle Moses who has done everything for us! And to Aunt Dusa who has done all the rest. And to Denis who has done everything they couldn't do."

"And then she says she's not Irish!" Aunt Dusa laughed.

. . . . . .

"And you think it's all safe? No one knows?" Sylvia asked softly of Uncle Moses, as she opened the door for his departure.

"Not a soul in all this great foolish world," he

answered; "not a soul but us four—and Forrester, who is close as a door shut; and Agar, who tells nothing. Never was a secret so kept. And never was such a secret to keep. In the Märchen the princess in her tower was not better guarded than thou. The Dragon—that is Dusa; the Eagle—that is Denis; and the Lion—that is the old Uncle Moses. God bless thee, thou dear child!"

The three that were left sat yet a little while over the white disordered table. Sylvia was very merry. She laughed a great deal, and made the others laugh more. When Sylvia laughs you have to laugh with her. It is a glorious compulsion.

Yet when Dusa was alone with the girl, brushing out her long hair, straight as lengths of black silk, she paused, brush in hand, to say: "You are sad to-night, dear. Why?"

"Am I?" the girl asked, pleating the lace of her dressing-gown. "Well, you know best, dear Dragon."

"Tell old nurse, dearie," said the Dragon, just as she would have said ten years before when some childish adventure had ended in tears, bruises, and hands bramble-torn.

"It's nothing. I mean it's everything," said Sylvia. "I mean I wish I knew where *he* was. What's the good of anything if I don't know that?"

"He's dead long ago, you may depend," said the Dragon comfortably, "else he'd 'a' come pestering you as soon as you'd got two penny pieces to rub one

against the other. He's dead and buried, and gone where he ought to go—you may be sure of that, my dear."

"I wish I might be sure," said Sylvia in her blue dressing-gown.

"Well, *I'm* sure," said the woman, "and good riddance is what I say. But why do you want to be so sure just now?"

"I don't know," said Sylvia.—"That'll do: don't brush any more"; and as she quickly plaited the black hair, she said: "I'm glad I'm not likely to fall in love. That *would* be awful, wouldn't it?"

"When you think you're going to fall in love you tell old nurse, and we'll look him up in the registry," was the comforting answer. "I lay we find him dead and buried at Somerset House for a shilling."

"I wish we could," said Sylvia. "Oh! what a beast I am! But the worst of it is we *can't* know and we don't know. Good night, Dusa darling!—No, I'll do all the rest for myself. Do go! Good night. Oh! there are so many things we don't know."

Dusa darling slept in the adjoining room, and Sylvia locked the door between them. She lay awake a long time, but the Dragon did not know it.

Another of the things that neither of them knew was that Denis slept on the other side of Sylvia's door—lying across it as some faithful dog might have lain. A crutch makes a noise on stairs and passage-floors, but a crippled man can quite quietly creep up and along them, in the dark, with no one to see how

funny he looks pulling himself along on hands and one knee, with the helpless, misshapen, useless foot dragging noiselessly behind him. In the dark, even, it is not difficult ; and in the early morning light it is ridiculously easy for the crippled man to get back to the comfortable room where people think he spends his nights.

Decidedly, if Mr Templar could have gone home with Sylvia, and could have had the run of the stairs and passages when she was asleep, he would have found much to interest and intrigue him.

But then he did not go home with Sylvia. Nor did anyone else, man, woman, or child, save only the Dragon, the Eagle, and the Lion, who was Moses Mosenthal.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALSE MOUSTACHE

MR TEMPLAR was not the only man in London with the wit to combine the three ideas—money, detectives, Salome; but in no other case did the equation work out to anything at all resembling the desired result, because no one else had the idea of substituting for the most interesting term of the equation another less charming but more amenable. In other words, while the other mathematicians sought Salome—by means of money and detectives,—Templar, quite early in the game, addressed his researches not to Salome, but to Pan the flute-player. He felt, quite unreasonably and quite certainly, that if he found Pan he would find the nymph.

The first report was that Pan lived at a house near Portland Place, the ground floor of which was occupied by Mosenthal & Mosenthal, house agents. The second, that he spent his week-ends, as well as certain weeks, at an old house near the river Medway—its name The Wood House.

Templar pigeon-holed this information, dismissed his detective, and bought a false moustache. He was

warming to the game. The spirit of the chase fired his blood. He could not believe, now that he came to think of it, that it was impossible to trace two women in a motor-car in London. So he chartered a taxi-cab, with a driver whose manners and speech were at least as good as his own. (Are half the drivers of London taxi-cabs young men from the universities? The question justifies itself on three-fifths of the occasions on which one rides in the public motors. Or perhaps it is the county council schools?) He explained what he wanted at quite needless length, and the chauffeur of the taxi-cab understood at least twice as much as there was to understand.

So that when the Eagle and the Dragon and Salome (all bundled up, Salome was) entered their motor at the stage door and it glided away, the unobtrusive taxi-cab glided after it, and, as snake might glide after snake in the dark labyrinths of the jungle, so serpentined in pursuit through London's lit streets. The chase, delayed for a moment at the door of a West End house-agent, where a lame man got out of the motor and let himself in with a latch-key, ended in a West End mews.

The motor ran itself between the waiting open doors of a coach-house—garage is the correct jargon, I am told,—and . . . . stayed there. The chauffeur put out the staring eyes of the motor, and proceeded with calm deliberation to strike a match and light a gas-jet and do something, something which made a metallic sound, to his infernal machinery. Templar,

his coat collar turned up, and wearing, with incredible self-consciousness, the false moustache, left his taxi-cab in the street and went up the mews to lounge opposite the garage door. The gas-light shone full into the motor brougham. It was empty!

But it couldn't be empty! Two women and a lot of bundles might conceivably contrive to get out of a growler going at the snail's pace possible only to those decaying vehicles, but to get out of a going—a rapidly going motor in crowded London streets, unobserved! It was impossible.

Yet it was possible. For it had been done. The motor was empty. There was no one there.

"And what do *you* want?" the electric brougham's driver was asking; and Templar, disclaiming with hurried politeness all possible wants, hastened back to his motor.

"Follow the chauffeur," he said. "Wait till he comes out, and then follow him." And the chauffeur was run to earth in Lloyd Square, King's Cross.

Templar, inexperienced detective that he was, sprang from his docile taxi-cab and addressed the chauffeur at the moment when latch-key met key-hole.

"I say," he said, and then found that there was nothing more that he could say.

"*What* do you say?" said the chauffeur in a tone that made the immediate saying of *something* a matter of life or death.

"I say——" Templar had never felt so inadequate, "I say—I'm not asking out of idle curiosity."

"I'm glad of that," said the chauffeur, arrested on the half turn, his key paralysed in the lock.

"I say——" said Templar again, and never had he felt such a fool. "That lady you were driving to-night——"

"Oh, go to hell!" said the chauffeur, turning his convalescent key. "You make the seventy-second since she came on the boards. Go to hell—you and your false moustache."

With that he took a step forward into darkness, and the door slammed in Templar's disconcerted face.

"I'm extremely sorry, sir," said the taxi-cab chauffeur, "that you haven't had better luck."

"Oh—go to hell," quoted Templar on the pavement.

"Certainly, sir," said the chauffeur; "any particular number?"

"I beg your pardon," said Templar, when he had laughed.

"*Il n'y a pas de quoi*," said the driver of the taxi-cab, with an accent almost too perfect. "Sixty-four Curzon Street? Yes, sir."

When Templar stood on the pavement, feeling in his pocket for the silver demanded by the bald-faced taximeter dial, the chauffeur looked at him, raised his eyebrows, and said:

"If I might venture a suggestion, sir?"

"Fire ahead."

"I've seen the lady dance. Excuse my saying so: it's no go."

"Confound *you*!" said Templar.

"Not at all," said the chauffeur blandly. "I am only speaking as one man to another. She's straight."

"Damn you!" said Templar.

"By all means," said the chauffeur. "Am I to understand——?"

Templar chinked silver.

"Thank you, sir. I suppose I'm not mistaken. It isn't possible that *you're* pursuing the lady *pour le bon motif*?"

"I knew her when she was a child," Templar was surprised to find himself saying.

The man detached one of the lamps of his cab and flashed its light suddenly on Templar's face.

"Right!" he said, satisfied by what the light showed him. "Then I'll tell you something. That moustache is false as lovers' vows. It simply asks to be plucked off. It tempts the hand like a peach. You'll find crape hair and spirit-gum more convincing as well as more secure. And I'll tell you something else."

"Well," said Templar, furtively tearing off the too profuse disguise.

"You're not the only one that knew her when she was a child. There's another."

"Who's the other?" Templar flashed back at him.

"Black—oily. I'd sooner you found her than he. So I'll give you a tip. Where does she go for week-ends?—and the week off she takes in every three? That's all.—No, thank you, sir, if it's all the same to you. Just the bare fare, please.—And if I were

you, I'd follow that trail. Never mind where she lodges in London. Try her country address—if you can get it. She goes for her week off next Saturday."

"You seem to know a great deal about her," said Templar weakly.

"I've seen her dance. And I drove her three times when she first came to London—once was to Charing Cross," said the chauffeur. "If I wasn't a poor devil that hasn't a chance left, I wouldn't give you the chance I'm giving you now."

"You've been drinking," said Templar.

"Of course I have," said the chauffeur contemptuously. "What else do you expect? But I can drive straight, all the same. No doubt to-morrow when I've not been drinking I shall wish I'd cut my tongue out before I'd told you what I *have* told you. But at present you appear to me to be honest. Illusive effect of mixed liquors, no doubt. Good night, sir; thank you!"

He went to the front of the machine, and agitated its vitals.

"But I say," said Templar, "tell me how you know——"

"How I know she's straight? I'm not a Yahoo——"

"No—no, no. How you know about her country house?"

"Common-sense—common, barn-door sense. And the oily one *doesn't* know—yet. Good night, sir! Yes, I know I shall be sorry for this in the morning."

Templar was sorry already—as a man is sorry who has made a fool of himself, to no purpose. To no purpose? Not wholly. The suggestion of the country house stayed and stuck. He had no chance of finding *her* country house. But he did know the country house of Pan. Pan was a bumpkin—a Cockney bumpkin, if such a thing could be. He would be amenable, malleable. The nymph in the forest had twisted him round her little finger. Mr Templar, as yet, knew no difference between his little finger and the little finger of Salome.

The upshot of it all was that he took train for Yalding on the Friday. He had spent a week in researches: and four evenings of that week he had, from his stall, seen her dance her forest dance to Pan's piping. But he had not seen her dance the Salome dance. The idea of it revolted him—seemed vulgar, common, profane.

He had also called on Mr Mosenthal the house-agent, on a pretence, which he hoped was not altogether transparent, of wanting a flat of four rooms with kitchen and bath-room, hot and cold water laid on, in an old house in a good neighbourhood for £30 a year. He saw Mr Mosenthal's clerk and made cautious inquiries as to the tenants of the house. He was told that the first floor was let to the well-known tailor Mr X., that a palmist, Miss Gertrude Steinhart, had the second floor, that a typewriting office had the basement, while the attics were used as ware-rooms by Mr X.

"Which floor does the lame gentleman live on?" Templar asked.

"Lame gentleman? There's nobody lame here," said the clerk, with the proper pride of one who stands up to life on two straight if slender legs. "A lame gentleman who plays the flute? Oh, no, sir—that wouldn't be at all the class of tenant Mr Mosenthal would entertain the idea of, for a moment. You must have got the wrong number, sir. What name did you say?"

Templar said it didn't matter at all, thank you, and got away.

"What was that gentleman's name?" asked Mr Mosenthal, coming out of a door with his name on it.

"Templar, sir—64 Curzon Street, Doubleyou."

"What's the rent of that flat of ours at the corner?"

"Eighty-five, sir."

"Offer it him for fifty if he calls again. Make it ninety-five to anyone else. And keep your mouth shut."

"Certainly, sir," said the clerk blandly. He too was of The People, and Moses Mosenthal had his race's instinct as to the man who can be trusted.

Templar on the pavement of Oxford Street told himself what a callow innocent he had been to be taken in by such an obvious trick. Of course the man had just dodged into that door—with some old latch-key that happened to fit; no doubt he'd played that game before—waited till the watchful taxi-cab had slithered away, and then limped home to his

lodgings. But how had the women got out of the car? And when?

He had found food for reflection as he walked back to Curzon Street and packed his bag for Yalding.

In the train he reflected still further. He had been away for eight years: he had come home determined to enjoy himself. In Africa his mind had played joyously with visions of Edmund Templar (in the faultless evening dress of an English gentleman, for all the world like a Labour member described by a yellow journal) frequenting theatres, music-halls, and places where they eat, revolving in centres of electric-lighted gaiety, himself the gayest of the gay. He had meant to be interested in everything, to enjoy everything that there was—every single thing: the lights, the food, the music, the feminine charm so long absent from his life; "all," in fact, as Mr Kipling so justly puts it, "all that ever went with evening dress"; and, so far, he had enjoyed nothing but the sight of her dancing, had been interested in nothing but his flat-footed attempts to play the detective, to find out what she desired to conceal.

He stopped this last thought: he did not want it. He unfolded his *Pall Mall* and began to read—first the Notes, then other things, till he pulled himself up in the middle of an article on markets, the final impression left on his mind being that wheat was "firm," oil "low," and that pork had "opened languid and declining." Then he gave it up and watched the changing green of wood and hedge and pasture, and

washed his tired eyes in the waters of beauty, owning to himself that the Kentish country was not so bad. Not like the New Forest, of course; but still, not so bad.

If you go to Yalding you may stay at the George, and be comfortable in a little village that owns a haunted churchyard, a fine church, and one of the most beautiful bridges in Europe. Or you may stay at the Anchor, and be comfortable on the very lip of the river. Templar chose the Anchor, because he felt that there, sooner or later, he would see, in a boat, the beautiful face and fine hands of Pan. When people take old houses near rivers, it is safe to assume that they do it because they love boating.

But he walked up to Yalding and leaned on the bridge and looked down into the mysterious shadowy depths that by daylight are green water-meadows; saw two white owls fly out from the church tower; heard the church clock strike nine; had a drink at the George and a pleasant word with the George's good landlord; and went back over the broad, deserted green space, tree-bordered, which Yalding calls the Leas, to that other bridge which is almost as beautiful as Yalding's, and so to bed in a little bungalow close to the water, and there fell asleep with the sound of the weir soothing him like a lullaby.

In the fresh, quiet night the light and noise of London seemed very far away, and it was while he leaned on the Yalding Bridge and looked down into the water-meadows, that he had to face again the thought which in the train he had smothered with

the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He began, in fact, to feel ashamed of himself. All that he had done was so silly, so amateurish, so unworthy of a thoroughly seasoned railway engineer and man of the world. Also it was rather caddish, what? To be trying to hunt down a girl who didn't want to be hunted. And to what end? He did not answer that question. Nor did he allow himself to be asked it twice.

A soft air blew from the hills, rustling the sedge beside the invisible river; the mists that had floated between earth and sky drifted away like blown foam; the quiet stars came out. Alone in that spacious night, so calm, so clean, Mr Edmund Templar felt small and rather dirty. He felt that he was not the sort of man he should care to be asked to meet. A meaner man might have felt all this, and have been sorry to feel it. Templar was, on the whole, not sorry. If he were really this sort of man, it was as well to know it, now—and to take steps. No—he was not sorry. But he was not glad.

CHAPTER V

THE DISASTER

AT the Anchor you breakfast either in a little room whose door opens directly on that part of the garden which is adorned by two round flower-beds edged with the thickest, greenest box you ever saw—this is next door to breakfasting in the garden itself,—or you *do* breakfast in the garden. Once upon a time you used to breakfast in a hornbeam arbour, but now that is given over to bargees. The landlord of the Anchor is a just man, and apportions the beauty of his grounds fairly among his clients.

The morning being a prince of mornings, even for June, Mr Templar ate his eggs and bacon in the garden, drank there his three cups of tea, and there leaned back and smoked the after-breakfast pipe. There were birds singing in the alders opposite; the river, decorated with sunlight, looked warm and brown, like the shallow pools whose warmness quite shocks you when you dangle your feet in them from sea-weed-covered rocks. That it was not warm Mr Templar knew, for he had plunged into it at his first awakening.

There were flowers in a big tumbler on his table—early roses, a late tulip or two, wood hyacinths and ferns, all squeezed tightly together in that lovely nearness that says as plainly as it can speak, "You are in the country now." A wood-pigeon cooed in a tall ash-tree over the water; an adventurous ant or so hastened across the white desert of table-cloth; there was a wasp in the marmalade. Nothing was lacking. It was a real country breakfast. Templar soaking himself in country sights and sounds, remembered with a shock why he was there. He felt an affectionate if censorious pity for the man who had bought the false moustache and made those double-faced, silly inquiries at the house-agents'. That man —well, the less said about him the better. But it would have been fun to go on being a detective. And it looked so easy now! All the real difficulties were surmounted. He had only to question the landlord or his amiable wife, or one of their agreeable children . . . . and then. . . . But he had seen with an enlightenment too full for any re-shutting of the mind that this was the sort of thing one didn't do. Afterwards he came to be very glad that he had seen this, and seen it when he did. It was the sort of thing one didn't do.

"But all the same," his reflections ended, "I'm glad I came. I shall stay till Monday."

He would not question the landlord or anyone else. He would ask no questions. He would just choose the likeliest of the little fleet of odd craft that lay

below the landing-stage, and pull upstream. A quiet day between sky and river would be good medicine, would cure the mental indigestion brought on by light and London, and a fancy at loose ends of which he was now ashamedly conscious.

Do not ask whether he had, at the very back of his mind, a poor little devil of a hope that Fate might grant to his inaction what she had denied to his energy. I do not know. And he did not know. But if two people are abroad in boats on a short and narrow river, there are, to say the least, chances. He wondered in what craft Pan would take to the water, and imagined a canoe.

His light leap into the boat of his choice brought to view an iron bar that lay at the bottom of the boat.

"Hullo—I say—catch hold of this iron rod!" he said. "I don't want a cargo of rails on board."

"That's the crow-bar, sir," said the man who had got the boat ready; "you'll want it at the locks. There's no one to put you through—you have to work the locks yourself."

"Take off the rudder," said Templar, and shot out from among the crowd of boats.

The Medway just above the Anchor is a river of dreams. The grey and green of willows and alders mirrored themselves in the still water in images hardly less solid-seeming than their living realities. There was pink loosestrife there, and meadow-sweet creamy and fragrant, forget-me-nots wet and blue, and

a tangle of green weeds and leaves and stems that only botanists know the names of.

And growing out of the rough wall below Stoneham Lock, Our Lady's bedstraw, both the yellow kind and the white. Templar knew it, though he did not know its name. It was of that trailing stuff that the forest dancer's wreath had been woven.

He made his painter fast to the post of the tarred gate that lies across the towing path a stone's-throw from the lock, shouldered the crow-bar, and set out to get the sluice gates up. He was an engineer, and to an engineer, the Medway locks, of course, present no difficulties. Not so if you should be a stock-broker or an artist, or a city clerk or a poet. In those cases the crow-bar and the sluice gates combine to laugh at your inexperience, and bite pieces out of your fingers.

He got his boat through the lock, and went on up-stream, only a very little saddened by the thought that perhaps The Wood House which was Pan's country seat might be down the river, and not up. He passed three locks—the Medway strings them quite thickly on her silver thread. The last of them was just a round pool with heavy tarred gates above and below, and flowers and long grasses trailing in the water that brimmed it.

The next lock is Oak Weir lock, and there he paused for an easy and half a pipe.

There were big trees shadowing a meadow on the left, but the stones by the lock were warm to the hand and the tarred lock-gates were hot. He lay in

the sun, his hat tilted over his eyes, and was glad of the summer and the sound of the water pouring from the full pen over the top of the sluice gates on the other side of the river. It was good to be here. And do not think less of him if I own that in the softened mood induced by muscles gently exercised and the summer scents and sounds, he found himself thinking that he might well have spent a little longer with his great-aunt and great-uncle.

His father and mother were in India, too far away to inspire such regrets and remorses.

The plash and rattle of sculls roused him from something very like sleep. A boat, still invisible, must be coming downstream. If he allowed it to take the lock before he did he would have to wait while the lock filled and emptied again; whereas, if he made haste to get his boat through, the water that rose with him would serve to bring down the other boat

He got his boat into the lock and tied her painter to the boat-hook stuck in the soft grassy ground. Then he perceived that the other boat had come out of invisibility and was advancing down the upper river. He hastened to get the lower gates shut and to let down the sluices. Then he ran round to the upper gates and began to raise its sluices. You raise the sluices of a Medway lock quite simply: you just hike them up by means of your crow-bar, whose end fits into square holes in the side of the tall tarred post that is, so to speak, the handle of the spade that

is the sluice. You lever this thing up, one hole at a time, and to prevent its slipping when you have got it up, you put in an iron pin that rests horizontally on the top of the lock gate and holds up the sluice. If you are careless you do not move this pin at every step of the crow-bar, so that sometimes the pin is in the air, and four or five holes are raised between it and the broad tarred tree-trunk that is the top of the lock and also the lever by which the lock is eventually opened.

Now, it was just at the moment when the pin was in this Mahomet's coffin-like position that the other boat creeping silently with the stream came close above the lock and suddenly, without warning, bumped its nose against the lock gate on which Templar was standing. He turned sharply, and almost as he turned he saw that Fate had been kind — kind incredibly.

"See how wise you were to be good," he told himself; "virtue rewarded, if ever it was!"

For the person in the boat, and the only person, was the girl whom he had spent time and money and detectives on seeking. It was she — without paint or powder,—fresh as the dawn and pretty as a pink.

He was never quite sure whether it was accident or design that made him drop the crow-bar. He had certainly longed for some incident that should make an interchange of words unavoidable.

Having dropped it, he caught at it with commend-

able speed, and thus got his fingers under the pin just at the instant when the heavy sluice shaken by the impact of the boat shuddered and slipped back into its old place. The crow-bar splashed in the lock below, as the pin came down across his fingers, with all the weight of the sluice to hold it there.

There was only one thing to be said—if one spoke at all. And it is not possible to the ordinary hero to bear, in silence, the smashing down on his fingers of an iron pin enforced by the weight of a heavy sluice gate. If he thought at all, he thought that all the bones of his three fingers were broken. But that is no excuse. He said what he had to say.

And thus it happened that the first word which he ever spoke in her presence was "Damn."

She took no advantage of this conversational opening.

Bounders will say damn on such slight provocation—the slipping down of a sluice that doesn't pin their fingers—the dropping of a crow-bar—any little thing.

If he did drop the crow-bar intentionally he got the deserts of the deceiver. More, even. The agony in his hand was intense. There was blood—he could see that.

He set his teeth and tried to raise the pin with his other hand. He might as well have tried to raise Mont Blanc. The girl in the boat below could

see nothing. To her it was simply a clumsy man who had said damn because he dropped his crow-bar, and now instead of asking her for hers was fiddling about with the sluice. She wasn't going to offer it. She wasn't going to do anything to help a person who went about saying damn at every little thing.

When he tried to lift the pin with his right hand its movement communicated itself to the hand that was held fast, and it hurt him more than ever—but he did not say damn again. Instead he turned towards her a face grey and drawn with pain, and said:

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you—I've smashed my fingers under this pin. Could you get a man and a crow-bar, do you think? I'm very sorry to bother you, but I'm quite helpless."

Before he had got to "man" she had pushed off, and almost as he said "helpless," her boat bumped against the wall at the lock's other side. She had her crow-bar ready in her hands, flung it out, jumped out after it, ducked under the long tarred timber, and stood beside him on the narrow plank. A fool, he reflected later—oh, and many people not at all fools,—would have tried to come along the plank from the other side, and thus have had to pass him, jarring the hurt hand in the passing.

"Hold on tight with your other hand," she said. "You'll feel beastly when I get the pin up; and if you tumble into the lock I can't help you."

A crow-bar is a heavy thing, and it is not every woman who can use it.

She applied hers with a calm dexterity that won his surprised admiration when he had time to remember it. At present he held on with the other hand, and hoped that her hands were steady. She raised the sluice a careful inch and held it levered up on her crow-bar's point.

"Take your hand away, then," she said impatiently, and instantly took it by the wrist and laid it on the top of the lock. Then she let the inch go, and the pin lay in its proper place on the tarred wood, with no flesh and bone between. She threw her crow-bar on to the bank.

"Come on!" she said; "hold on to me if you're giddy."

He did not hold on to her. He got to the bank, said "Thanks, awfully," lay face-down on the grass and sweet clover, and let his hand hang over in the running water, which reddened a little about it.

There is nothing more sickening than the pressure of water on a bleeding wound. He laid his head on his arm, and the world went round a great deal too fast. But it seemed impossible to get one's hand out of the water that hurt so.

She did it for him.

"Now don't be silly," she said. "Have you got any brandy?"

Of course he hadn't. "No—it's all right; don't bother," he said.

"I thought men always had," she said, and laid a wet handkerchief on his head. He heard the boat's hollow response to her feet as she leapt into it.

"Jove!—she's in a hurry to get away," was his last thought.

To faint at physical pain is a revolting trait in a hero, especially in an engineer who, one supposes, must so often be hurting himself with the hard materials of his trade. I cannot excuse him. And he was always ashamed of the incident.

But if he had plotted and planned, he could not have arranged a better means of compassing his desire to "get to know her."

When he came back to his world, his head was low at the water's edge, his feet were raised on a tea-basket with a boat-cushion on top, and his hurt hand was lying on something soft, and was covered up in something softer.

A horrible smell insisted on itself close to his nose.

"Don't," he said, moving his head; "I'm all right—let me get up."

He got his feet down and his head up. The girl was sitting quite close to him with a wood-pigeon's feather, half-frizzled, in her hand, and on her lap a box of matches.

"It says in books to burn feathers," she said. "I expect it's all right. It would wake me, I know, if I were dead."

He murmured something about being sorry he had been such an ass.

"You weren't—you were awfully brave—standing there and speaking so politely. I should have screamed and tumbled into the lock if it had happened to me. Oh! I forgot—you couldn't fall."

She shuddered, because her imagination had made her a nasty vivid little picture of a man tumbling off a lock and hanging by his crushed hand.

"You're all right now, aren't you?" she said anxiously. "If you're really better, I'll put the boats through the lock, and pull you down to East Peckham. You must have a doctor for that hand: at once, too. You just sit still. See, lean against the basket till I've got the boats through."

She got the boats through, and she pulled him down to East Peckham.

"And don't bother about steering or anything," she said. "I can manage splendidly."

So he did not bother, but nursed the wounded hand as though it were a baby. She pulled easily and strongly, and he was now at leisure to notice that she wore a white linen dress and a big Panama hat turned back from her forehead, and that she did not look like the girl who danced at the Hilarity, changed by the changed dress and surroundings, and by the absence of paint and powder; but like the child who had danced in the forest—like that child grown to womanhood—that child, come into her kingdom.

At East Peckham she said: "Can you get at your watch? I think it must be one-ish. The doctor's at home between one and two."

The hour was propitious.

"Thank you a thousand times," he said; and "Good-bye" he said too, for indeed he seemed to have come to a point where nothing else was possible to say.

"Good-bye? Nonsense!" she said. "Do you think I'm going to abandon my only case? I took the First Injuries to the Aided course,—and you're the first chance I've had of showing off. Of course I'm coming with you to the doctor. Or if you don't feel up to it, I'll fetch him to you here."

"Of course I'm up to it," he said; "but it's not fair to trouble you."

Nothing but the banal rises to the lips at life's great moments.

With perfect self-possession she helped him out of the boat and made him lean on her arm. She had turned down the Panama so that it shaded and almost concealed her face. As they passed the Rose and Crown she stopped.

"Brandy, of course," she said—coerced him into the hot little sitting-room behind the geraniums, ordered "Some brandy, please," and saw that he drank it.

At the doctor's she waited by the gate while he went in and had lint and bandages put on his hand

and his fingers strapped together. As the doctor untied the blood-stained wrappings, Templar noticed that they were long strips of soft white stuff edged with lace.

"Won't your wife come in?" the doctor said, glancing out through the window.

"Oh! that's all right," said Templar confusedly.

Presently she had got him back to the boat. They had hardly spoken at all.

"Now," she said, "where do you want to go? Were you trying to get to Tonbridge?"

"To-morrow would do for Tonbridge," said Templar deceitfully.

"Then, shall I pull you down the river?"

"I say, you are most awfully good!" he said.

"Nonsense!" she said impatiently. "Of course I can't leave you stranded with a boat. Shall I get a man to pull you back to—to wherever you came from?"

Of course Templar could now quite well have got a man from the Rose and Crown or elsewhere, but he didn't say so.

"Come!" she said, "here are the boats. What are you going to do?"

Then he became suddenly brave. "What are *you* going to do?"

"Find a shady place by the river and have lunch. But there's plenty of time for that."

"I was going to have lunch by the river too."

She looked at him, appraising him. Already he

was endeared to her b[illegible] the fact that she had done quite a lot of [illegible] for him. Among others she had touched [illegible], which she feared and hated.

The day was fair—and life was dull in the Tower with the Dragon, the Eagle, and the Lion. And was one never to exchange two words with anyone but those three? A steadfast purpose is all very well, but one must have a holiday sometimes. She had never had just this sort of holiday. He was looking as imploring as he dared. And she decided that he looked rather nice.

"You've been so kind!" he said. "And I've been such an idiot!"

She understood that he was asking for time to show her that he was not always dropping crow-bars and pinching his fingers and saying damn and fainting. And she felt that she herself would have wanted the same chance had she perpetrated the same follies.

So she laughed. "Oh! very well—come along, then," she said. "I'll pull you up to Oak Weir again—if you can stand the tragic associations. And you shall tell me your name and station, and we'll pretend we've met at a dinner-party and been properly introduced."

That was how it all began.

They had lunch together in that flat meadow away to the left by Oak Weir, among the roots of the great trees that reach down to the backwater where the

water-lilies are. And he told her his name, and she told him the names of the water-plants and the river-side flowers; but her own name she did not tell him. Nor did he ask it.

She quite plainly thought herself safe in a complete anonymity. He told her, quite early in the game, that he was just back from eight long African years. Therefore he could not have seen her at the Hilarity. Therefore she was just like any other girl to him. She revelled in the resemblance. "Just like any other girl," was just what she had never had a chance of being—to any man. And he found that he was telling himself that she was a jolly little girl, with no sentimental nonsense about her, and that he liked her very much. So far was he, by now, from the Templar who had employed detectives to hunt down such a very different sort of woman.

I do not know how he managed it. Such things are done by the expert. Certain it is that there was no word of love, of flirtation, of sentiment: and equally certain that when, at the long day's end, they parted, it was on the straightforward, sensible understanding that they were to meet next morning by Stoneham Lock, each with a luncheon basket, at ten sharp, and spend the day together.

He went back to the Anchor to review and revise his impressions of women, and to bear the pain, which increased, of his hurt hand.

She went home.

Home was The Wood House not fifty yards from

East Lock, where Miss Alexandra Mundy lived with her aunt and cousin. The cousin was unfortunately deformed, so they received no company and returned no calls. They spent a good deal of time in town, going to the theatre and so on, local drawing-room gossip understood—very quiet people, quite respectable. Rich, too, but kept themselves to themselves. The cousin's affliction, no doubt. But the girl was odd too—about alone all day long on the river. Probably half-witted like the boy. One or other of them played the flute or the violin. You could hear it over the high wall of their garden. In brief, very queer people, my dear; something mentally defective, you may depend. The people in the poor scattered cottages knew better. To them, as to the Dragon, the Eagle, and the Lion, Sandra was a princess.

. . . . . .

"Well, are you rested, love?" the aunt, who was also the Dragon, asked when supper was over, and Denny had wandered out into the starlight. "You've had four days, alone all day."

"I must have four days more," said Sandra happily. "Has anything happened?"

"Nothing. We had been in the garden, and Denny played, for a wonder."

"Something has happened," said Sandra, with sudden conviction. "You look so queer. You'd better tell me, now."

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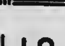
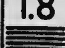

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"It's nothing much, dear."

"Tell me at once."

"It's only—it's what I've always been afraid of."

"Not . . . .?"

"Yes, dearest. It's that man. He's found us out, just as I always said he would. And he wants money. I knew he would some day."

"You didn't. You said you were certain he was dead," said Sandra, white and fierce.

"Oh! what does it matter what I said? He isn't, and now everything's spoiled."

"Tell me all about it," said the girl, quite gentle now.

"He came here this morning. I opened the door. He asked for you. And then I recognised him and told him you didn't live here. But he recognised me too. And besides, he knew, he knew! I said you'd send him a hundred pounds. It's the only way, love. When you've made your money we'll go right away and hide somewhere where he can't find us."

"There isn't anywhere where he can't find us," said Sandra dully. "I've always known that." Suddenly she caught the Dragon's arms above the elbow.

"He can't make me live with him, can he? He can't, can he?"

"No—no, my chickie dear, of course he can't."

"I might have known he'd turn up," said the girl bitterly, and dropped the arms she held. "But I

thought you knew he was dead, and you'd promised grandfather not to tell me for fear I should go and be a fool about some other beast. As if I hadn't had enough of beasts to last me all my life!"

She clung to the Dragon now like a frightened child.

"We mustn't come here any more," she said; "he can't get at me at the other house. You won't let him get at me—will you, Aunt Dusa? You won't?"

"No, no, my pigeon. I'll take care of that," soothed the woman, holding her.

"And I've been so happy!—oh, aunty! I've never been so happy as I've been to-night." She had lost control of herself at last, and sobbed wildly against the other woman's neck. And as she clung, sure, unmistakable as a knife-thrust, the knowledge of the full measure of that day's disaster came to the Aunt.

"My love," she said quietly, "there's someone else. You've met someone—there is someone——?"

"No, there isn't," cried Sandra, still more wildly. "I only thought there was. But there isn't, there isn't: there never will be while that man's alive. There never will be anything—never anything for me. What's that?"

It was a sound from the garden heard plainly through the open window.

"It's all right, my pet," said Dusa, holding her

more closely; "ah! have your cry out, my poor, my pretty. It's all right. It's only Denny."

It was only Denny, humming an air from his symphony, and twisting his long fingers in his hair as he stumbled among the shadows of the starlit garden.

CHAPTER VI

THE SNARE

HAVING now displayed to your sympathising eyes poor Sandra in the worst possible emotional fix, I cannot do less than show you how she got there.

It all happened when she was a slip of a girl, running wild in the New Forest. Her grandfather, always a perfect Providence to anyone who did not happen to be related to him, had arranged that Denis was to have lessons—lessons in the three R's from the National schoolmaster; lessons in Latin and English from the vicar; lessons in music from the organist of that little church at the edge of the forest, that church which tourists love—the church whose graveyard bristles with bicycles during the hours of Divine service.

This organist, by name Saccage, was the wet retriever of the aunt's narrative. He was oily in face and hair, his hands were podgy, his legs short. He had almost every physical characteristic calculated to repel a girl. But he was an artist. He was a skilled musician, and could draw dreams down from heaven

with his organ-playing, or, with the fiddle jerk up devils from hell. Also he could recognise genius in arts other than his own.

Prowling about in the forest, thinking out the andante of his concerto, he came, as another man had done, on the sylvan stage; and, laid as close against an oak as his shape permitted, watched through green branches the dancing of Sylvia—heard the music of Pan.

It may be counted to him for what it is worth, that he was the first to see the financial possibilities of Sandra's dancing.

He withdrew unseen, and went home knowing that he held the chance of his life in his hands. If he could get that girl and that boy on to the boards of a London theatre—having first established a claim to tax their earnings to the last bearable point,—his future was made.

But how to establish the claim?

Teach her music—for nothing—for love?

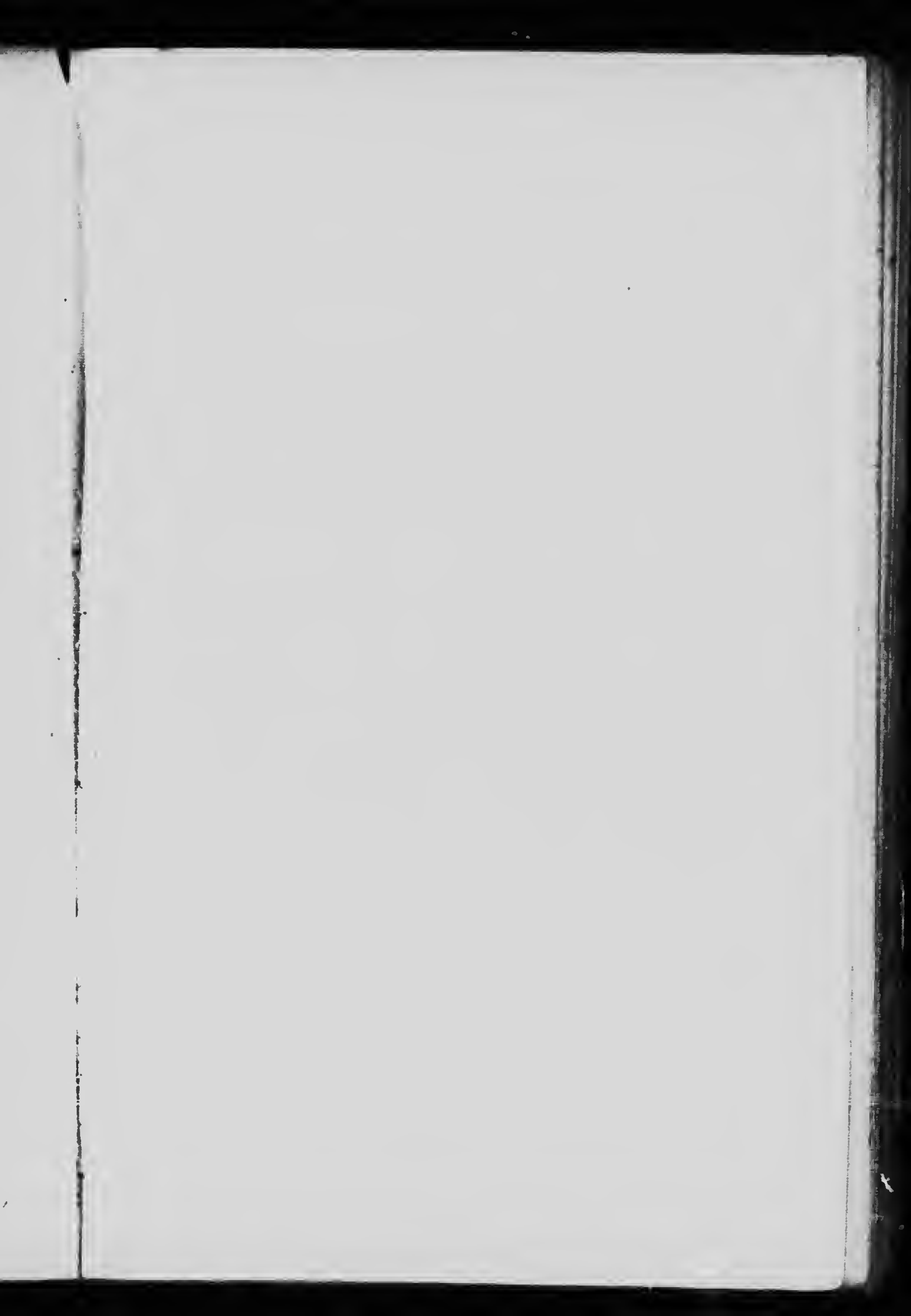
Gratitude?

Gratitude would only confer on him the power to tax for crumbs and broken meats—the tax a dog levies who has saved your house from burglars. He did not want to be dog; he wanted to be master.

Teach the violin—for love.

Yes—love was the way.

It was easy to make Sandra's acquaintance in those days. She had no friend but her old nurse, Mrs Mosenthal, now promoted to be housekeeper. And



HE TALKED TO HER ABOUT GENIUS

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Mrs Mosenthal did not love the forest, or tread its green ways.

He taught the child music, and was confident that later he could teach love to her. For all his physical repulsiveness, he had not been unsuccessful in that art which he called love. The artist in him gave him a power over weak and coarse natures. But it gave him none over Sandra, save the power of one who tells dream-stories of a great future, and who seems disinterestedly anxious to make those dreams come true.

He talked to her, really quite cleverly, about genius—its responsibilities, its claims. He won her confidence—got her to dance for him; and with astonishment and awe proclaimed that, little as he had suspected it, all which he had said about genius applied to *her*. That dancing of hers was genius. How could she reconcile it to her artistic conscience to hide such a light under a bushel? She ought to go to London—to take a concert-hall—not a vulgar theatre,—and just dance for the elect, who would watch her with reverent wonder, and pay well for the privilege.

"But my grandfather would never agree," the girl told him one day after a music lesson.

"I would help you," he said: "all artists are of one brotherhood and bound to help each other. Your grandfather has no right to prevent you from giving your wonderful gift to the world. You ought to take the matter into your own hands."

This meant run away.

When Sandra understood, "He'd fetch me back," she said dismally. "By the ear," she added.

It was after some such talk that Saccage unfolded his plan. There was no sacrifice he would not make in the cause of Art. There were means to prevent her grandfather from taking her back. A marriage ceremony——

"With whom?" said Sandra.

"With me," he answered impressively. And Sandra laughed.

After that he hated her. Before, he had desired her beauty and the money that it and her talent should make, and had been indifferent to herself. Now he hated her, and he hated her to the end. But he only smiled.

"You misunderstand me. I said a ceremony. I could never trammel my Art with the absurd outworn fetters of marriage. But I would lend you my name. There is no sacrifice. . . ."

And so on, till the girl asked him bluntly what it was that he did mean.

"I have a friend," he said, "who used to be a registrar of marriages. He has some of the old certificate forms by him. To oblige me, and for the sake of Art—he has a fine untrained baritone,—he will fill in one for us. And to obtain proper witnesses we must pretend to go through the marriage ceremony. Then you can show the certificate to your grandfather, and he will think you are my wife and that he has no power to take you back."

It was a beautiful, romantic plan, and it was carried out to the last detail.

Sandra went out alone for the day, as she had been used to do now and again when the desire seized her, and came back with a marriage certificate tucked into the front of her girl's blouse.

It is impossible, you think, that any girl, however untaught and neglected, could have been so silly? My dear madam, I beg you to remember what a goose of a girl you were at seventeen. And you, my good sir—has no girl, for your dear sake, ever consented to things even more foolish than this mock marriage?

Sandra returned to Ringwood—she was to pack her clothes to be sent after her: to put all her valuables and money in a hand-bag, and to meet Saccage at the railway-station and go with him to London.

"I have a dear sister," he said—"most musical she is—who will make you welcome to her unpretending flat. We will interest a few wealthy friends in yo[illegible] career, and then .... Fame, my child, Fame, a[illegible] the fulfilment of your genius."

So poor Sandra packs up her belongings—the bo[illegible] and scarves she likes best, and the theatrical pa[illegible] jewels that were her mother's—old Nurse had fou[illegible] them somewhere, and given them to her to play with—packs up, breathless with excitement and expectation.

"Not a word to your nurse," Saccage had told her, "nor to Denis. As soon as we're settled we'll send for them both."

So she packs in secret.

What a situation for the child! One would think, now, that nothing could save her. Yet she was saved. That snake in the grass, the anonymous letter-writer, so justly reviled in all respectable fiction, proved her salvation.

Her growing intimacy with the organist had not, you may be sure, escaped local attention. Someone, brave enough to write a letter to save a child, yet not brave enough to sign it, had written to her grandfather. I shall always believe that the courageous, cowardly writer was Mr Templar's aunt.

And the grandfather came back, just too late . . . . and just in time. For he met them at the station —the two first-class tickets taken but not clipped, and Sandra's bag already in the corner of an empty compartment.

"Where are you going?" said the grandfather, hoarse with fury.

"To London," said Sandra, pale and desperate.

"With her husband," said Saccage dramatically. He also was pale, but resolved to assert himself. He had not looked to have to do it so soon.

"We were married this morning," said Sandra. "You always hated me. You ought to be glad I'm going."

"You are not going!" he said, and caught her wrist. A crowd began to gather. He dragged her into the waiting-room, and the train went without them.

The old man looked at the certificate, and then at the two whose names were on it. Also he asked certain straightforward questions of the organist, questions that did more to frighten Sandra into submission than all his bullying.

"Miss Mundy is a ward in Chancery," he said, "under her grandmother's will. Do you know the penalty for marrying a ward without permission of the court, you cur? It's pretty severe. Imprisonment's not a thing you'll care for, perhaps."

"I want my wife," said Saccage, nobly, as it seemed to Sandra, keeping up the farce they had agreed upon.

"You will not get your wife," said the old man, "but you will get your trial and your sentence. And Miss Mundy will come home with me."

"Mrs Saccage, if you please," said Saccage. "If you choose to bring an action I can't prevent it. But if you do, your cruel neglect of your grand-daughter will come out. I will send you the address of my solicitor. Meantime I claim my wife."

"Will they really send him to prison?" Sandra asked, breathless.

"Of course they will," her grandfather said impatiently.

"Well, then—I won't have it. No, I won't let him sacrifice himself for me," she said bravely. "We're *not* really married. It's only pretence, so that you shouldn't be able to make me go back. But I'll go. Only, don't do anything to him. He's been so kind! We aren't really married."

The old man laughed—a laugh that Sandra always remembered as the most horrible sound she had ever heard.

"So that's how he's worked it?" he said. "I was wondering. After all, you've a little ot my blood in your veins. I was wondering how you came to throw yourself into the arms of this dirty counter-jumper. But don't you make any mistake, my girl. This is a real marriage certificate. You're his wife right enough. Now, will you come home with me and do as I tell you? Or will you go with him and share his bed and board? You're his wife—he can do what he likes with you. Kiss you, put his fat arms round you. . . ."

"I don't believe it," said Sandra. But she did. She sat down trembling on the yellow wooden seat in the waiting-room.

"Well—will you go with him?"

"*No*," said Sandra.

"Then sit still." He walked to the door, hustling the organist before him. They talked there in low voices, till Mr Mundy swept the other out of his way, took Sandra's arm, none too gently, and carried her off in the station fly.

Left alone, Mr Saccage got back the money for his first-class ticket, and instructed the station-master to wire to the terminus about a bag that had been put into the 6.15 London express. He did not believe in wasting things. He took the next up-train, and Ringwood knew him no more. But he did not

get the bag, for old Mr Mundy also had a thrifty soul, and his wire went five minutes earlier.

Sandra, dazed, berated, all her castles shattered, her only knight-errant proved to be but a scheming knave—be sure the old man rubbed it in—who had married her because she was the grand-daughter of a rich man who might be expected to leave her his money, poor Sandra that night sobbed out the truth to her nurse. When she had cried herself to sleep, Mr Mundy gave the nurse his version of the story.

Next day Sandra was sent to school, and three months after she left it her grandfather lay for the last time in the big bed he had used so seldom. If he had lived he would probably have tried to help Sandra to seek annulment of her marriage. The pension he paid to her horrible husband shows that he had some thought and care for her. His solicitor says that he did not at once seek to cancel the marriage, because he considered that a couple of hundred a year was well spent in guarding the girl from fortune-hunters during her impressionable minority. There is no security against being married for mercenary motives so strong as the fact that you are already married, and that your husband still lives. But death came quickly and quietly; and if her grandfather meant to help Sandra at long last when she had been schooled enough by the humiliation of her bondage, he never lived to do it.

She was not a ward in Chancery. That was only a useful lie.

In the cold dining-room, with the dead man lying in the room above, the housekeeper, who had been nurse, sat murmuring comfort—vague little plans of quiet pleasure—a month at the seaside, perhaps—anything her dear liked.

It was then that Sandra, quite calmly and very affectionately, explained what she meant to do. All the nurse's objections, and they were many, were swept away with a quiet firmness that did not so much defy opposition as ignore it.

"We are going at once," the girl repeated: "you and I and Denny. You must go down and tell him to-morrow morning. We are going to London, and I am going to make our fortune by dancing. That man was right about one thing. I can dance. I know he was right. And when we've made a lot of money I shall buy a place near here—I'd buy the Mount if I could,—and come back and live here and be good to the poor people. And you shall live in luxury, nursie-love, and so shall Denny. But we'll make a name for ourselves first. Now help me to pack up every single thing that's valuable and packable. That lawyer man told me grandfather left no money, only debts. And I'm not a ward of Chancery, and Granny didn't leave me anything. Grandfather only said that. And everything here's to be sold to pay the debts. They sha'n't sell my share. We'll take it."

"But, my love," said the nurse, "it's stealing."

"No, it isn't. I ought to have my share. And if

it was stealing I'd do it just the same. I've had enough of being under people's thumbs. I'm going to have people under *my* thumb. And the way to do it's money, money, money. And you're going to help me—Denny and you."

The nurse sat gazing into the fire, for it was in late October that his last chance of doing anything kind for his son's child was taken away from Richard Mundy. And she was silent for quite a minute.

Then she said: "You know, my lamb, your dear father married beneath him, as they say."

"*So* they say," said the girl. "I expect she was worth twenty of him, if he was anything like grandpapa."

"Oh, hush!" said the nurse. "Your father was a perfect gentleman, like a fashion-plate for politeness to all. And your mother was a good, honest girl, and loved him faithfully, dear, for all she was a dancer. Don't you ever believe different."

"Did you know her?" Sandra asked curiously.

"Better than I did anyone else," said her nurse, in a curious, stuffy voice.

Sandra looked at her, the light of romance awake in her eyes.

"Oh, you darling, how splendid! I see it all—*you're* my mother!" she cried through an embrace.

"How you do jump at things!" said the nurse. "I wish I was your mother, my pet, but she's in her grave this many a year."

"How disappointing of you not to be her!" said Sandra.

"You wouldn't be ashamed of her if it *was* me?"

"Do I look like it?" said Sandra, hugging her again.

"Well, then . . . . I think, p'r'aps, I ought to tell you, love, and if it hurts your pride I'll wish I'd bitten my tongue out first. I'm your own mother's own cousin! There!"

It was pale after the light of rosy romance, but that it was something warm kisses attested.

"How lovely! And I've got someone that really belongs to me! And it's you. Oh, my dear! I haven't been so happy since I was a little kid, and you used to let me have dolls' tea-parties in the forest."

"Your grandfather . . . ." the nurse admonished with an upward glance.

"He's dead," said Sandra firmly, "so we won't say anything about him. I'm glad I've got *one* relation who hasn't a stone cannon-ball instead of a heart. I wonder he let you come here, I'm sure. 'It was not like his great and gracious ways!'"

"It was the only way I could think of to be near you. Your grandfather was a hard man, but you've always got to remember he let me come as nurse to my pretty. I took you from your mother's side as she lay dead," she went on slowly, "and no one else ever did a hand's turn dressing or bathing you. That's something! Her and I were like sisters," she

said; "and there were other reasons. . . ." She paused on a sob.

"You poor, dear darling!" said Sandra. "You were fond of my father, and my mother got him. I do *really* see it all this time."

"I don't know how you fare to think of such things," said the nurse; but she did not deny it.

"It *was* decent of him to let you come," the girl said.

"It was that. But he made me promise that I'd never tell you I was anything to your mother. And I've kept my word up to now, haven't I, pet?"

"And now?"

"Oh, well—a promise is a promise, and while he lived I would as soon have broken it as laugh in church. But he's dead, and that makes all the difference. So if you do go this wild-goose chase to London, you'll have your own aunt—or as good as—to watch over you and see that people respect you like they ought."

"I'll take care of that," said Sandra. "So you're going to be a dragon or a gorgon—or whatever it is. . . . I say, I can't go on calling you nurse. I shall call you Aunt Medusa. Do you mind?"

"So long as you're within arm's-reach you may call me what you like," said the nurse fondly. "I've had my own troubles. I've been married—such a handsome man as he was!—a Jew, it's true, but such a way with him! I never had a moment's peace till I buried him. And that reminds me." She cleared her throat

nervously. "I ought to tell you, my dear—your grandfather told me all about that wicked musical gentleman who tried to take advantage of you."

"All?"

"He told me he'd got you to marry him on false pretences, the scum! But don't you worry about him, love. He's dead and buried too—I'll be bound. Your grandfather used to send him money to keep him quiet. But I know he hasn't sent to him for over a year. So I lay he's dead and out of the way."

"Ah!" said Sandra.

"And if you do hold to this moonlight flitting, what I say is let me send to my late husband's brother,—a fine gentleman he is, rolling in money—a house-agent, and a good many other things besides, if what my Eph used to tell was true. He was always quite the gentleman to me: sends me £50 every Christmas for a present, regular as the day comes round. I'll drop him a line, and see if he won't help us. You won't be any the worse for a gentleman of means to back you who's so to say a relation, so he can't be up to any of their underhand schemes with a young girl."

Nurse's late husband's brother wrote a very laconic answer to her involved appeal. "Come and see me," he said.

So when the three, with their boxes and bales, reached London, they went to see Mr Moses Mosenthal, House and Estate Agent, and . . . . the rest.

"I must see her dance," he said. "I cannot take

the risk of helping a maiden to make of herself a fool. That is not the way for Moses Mosenthal. Go now to this quiet hotel." He pencilled the address. "And to-morrow afternoon, when she is from her journey rested, return here—she shall dance for me. And the young man shall bring the flute."

It was in a narrow first-floor room, among rolled pieces of cloth piled to the ceiling, with coats hanging from curved bars and books of patterns outspread on a rosewood centre table, with coats half finished, embellished with white tacking threads and mysterious patches of what looked liked sacking, that Sandra first danced to Mr Moses Mosenthal. Two shut doors to the left bore the legend: "Mr Mosenthal. Storerooms. Private."

The dark blue velvet curtains that conceal the intimacies of the "trying on" served well as background.

Sandra had flattened her pretty nose at a florist's window, and presently gone in and bought long trails of smilax and white chrysanthemums. These formed a wreath. Her dress was an old limp muslin dress that had been her mother's, artfully wetted and creased and dried in long wavy folds. Ankles and feet were bare. So were the slender arms and girlish shoulders. Perched on a pile of cloth Pan piped to her. The nurse, her bonnet on one side, watched breathlessly—not her girl, but the face of her brother-in-law. It was the Tchaikovsky music that had sounded long ago through the forest leaves to Mr Edmund Templar, and the spirit of the dance that he had watched was

there, in the tailor's shop, as it had been in the green forest.

The dance ended. Sandra was on one knee, arms held out, appealing, questioning, to Mr Moses Mosenthal. Would he approve? Would he applaud?

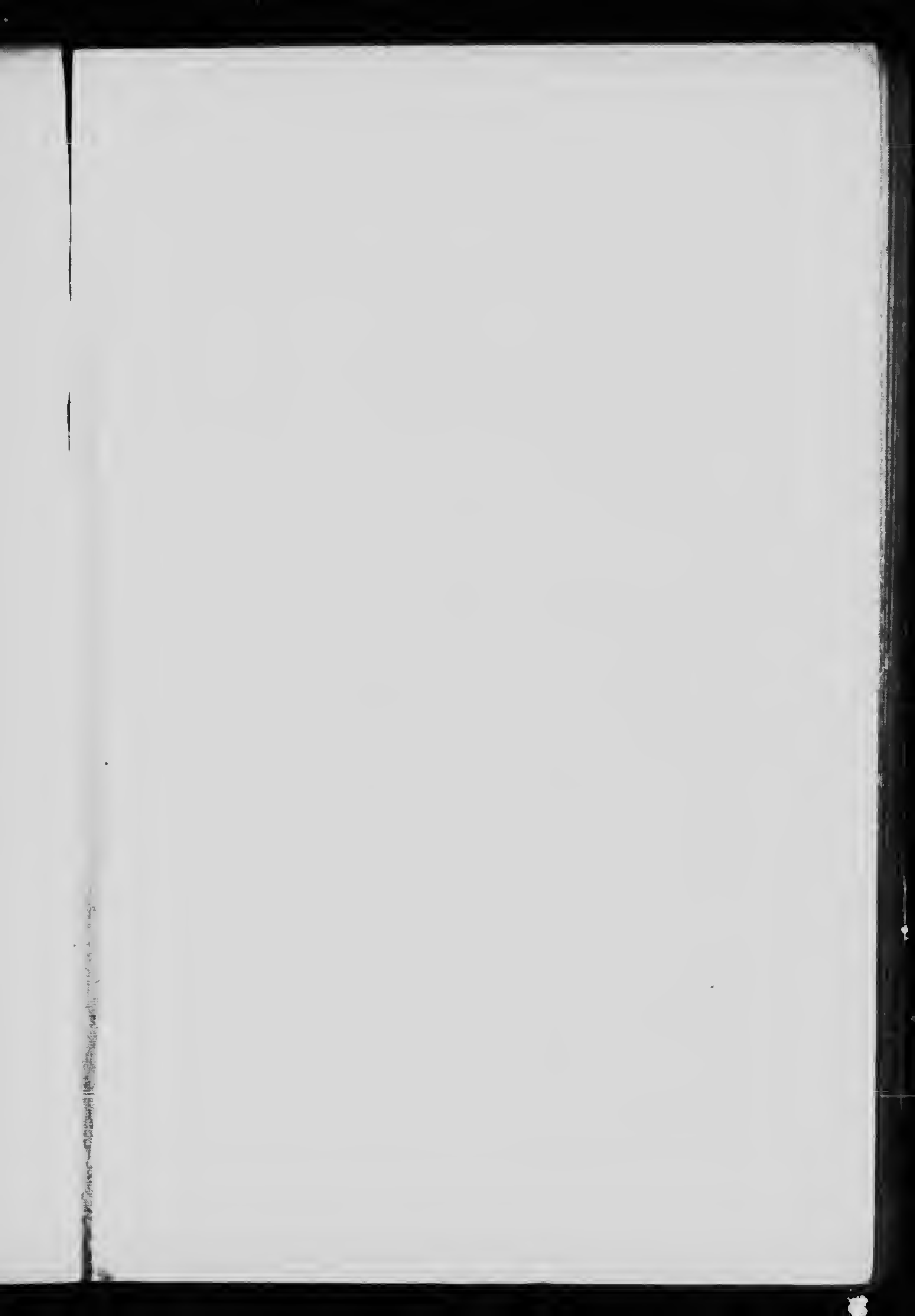
He just nodded, three times. Then he rubbed his hands.

"Well?" said the nurse. Sandra would not have spoken then.

"Good, good! But it is good! It is great!"

He reached his large hand to Sandra to raise her—much as Ahasuerus may have reached the sceptre to Queen Esther.

"So! To-morrow I take you to see a manager. He will give you a show if I say so. But you sign nothing without me. See? And you do not give your address. See? And to-night you still stay at the hotel, and to-morrow I find you a house that no one knows where you are. See? I am house-agent. I have many houses. And I have among them—I have without doubt the house for you—the house without an address!"



SANDRA DANCED TO MR MOSES MOSENTHAL

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CHAPTER VII

THE LOVER

SHE came along by the towing path, and he knew the moment he saw her that the world was changed. Calamity marked her gait, the swing of her clenched hand, the d[illegible] of her proud head. He went to meet her along the path, still dewy.

"Where's your boat?" he said.

"At the lock. I was tired. I thought I should get here quicker walking. Let's go across the meadow and sit under the trees: shall we?"

"Where's your basket—in the boat?" he asked stupidly.

They had parted last night in the dusk, almost as lovers part. And he had gone home through the twilight thinking of her—thinking, thinking. He who had pursued her through jaded London, with his mean spyings and the hot desire of a man who seeks the embraces of an easy Venus—who had hunted her with his dogs of dirty detectives as one hunts a prey—who had soiled the thought of her with those other tainted cheap thoughts,—he had found her when he

had ceased to seek, and had found Diana with a child's heart.

This he saw plainly as he went home along the winding river-bank. He also saw that, having found the nectar of the gods where he had looked for cheap champagne—ambrosia where he had thought to find the spiced dishes of vulgar gourmets,—he must hold fast his prize.

He did not want to be married: no man does. But he wanted her. He wanted the food of the gods, and that food could only be served as a sacrament. To soil the bread and foul the wine were a sin unthin' able. When you have looked for a pig-sty an found a palace, you do not seek to turn what you have found into what you looked for. You desire to enter the palace and make it your own for ever. The palace of pure love was here: marriage its only door.

Half the night he had lain awake going over her words, re-feeling again and again the touch of her two soft thin hands in his.

He had tried—not at all meaning to try—to draw her to him by those hands, and she had swung herself back to full arm's-length, and said very softly and passionately: "No, no—not yet; it is too soon. I mean it is very late, I must go home."

And he had let her go. They had walked together to the gate of her garden, and for most of the way her hand had been on his arm, against his heart.

And now—he dared not meet her eyes, for fear of the coldness and distance that he knew they held.

Could she have found out anything? About the detective?

In silence they reached the trees, and sat down under them. She clasped her hands round her knees and looked out across the pasture to the woods with eyes that did not see. He waited awhile, but she did not speak. Then:

"What is it?" he said in a very low voice.

"I don't know how to begin."

"Don't begin. Just tell me."

"I can't. I thought I could, but I can't."

"Something's happened since last night? Something bad."

"Yes."

"Very bad?"

"Yes—the worst that possibly could."

"Then tell me. You must."

"Why should I?"

"I might explain."

"There's nothing to explain."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "Because I shall help you, then," he said.

"No one can help me."

"I can help you to bear it."

"Not even that. . . . It's no good. I can't tell you—let me go home. Good-bye!"

It was then that he came close to her so that his shoulder touched hers as it leaned against the trunk of the oak tree.

"Tell me," he said: "tell me, because I love you."

She turned and looked at him. He met the look in her eyes and kissed her. She drew back instantly, loosed her clasped hands, and held them out to him.

"Ah!" she said, and "ah!" again, and then surprisingly:

"I hoped you would tell me that."

He held her hands closely, and had the sense not to say "Why?" To be near her—even with this unexplained cloud above them—was enough to make the old earth new. And he had kissed her. And as he kissed her, he had known certainly what he almost had known before, that she loved him.

"Tell me," he said tenderly, almost gaily. "I'm sure it's nothing. I'm sure when you tell me it will all turn out to be nothing. It's some silly nightmare, and when you tell me you'll wake up. And when you've told me, I want to tell you things, no end of things, all new and all beautiful. Tell me."

"Oh, yes," she said, and her eyes were far away again on the distant wood, "I can tell you now. That's why I hoped you'd tell me *that*. At least I think that's why. Anyway, I couldn't have told you if you hadn't. I shouldn't have had any right to tell you."

"I am a patient man," he said, and the joy would not any longer be kept out of his voice; "but there are limits. Tell me."

"I will," she said. "I am married."

"You . . . . you are . . . ."

"I am married. I thought he was dead. Aunt Dusa thought so too. Last night he turned up. I am glad you love me; for myself I am glad. It's the only beautiful thing I've ever had . . . . these four beautiful days. But it's hard for you."

Her voice was cold and toneless.

"I don't believe it," he said. "It's some child's test of yours—to see whether I love you—to see how unhappy you can make me. It's not a pretty game—dear—don't!"

"It's not a game," she said, "and you know it. Don't—you're hurting my hands. Let them go."

"I didn't mean to," he said humbly, and he did not let them go.

"Don't make it harder by pretending not to believe me. Let me tell you—I was a child and a fool. Let me tell you."

She told him; all that the last chapter told you, or nearly—all that, and very much more.

"So you see," she ended, "it's good-bye. And I've come to say it."

He got up and walked away—quite a long way he walked; then came back quickly and stood looking down at her.

"It's not good-bye," he said. "That's not a marriage. We can get that annulled, and then—oh, Sandra! don't be unhappy, my darling. It'll be all right."

"It never will," she said; "if the marriage could have been annulled my grandfather would have done

it. He paid the man to keep away, and now I must pay him to keep away. And I've been so happy—and now it's all over. Oh! I wish I'd never seen you. I wish I had never been born."

He was down beside her, his arm round her neck.

"Don't cry, my darling—ah! don't. What did you say?"

"I—I can't find my handkerchief," was what she said.

He gave her his, with a silly, glorious thrill of intimacy. Then they sat and held each other tightly, while she cried and he kissed her hair.

When she had grown calm again, he tried every argument, every persuasion, only to see each shattered against the rock of her inflexible will.

She had not spent the night in agony for nothing. Her mind was made up. Her husband was alive: therefore she had no right to love the man who loved her. She could not help loving him, but she could never see him again. That was what it all came to again and again through the quiet morning hours while he pleaded and she denied.

"And even if you were married," he said at last, driven to a sharper attack by the immobility of her resistance, "what does it matter? Come away with me—we'll be married in a church and go to South America or somewhere where he'll never find you."

"Don't," she said gravely.

"You can't think there's anything sacred in a marriage like that—a marriage you were tricked

into? And anyhow, marriage is all a silly convention," he said, and almost persuaded himself that he thought so. "I can't let you go."

"You've got to let me go. While he's alive I'll never see you any more."

It all came round to that over and over and over again. Worn out at last he had to let her leave him.

"Tell me your town address," he said. "I'll see my lawyer. I know you can get free."

"I live," she said, half smiling, with pale lips, "at the house with no address. And I won't tell you where that is. And don't tell me where you live. I won't know."

"That at least couldn't do any harm," he said. "You must know where I am. You might need me. I live at 64——"

"*No!*" She almost shouted the word. "I won't—oh!—don't you see? don't you understand? I don't keep on saying it all; but you aren't a fool—you must see. . . . Don't you understand that if I knew where you lived, I could never trust myself from one day to another to keep away from you? . . . And I must. Whatever happens, I'm going to keep straight."

The phrase, which was Aunt Dusa's, gave to the declaration a force that no finer phrase could have lent it. It was then that he held her in his arms as one holds the beloved for the death-parting—lightly, passionately, with the tenderness of a mother for a

child, the passion of a lover for the mistress desired and unpossessed.

"Go," he said, letting his arms fall suddenly, "go if you must go—go now."

She went; and at the end of three steps turned to say: "Take care of your poor hand."

It seemed to him the most pathetic and lovely thing in the world. That she should care about his rotten hand—now——

She did not look back again. She knew that he was lying there among the tree roots. And she knew, too, that if she looked back she would go back to him, and that if she went back to him she would never be able to go away from him any more.

So she went blindly along the towing-path; and children going to afternoon school passed her and looked curiously at her white face.

"She do look sick," one of them said.

"I reckon it's a touch of the sun, like what father had," said an older child; "only he was red in the face. And her no hat on and all!"

She found her boat, and pulled up to the boat-house, moored the boat quite securely and reasonably, and went back to The Wood House.

"We'll go back to-morrow," she said. "I'm too tired now. I want to go to sleep. Don't wake me for anything. No, I don't want any lunch. I don't want anything—only to be let alone and to go to sleep for a very long time. I shall be all right to-morrow. But I'll write a letter first."

She wrote, quite legibly and steadily:

"I know you can't make me live with you. You can do anything else you like. And you shall never have a penny from me.—ALEXANDRA."

"There!" she said, hammering the envelope with her fist to make the gum stick, "send that to that man at once. At once. I suppose he gave you his address. I suppose he's somewhere near here. I shall never give him a penny. He can't hurt me any more than he has."

A real heroine would have thrown herself on her bed dressed as she was, and either fallen into the sleep of exhaustion, or lain awake for hours gazing at the white ceiling. But Sandra had learned to take care of her body. She undressed methodically and completely, bathed, put on her night-gown, brushed out her long hair and plaited it up, pulled down the blinds and went to bed with a cold-water bandage over her swollen eyes. The sleep of exhaustion came all right enough then.

Mrs Mosenthal, left with the letter in her hands, sought a messenger for it. There was no one. The gardener only came once a week, and it was not his day. The woman from the house by East Lock, who came in every morning to cook and clean, had gone. Aunt Dusa could not take the letter herself. Sandra might wake and want her.

Remained only Denny. So Denny she sought, and found. He was in the garden, lying face downwards in the darkest, dampest part of the shrubbery,

his chin on his hands. His "little friend," the crutch, lay beside him. At her voice he raised his face to her, void of expression as any wax mask at Madame Tussaud's.

"Oh, bother!" said the harassed woman, "he's in one of his states now. Of course he would be—just to-day of all days."

Denny had fits of silent absorption, when he seemed oblivious of all around him. He could be roused from these, but if this were done he was always ill afterwards. So it was usual to leave him alone at such times. After an hour or two he would arouse himself, and come back into the waking world, stretching his long arms like one who has slept too soundly. These lapses into oblivion were always called his states. They never happened in town. Sandra had a theory that his music kept them at bay. But in the country he could not always be induced to offer that defence.

"It's no good," said Mrs Mosenthal. "Go that letter must, or we shall have my lady ramping and raging, poor, injured lamb! Denny, Denny!"

She shook him by the shoulders. He rolled over on his back, and his face lay turned up like a dead face. She took his cold hands one at a time, and kneaded them between her warm, fat, cushiony palms.

"Denny, Denny!" she said loudly, "wake up! Sandra wants you."

"I know she does," he said suddenly in the midst

of the fifth repetition of this formula. "I know. I'm ready." But his face still looked like the face of a dead man.

"Wake up," she said sharply; "you must."

"Eh?" he said, and sat up, rubbed his eyes and stretched. "What is it? I was asleep, wasn't I?"

"Yes," she answered.

It was what he always said after one of his states, and what they always said in reply.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," she said, "though, really, this place is too damp. Why, the ground's as soft as butter—with all these dead leaves about, too. You'd think they'd all be gone by this time of year, wouldn't you?" she added, making conversation bravely, as Denny stumped beside her into the afternoon sunshine. "Sandra wants a letter to go at once. There's no one else, so I thought you'd take it—in the chair. Would you mind very much? It's to the Railway Hotel at Paddock Wood. It's on business—very urgent. I wouldn't ask you, only Sandra was so particular for it to go at once."

Denny's face flushed a slow crimson. He hated to go abroad in daylight in that chair—a sort of tricycle worked by the arms, with a rest for the poor lame leg. The crutch was less noticeable. Everyone stared at the chair. But with the crutch one went so slowly and got so tired. In the chair, at night, Denny could go for twenty miles easily. On the crutch a couple of miles wore him out.

"Of course I'll go," he said. "The princess is

resting, isn't she? She must be tired with all the boating she's done this week. And all alone, too."

Mrs Mosenthal looked at him and wondered how much he knew. She could not be sure. One never could be sure, with him.

He went to change his suit—he was always particular in matters of the toilet—pernickety, Mrs Mosenthal called it in moments of exasperation. She brought the machine round to the front door.

"You *are* in a hurry," he said, and smiled, when he found it there waiting.

"It's Sandra," her tone apologised. "She might wake any minute, you know, and ask if it had gone."

"She might," he agreed. "She makes slaves of us all, doesn't she? I wonder whether there's anyone who doesn't worship her—anyone she can't turn round her little finger?"

And again she wondered if he knew anything, guessed anything. And again she could not be sure.

"It's a wonderful thing—all right, I'm going; I must get my silly leg straight on the rest—it's wonderful how she makes everyone do what she wants, and everything she wants seem right. So long, Aunt Dusa, dear."

He was quite awake now: that was his own smile—a very beautiful one, by the way. But for the accident of being dropped in the gutter at two little years old by a child only two little years older, Denny would have been a six-foot man, broad and

strong, with the shape of the Discobolus and the face that women turn round to look after. Well, the face was still his—and when he smiled Mrs Mosenthal sighed and said to herself:

"God bless the dear boy! His heart's right, at anyrate."

She watched him till he was out of sight.

The ride to Paddock Wood would have been pleasant enough to a man who had not been dropped in the gutter when he was two years old. To Denny it was a martyrdom. Every turn of the road might mask a foot passenger—someone who could walk strongly on his own upstanding equal feet, and who would look curiously at the man who worked a tricycle with his arms, because he had a foot that could not even walk, much less work machines. Behind any bush might lurk a boy, and when you are a cripple you learn to loathe and detest boys.

But if Denny had had to put his feeling into words—his feeling, for it was not definite enough to be called a thought,—he would have said:

"I am holding my breath in terror of something that will make my soul ache through and through—at any moment I may meet someone who will make fun of me, and whom I shall wish to kill. But I am happy, because it is for her I am holding my breath for fear; and it is for her that I am here, where my soul shivers and feels already half what it will feel when they laugh at me. For her, for her, for her!"

It was a refrain to which the movement of his arms kept time.

Close by the twenty oast-houses that stand in a double row on the way to Paddock Wood, he was aware of a stout, oily-faced man with black hair and a beard like an Assyrian.

The man looked at him, and, though he did not smile, his eyes and lips sent straight through Denny's soul the agony it was waiting for. The man raised a fat hand, and the machine stopped.

"Were you taking a letter to Mr Saccage by chance?" said the oily man, in a voice that matched his face.

"So you remember me?" Denny said silently. "You know I live with her? But you don't know that I remember you. . . . Yes," he said aloud.

"Hand over, then. I'll save you another mile, or two—counting the two ways. *I'm* Mr Saccage."

"I know you are," said Denny, still to himself, and felt that he would gladly face the two miles more of misery for the sake of saying no to this black-haired beast. But Sandra had wished the letter delivered quickly. He pulled it out, and gave it.

"She might have chosen a quicker messenger," Saccage grumbled. "But I suppose you can't choose in the country. Always been lame like that?" His look seemed to scorch the maimed foot.

"Not quite always," said Denny equably. And he remembered how kind this man had been to him once, when he had something to gain by it, and

how he had hated himself for hating one who was kind to him. And he watched the letter in the other man's fat yellow hand.

He watched the tearing open and the reading of the letter, and his eyes shifted to the face of the man who read. He himself read on that face: "Oh, won't she? We'll see about that!"

Mr Saccage seemed to feel the eyes of the man in the wheeled chair. He looked up quickly, and their eyes met—in a long look, which neither would be the first to relinquish.

"Well!" said Mr Saccage at last, and it was his eyes that had been forced to shift. "Well—upon my word! I hope you'll know me again next time you see me, young man."

"Yes," said Denny coolly, and wheeled his chair round as he spoke. "Yes," he said again as his hands grasped the levers for the first stroke. "Yes, I think I shall!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUSBAND

Mr Saccage walked slowly back to his inn, fingering his Assyrian beard with his pale hand. As he walked he called himself names—of which fool was the last and least.

"It's the artistic temperament," he said: "it betrays me at every turn." He took off his hat and held it under his arm, that the wind might play with his long hair. "This impetuosity . . . . I should have waited, waited, waited, like the lion for its prey." He knew nothing about lions, but he drew himself up as he went, running his hands through his hair as a regular dog of a lion might run his claws through his mane in an access of self-esteem. "If only I'd let her get a little deeper in! But I thought—anyone would have thought. . . . And now she's chucked him. Just my luck. Lord! how damp that swampy wood was, the other side that backwater! Rheumatism in my bow arm, I expect. But it'll be worth it, my boy—it'll be worth it—you wait a bit. You've frightened her, that's all. Timid little fawn—timid little idiot!

What she wants now's a little encouragement. Just a little push the right way, and over she'll go. Then you can stand over her and make your own terms. I hate the little greedy cat. Well, Miss Pussy, I'll file your claws and draw your sharp teeth, and make you dance a new way to my piping. I should like to encourage the other fool too—the artistic temperament ought to be inventive." He went on his way, pondering between the green hedges.

Denny made haste home. He wanted to see her—to look at her—to be sure that she was still in the same world with him. It was only that that he needed—but he needed too to assure himself of it.

He found not Sandra—her blinds were still drawn closely, and no sound of movement rewarded his listening,—but Mrs Mosenthal, darning long silk stockings in a basket chair in the shade of the brisk little holly-tree by the French window, on whose glass shone yellow sunlight.

"I took the letter," he said, getting heavily off his machine and letting himself down on to the sun-warmed flagstones at her feet, "and I met the man. He thought I didn't know him, but I did. He took the letter and swore."

"What did he say?" she asked, and wished she had sent anybody else.

"Nothing—outside. But inside he swore. And he made up his mind that he meant to go on being a beast; only more so."

"You can't possibly know anything about what you're talking about," said Aunt Dusa helplessly.

"Perhaps not. I daresay I don't. I daresay I only fancy things. Only, what you fancy's just as real to you as the things sensible people are sure of. I can't think what God was about to let a thing like that be born."

Aunt Dusa emitted a shocked "Hush!"

"Yes, but you know I'm right," he persisted, pleating and unpleating the folds of her brown skirt. "I always know. I was right about that housemaid who stole the linen. I told you she wasn't straight the first time I saw her."

"How do you know these things?" she asked, not because she believed that he did know, but because she believed that it was good for him to talk. "It relieves his poor brain," she said.

"I don't know how it is everyone doesn't know. It's as plain as the shadows on the grass. I just see it—like *you* see *them*. And I'm never wrong. You remember the Building Society man? You all thought he was so affable and good to the poor. But *I* knew. And the man at the Ringwood Peal, that knifed his brother? *I* knew he was all wrong. I told you so."

"You certainly did. But," she persisted, "tell me how you see it. Do they look black in the face like shadows?"

He rubbed his hands impatiently on his knees.

"I can't tell you. I can't explain. I can't make

you see. If you don't see these things you don't. If you do, you do. But I can't explain. I might as well try to explain what a shadow was like to a person who'd never seen one."

"But everyone sees shadows, you know," said Mrs Mosenthal patiently; snipped off the ends of silk, and chose a fresh stocking.

"Yes: that's just it. You see I can't explain. Only, I know. And I want you to tell her to be careful."

"Why don't you tell her yourself?"

"She mustn't know that I know. She'd hate me to know. And if she begins by hating me to know, she might end by hating me for knowing. You tell her that it's *you* that think he's dangerous. She'll mind *you*. You tell her to be careful. Where is she?"

"Still resting."

"I'm glad she's got you," said Denny, suddenly breaking a silence.

Mrs Mosenthal was quite moved by the tribute. "Well, I'm sure!" she said.

"And I'm glad you've got her."

"And you've got both of us." Mrs Mosenthal was really almost sparkling at times in her repartee.

"Ah!" Denny said, "I haven't got either of you. It's she who's got me. And that's better than nothing. It's better than anything except the things that don't happen."

"Now, Denny"—Mrs Mosenthal laid down the

stocking-covered hand on her lap, and let the needle-bearing hand fall beside it—"you mustn't. You know it's no good."

"Nothing's much good."

"You know perfectly well what I mean. It was all very well when you were children, but now she's a young woman and you're a young man, and you ought to check such feelings—they're wrong."

"There's nothing wrong in my thoughts of her," he said.

"Oh, yes, there is," she insisted; "and if it goes on you won't be able to go on living with us the same as what you have done. I know what I'm talking about. I've been there, my boy—I've been there. If you go on encouraging yourself to thoughts you didn't ought to have—about how you wish you was playing prince to her princess, and about how hard it is you being like you are—well, you'll upset everything, and you and us'll have to part. Not but what I own it is hard, cruel hard. But for you being like you are, poor dear, she might have fancied you——"

"You don't know anything," said he fiercely, "not anything at all. If I'd been straight and strong and all that God meant me to be, she'd never have looked at me. Do you think I don't know that? It's because I do know that, because I know there never could have been a chance for me if I'd been everything that I'm not—it's because of that that I'm not afraid to love her. Oh! if you want it you shall have

it. You've tramped into my heart with your soft, heavy boots, and now you can look round, and welcome. I've no chance. I've never had a chance—I never could have had a chance. So I can put all my soul into loving her. I tell you it hurts too much for it to be wrong. Wrong things never hurt like that. Did you ever hear of the monks who had spiky crosses under their shirts, and pressed them to them so that the spikes ran into their breasts, and loved the pain better than any pleasure? That's what my love for her is—it's the sharp-pointed cross; and I hold it to my heart with both hands, tight, tight, and I'll die holding it. Do you think you can stop me, do you?—do you?"

He had his arm on her knee, and crouching by her made her eyes meet his.

"Hush, dear!" she said equably. "Don't you get so excited. You know how bad it is for you. . . ."

"Don't you understand at all?" he insisted, "not the least little bit? Is it possible to say what I've said, and for the person you say it to not to understand a single word? I suppose it is."

He took his arm from her knee, and sat back on the flagstone again.

"Of course I understand every word," she said, "and if you really understand it's hopeless—as you say you do——"

"Hopeless!" he interjected scornfully.

"Well, then, as long as you don't worry her about it I daresay it's all right, though I do think what

you said about the cross is a little profane, dear, don't you? Come, now, when you think it over quietly?"

He frowned. Then laughed.

"Ah!" he said, "you're a good, kind, sensible old dear, and I don't know what I should do without you. Don't mind my nonsense. I shall never do anything to worry her: you know that well enough. Give me a kiss and tell me what there is for supper."

She gave him the kiss and the information with an equally calm readiness.

"I'll go to bed early to-night," he said. "I've got that wretched neuralgia again."

"If you write a bit of that piece you're composing, now," she said, "or play a tune on your fiddle softly so as not to disturb her—you know that always does you good."

His face clouded again.

"I can't," he said; "how often am I to tell you that I can't? There isn't any music in this place. Don't you understand? Some people play tunes on the violin. I don't. I make music. And you can't make music out of nothing: you have to draw it to yourself as you play, out of the air round you. It comes creeping closer, closer, like a beautiful ghost, and then you catch it and materialise it in what you call a tune. And there's no music in this place. There's only horror, and fear, and the ghosts of things that ought never to have been. If I were to play I

might materialise those things, and the tune I should play then would send you raving mad."

"If you ask me," she said, bundling the stockings into the basket at her feet and getting up briskly, "I think you ought to get to bed directly, with a nice cup of tea and a hot bottle to your feet. We shall be having you ill next, and a nice set out that'll be for her—and her having to begin her dancing again Monday and all, and you laid up and not able to play for her. Now, you be a good boy and do what I tell you. You know I only do it for your own good. Come along indoors with you; do, for goodness' sake! I'll get your little friend, and take the chair in afterwards."

She fetched his crutch, and they went in.

. . . . . .

It was when the house was quite quiet that night that Sandra withdrew her bolts and went down. She had, through the fast door, bidden Mrs Mosenthal put something to eat in the dining-room and go to bed. If she were hungry she would come down later.

"I don't want to see anyone to-night," she said: "not even you, dear. Go to bed, there's a darling, and don't come down if you hear me moving about, for I can't stand it. I shall be all right to-morrow."

It was past midnight when she got up and dressed. She had had her sleep out. Now she would go down and eat, and spend the rest of the night in packing. It would save time in the morning.

When she opened the dining-room door she found the lamp keeping watch in a silence that the tall clock emphasised with deliberate tickings, over a white spread table where chicken and bread and fruit and wine were laid out with pretty daintinesses of silver, glass, china, flowers.

She closed the door and sat down. There were two notes on her plate: one from Dusa. The other laid beside it was addressed in a hand that had once addressed letters breathing of hope and fame and Art—letters that she had watched for and treasured. Now . . . .

With a little thrill of yielding cowardice she let it lie—and opened Dusa's and read.

"My darling child, do make a good supper. You must need it. There is a good fire in kitchen, and kettle if you want chocolate or anything. And there is a raspberry cream in the refrigerator. Wish you had let me sit up. Would much rather have. Be a brave girl and eat the liver-wing, and a bit of the breast. DUSA."

Well . . . . she would be a brave girl.

It was not cowardice but courage now that left the other letter still unopened beside her as she carved the chicken, cut bread, pressed out the cork of the little gold cravatted bottle, and ate and drank, leisurely and sufficiently. She was not going to let his hateful letters upset her. If chicken and champagne could make one brave, brave she would be.

When the meal was over she opened the letter without undue haste.

It was longer than she expected. She had looked for a brief pleading for money—threats, perhaps. She got this:

"My Dear Alexandra,—Your attitude is very unwise and ill-chosen. I have always wished to be your friend, and if I once deceived you, believe me it was for your own good. I wish to speak to you. I saw that your household had gone to bed, and was interested in the little feast set out—which can but be for you. So I have opened your window and written this at your writing-table. . . ."

She threw round the room a swift, keen glance of fear.

"I shall leave this by your plate and wait at the gate of the shrubbery. If you are absent I shall see you as you return, and this note will be unnecessary. If, as I imagine, you are resting, you will find this note waiting when you come to your, alas! solitary supper. Me you will find still waiting at the shrubbery gate. Will you come and speak to me? I do not wait by the house lest anyone should see me. We cannot be too careful. All this must be entirely between ourselves—between you and me. You will be perfectly safe with me. You had better come—if not for my sake, for the sake of your new friend. Isidore Saccage."

"*P.S.*—It occurs to me that you may think that last is a threat. You have misunderstood me for all these years. It is not a threat. I have something to pro-

pose—for his advantage and yours—as well as for my own, of course. I don't pretend to be disinterested after the way you and your grandfather have treated me. Be wise: come and meet me quietly. If you don't I shall come to the house. This is not a threat either, but an alternative. Do just as you like about it."

To let him come to the house at that hour in the night, to have Dusa coming down, probably Denny as well, explanations to Denny, and before that brute . . . . No, it was impossible. She would go out and meet the man. Perhaps he really had something to propose. Perhaps he knew of some way by which she might be free of him . . . . for a price. Money was all he wanted, after all. If she could buy her freedom! That man would know if anyone did. She would go; she was not afraid of him, the hateful little sneak! All the same . . . .

She went up to her room to get a dark cloak, and took from the corner drawer the little revolver that Mr Mosenthal had given her when she first began to spend her holidays at The Wood House. It lay there as if it meant nothing in particular—it looked quite innocent, almost frivolous, among her lavender-scented laces and handkerchiefs. But it was a serious little person, too; and Mr Mosenthal had taught her how to make it speak straight and to the point. It lay beside her on the writing-table as she in turn wrote a letter. She took it up and pushed it under Dusa's door, very gently, in the dark.

She got her bicycle lamp out of the back kitchen, lighted it, and went down to the shrubbery gate. The night air was chill, and the branches that she thrust aside as she went dripped with dew.

A few paces from the gate she stopped.

"Are you there?" she said.

"Put out that light," said a voice in the darkness. "Do you want to attract every tramp in the neighbourhood?"

"I will put the lamp out if you like," she said distinctly and gently, "but you are not to come near me. I have a revolver—and if I hear you move I shall shoot. I have a quick ear and I'm a good shot. So I advise you to keep where you are."

"You're still the old spit-fire," he said, "and I've no desire to come near you. What I've got to say can be said quite well without our being in each other's arms—though, of course, that's where we ought to be."

"If I were you," she said quietly, "I shouldn't say things like that."

He did not answer. She stood rigid and cold, her hand gripping the little revolver. Now that the lamp was out her eyes were straining themselves to see into the darkness. And the night seemed full of little sounds. How could she be sure that none of them were the sounds of him moving, coming stealthily towards her?

"You'd better," she reminded him, "say what

you've got to say. I don't intend to wait long for it."

"If I were you"—he repeated her words—"I shouldn't say things like *that*. Don't be so high-flying, my lovely wife. You don't like that? Well, I'm not frightened of you. And you are frightened of me. You needn't be. I wouldn't hurt a hair of your pretty head. You're too valuable, my child. Now this is what I've got to say—just a plain, straightforward business offer. I didn't mean to tease you; only you and your revolver were the least trifle too much for my temper. Now, here's the offer: give me a decent income—luxury I don't ask for; a cultivated leisure for the pursuit of the arts is all I want—say £500 a year, and do what you like. I'll never interfere."

"You won't be allowed to interfere as it is," she said, setting her teeth in the darkness.

"You've changed," he said; "you used not to be dense. As you say, we aren't married in the sight of God and——"

"I didn't say so."

"Oh, well," he said, "if you think we *are* married in the sight of God, let's go home together like sensible married people and say no more about it."

He heard her stamp in the darkness.

"Well, we're *not* married in the sight of God, but we *are* married in the eye of the law. Is that it? Now, the law won't free you from me. But *I* will. Give me a decent living, go your own way, marry whom you like—and I'll never interfere."

"Do you think I'd trust you?" she asked scornfully. "Even if I were such a beast as you think me, do you think I'd be fool enough to trust *you*?"

"You might," he said, and she was astonished to find that she believed him. And she was astonished and sickened to find herself experiencing a fleeting pang at the thought that she had told her lover her secret and parted from him for ever. The next moment she was glad. It was at least out of her power to yield to this horrible tempter. "I shouldn't quarrel with my income," he went on. "And he need never know. He'd see all blue, as they say in France. Your new friend looks very confiding. Or you could tell him I was dead. It might be safer—and then he'd never have anything to find out."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

He knew by her voice that nothing he could say would make any difference—that this, like his other attempt, had failed. Already another plan was germinating in his brain. It grew to maturity even as he went on speaking, and coloured the words he used and the voice he spoke with. And as he spoke, he was wondering how he would look without his beard.

"You've had enough of marriage? Well, perhaps you're right. It's all humbug, anyhow. And you're a dancer, aren't you? Marriage is a little out of your line, perhaps? Well, if you want to try the other thing the sum I've named will make me a complacent husband. Yes, you're certainly wise.

I often wonder what you actresses and dancers get married for—just as a prelude to the divorce scena, I suppose. Well, whatever you call it, I'll leave you free—on that simple condition, that you make it worth my while. Think it over, will you? I'm going now—don't shoot me when I move, please."

"You are not to move, not till I have gone. I will not do any of the horrible things you say. And I won't give you a penny. Do what you like!"

"Shall I tell you what I shall do?" he said. "Yes, I'll tell you one or two things that I can do. I can make you live with me. I daresay I should like married life when I got used to it. Or, I can let everyone know where you live. No more quiet week-ends with your new friend then. Interviewers and snapshotters: Sylvia in her boat — Sylvia bathing—Sylvia kissing her latest lover under the oak-tree. I can make it impossible fo. you to do anything without seeing it next day in the paper. I don't want to drive you to sin, my immaculate lily; but, by God! if you make a slip—even so little a slip as a kiss or two—every office-boy in London shall know it. Sylvia and her 'cavalière servante'—Sylvia asking her young man to take her to Ostend. Go your own way. I've given you your chance. Go your own way, and take your own time. I can wait. I give you six months to come crawling to my feet, begging and praying me to take any money to let you alone. And I'll do it, my dear; when I've

dragged your name through the dirt I'll do it . . . . at a price. But it won't be the price you've refused to give me to-night."

"Now," she said, "if you've no more to say, I'll go. You can do what you choose. You shall never have anything from me. You can make my life hell—and I've no doubt you will. But you shall do it just for the love of the thing, you devil, and not for any profit that you'll ever get out of it. Do what you like. I don't care."

She turned; her eyes, used by now to the darkness, showed plainly the path through the shrubbery. She got back to the house, bolted and shuttered the windows, and sat down by the table where the revolver lay. Mrs Mosenthal found her there when she came downstairs at seven. "Oh, God!" she was saying, "what have I done to deserve this—what have I done!" She seemed to herself to have been saying just that, over and over again, for many hours.

But next night she delighted her audience at the Hilarity, and it was remarked that she had never danced so well, and Pan was considered to have surpassed himself. Aunt Dusa sat up late that night talking to Uncle Moses. He frowned at most of her story, but at last he laughed.

"It is simple like the day, my good Harriet," he said. "She can get the marriage annulled. I will see my solicitor about it to-morrow. But tell her nothing till I am sure. It is well for her that she has the Uncle Moses. That he should dare to threaten

the child! The melodrama-villain—the contemptible undergrabber! The foredamned, pestilent, cursed swine-hound!"

Which shocking expressions warmed Mrs Mosenthal's cold heart like a comforting spiced cordial.

CHAPTER IX

THE WIDOW

WHEN you have nursed for eight years, even in a half-forgotten corner of your mind or heart, the idea of an incomparable girl-child, who is all that time growing into a woman, and who will, by all the rules of development, some day be an incomparable princess; when, after this or that lapse from moral rectitude, you have returned to straight paths and have found her, and found her to be all, or more than all, that you foresaw; when you have also found her to have all the qualities your mind demands, or your heart requires, including the exquisite taste which prefers you before all other men; and when, at the very moment of your discovery that you are a prince, the crown is knocked off your head and you learn that your princess is in reality not a free princess at all, but wife, by the laws of your land, to a loathsome music-master, your outlook on life will need some focusing.

Mr Edmund Templar went back to Curzon Street, and he had his moments of loud swearing and his days of sullen, quiet fury; also his hours of reflection

and enlightenment. The first thing to do, of course, was to see his solicitor; but his solicitor was out of town, and he did not care to tell the silly, sordid story to a stranger. He must wait. Meantime, he could see her at the Hilarity, and he did.

His love for her had so much of the unselfish tenderness that distinguishes love from mere passion, that he was careful to remember how the sight of him might affect her in her dancing. He would not risk anything that might make what she had chosen to do harder for her. So he did not take a box, which he would have liked to do, and watch quite closely the pretty mazes that her pretty feet trod—the innocent, alluring curves of arms and neck. He took refuge in a wig, crape hair, and the gallery, and from amid these concealments watched her through an opera-glass. She could not see him—and he could see her, and it made things easier to him just to see her thus. And he could not be expected, perhaps, to know that day by day life became more and more difficult to her just because she could *not* see him.

"He might at least have come to the theatre once or twice," she told herself. Because you have parted with your lover for ever, and are "never going to see him any more," you do not therefore desire that he should accept the good-bye so literally as never even to *try* to see you, especially when you are to be seen, for a shilling, by any man who has the shilling to pay.

He, for his part, was at first pleased that she could

look so gay and glad—that she had the courage to hide so well the agony which he felt must be torturing her. It is odd, by the way—so odd, that in age people forget how natural that oddness is to youth—it is odd that a man and woman who, a fortnight ago, did not know each other's names should, in a few short days, become so much to each other that to know that they must part, probably for ever, hurts like having a hand cut off. They call it agony; and to them it is agony—an agony so keen as to make it seem incredible that even in their old age those who have endured that pain should forget it. Yet they do: and so we see the stern father and the worldly mother. It is all very odd—the agony, and the forgetting of it. You observe that Mr Templar did not doubt that what Sylvia endured *was* agony, and that her inspired dancing only just served bravely to hide a breaking heart. This was at first: presently he began to wonder whether suffering *could* be so bravely hidden—whether, after all, the wreck of that love-argosy, on which they had together ventured the cargo of their happiness, was less to her than it was to him. The thought stung. Well, women were slighter things than men—lighter, more swayed by the world. And well for them that it was so, he told himself with the bitter generosity of the deeply hurt. But he went on straining his eyes in the gallery with strong binoculars, and she went on dancing. It was her living—and more. . . . His wounded vanity told him the truth, so far, that it was in her dancing alone

that she was able, for a moment, to forget the man she loved, and also to forget what she feared from the man she did not love.

She practised for hours in the looking-glass-lined room, and Pan played for her, untiring—played better than he had ever done before. The great symphony on which he was spending all the hours that he could not spend with her, and all the powers of his soul that were not spent in love and sorrow, now approached completion. The symphony was to be performed by the Hilarity orchestra at his benefit—and there were new dances to think out. Besides the dances for the symphony they invented a new dance, of war, wherein she, in the brazen armour of an Amazon, danced a dance of battle to the sound of trumpets and drums.

It was a fine dance, dignified, relentless. She took the stage alone. It seemed to her that for Denny—gentle, dreamy, "afflicted,"—there could be no part in a dance of war. She herself put into the dance all the fury, the resentment, the hatred, that she felt for the hound who had betrayed and trapped her; and besides, all the determination not to yield, to die fighting, with which her hatred, her resentment, and her fury inspired her. It was magnificent. It surpassed her other dances, because it was inspired by a real, living, terrible emotion—not the vague, beautiful dreams of a child, but the heart-whole fury of a woman in love. The dance perfect, she introduced it at the Hilarity.

Templar saw it, shuddered, hated the dance, loved it, and understood.

The town saw it, and it took the town by storm. There had been no waning in the passion of the public for their darling, but had its flare dwindled, this would have awakened a new blaze. As it was, her popularity, which could not rise above the high-water mark it had already attained, did as water does when it can rise no more: it spread. People who did not care for dancing came to see her, dragged by enthusiastic friends and relations—came, and thereafter *did* care. People who had meant to go away for their summer holidays stayed in London that they might see her again, and yet again, before her holidays, too, should begin.

The frenzy of intrigued curiosity in journalists and in men who were not journalists, grew to fever-point. London was mad about her.

And while the splendour of the war-dance was fresh in the eyes of men and in the columns of the newspapers, she turned all her thought and care to Denny's symphony.

It was difficult. Denny would not allow her to hear any of the rehearsals of his symphony by the orchestra. He conveyed its meaning and measure to her, by means of his pipe, his violin, his piano.

She, for her part, would not risk dancing to his music any dance which she had not tried on the public; so that all the new dances had to be invented at home to Denny's music, and rehearsed and

performed at the theatre to the music of Beethoven. On Denny's benefit night she would for the first time dance her new dances to his symphony fully orchestrated.

Her dances owed so much to the inspiration which the moment gave her genius that this was possible. The programme would run somewhat like this:

THE LOVE SYMPHONY.

BY DENIS.

DANCED BY SYLVIA.

1. The Child.
2. The Maiden.
3. The Dance of Worship.
4. The Dance of Love and Death.

She revived an old scheme conceived long ago and abandoned for lack of the absolutely fitting music. Now she had that.

To the first movement a child danced on the sea-shore, wearing wreaths and garlands of knotted green-brown sea-weed—a child half-cradled in the dreams of childhood, half awake to the dreams of youth—a child whose eyes looked forth in innocent candour on the first vague visions of the mystery of love.

She tried it on the public, and her audience cheered that dance to the echo, and felt young and innocent and out of doors. Old dowagers remembered the sand-castles of their childhood, the Spanish castles of their adolescence; middle-aged stockbrokers looked on, breathless, and decided to go to the seaside next

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week-end instead of to the bungalow by the golf-links.

Then should come the forest dance—but a new forest dance, where her memories would not be of the New Forest, but of trees nearer home, and of the flowers that grow by a Kentish river.

In the dance of worship the scene was a soft-sanded space surrounded by the great rough pillars of a prehistoric temple, a purple Eastern sky holding a crescent moon, a rough altar, lines of white-draped, death-still figures. One man, white-robed, gold-haired, with rapt, devotional face, playing on a stringed instrument—I think it was a zither, but the management called it on the programmes a psaltery—and between the pillars and the white-robed, death-still priests a woman, dancing with stately, beautiful, slow movements, and the face, men said, of an angel: dancing because dancing was the only way in which her soul and body together could express the worship of all things good and beautiful which filled her soul and inspired it.

This was the biggest success she had had. It roped into her net most of those who were still outside it. The religious papers wrote leaders dealing with Miriam, David, Jephthah's daughter, and other dancers lauded in the Old Testament; popular Non-conformist preachers alluded to her from their pulpits, pointing out how wrong it was to suppose that dancing was necessarily of the devil, and declaring that no earnest Christian could be other than benefited

by the pure religious feeling which Sylvia had, with a courage and insight truly heavenly, introduced into that hot-bed of sensual vice, the music-hall stage. High Church clergy from far and near reminded all and sundry that they had always said so. And even Mr Stewart Hedlam, the staunch, unswerving upholder of the old teetotum-skirted, pigeon-winged *première danseuse*, clapped his hands sore from the stalls, and cheered the soul of Sylvia when she came before the curtain, by the sight of his beautiful silver hair and his fine, kind, mellow, approving face.

For the last movement she was to dance the Salome. She danced each dance for five evenings and no more. She whetted public expectancy; she then denied it. The dances were for Denny's music.

And as her success grew higher and higher, her lover's heart grew heavier and heavier. What his solicitor had had to tell him had added no joy to life.

But the heart of Uncle Moses rejoiced. His solicitor had had the same hopeless tale to tell. Only Uncle Moses perceived that Sylvia's hope of happiness lay in work—in successful work—in Fame, and not in love.

Also his pride was engaged. He had "run" Sylvia, and she had succeeded, as adventures which he financed had a way of doing. The jewelled gifts too heaped high, and he swept up, every night of her dancing, a cent. per cent. profit on sums not negligible. She had conquered the world, and she

was fleecing Mammon. He was getting his percentage—a royal one. And besides and beyond that, he loved the girl. That was her distinguishing characteristic when all was said and done—everyone loved her.

She had yielded now to the entreaties of the management of the Hilarity. It was no longer four days in the week that she danced, but five, and it would have been six but for Uncle Moses and Aunt Dusa, who insisted on at least two days of rest. And the week's holiday came once in four weeks now, instead of once in three.

As usual in August, "London was empty"; but it was crowded all the same, crowded with people who wanted to see Sylvia dance. For a heart in the condition which we term broken, there is no medicine like work; indeed, it is the best opiate in the world for all pain, except the pain of overwork itself.

Drug-taking is dangerous, as all men know, because of the hold that the drug takes upon one's nerves and one's will. Life without the drug soon grows to seem not worth having. Presently the only thing worth having in life appears to be the drug. Later the life *is* the drug—and nothing else.

Sylvia was fast nearing the point where she must either weaken and break down from overwork, or harden and crystallise into a talented professional. So far her highest, deepest, most irresistible charm had been that she was an amateur of genius.

Fate's next move came in time to save her from both these melancholy alternatives.

The move was announced to Sylvia, as a correspondence-chess move might have been, by a letter. It lay, with a heap of others, on the long, broad table that ran under the mirror in her dressing-room at the theatre. It lay on the top, and it probably owed its position to the peculiarity of its envelope. It was a "business" envelope—a large oblong—and it was black-edged, very black-edged. The blackness lay, not only in a St Andrew's cross upon its back, but as a border upon its face, framing the address in a sable square. Now, the people who write adulation to dancers are not usually in mourning mood. Sylvia therefore decided that here was a begging letter. And being kind-hearted and already dressed in the seaweed tunic of her sea-dance, and having nothing to do till her call came, which was delayed by a triple encore to a man who sang comic songs standing on his head on the back of a pig, she opened it. And when she had read it she turned pale, and clasped her hands to her heart just like a heroine of melodrama. Because melodrama, after all, is roughly founded on life. Then her hands dropped by her sides, and her face slowly and beautifully grew pinker and pinker under its rouge, till it became a very rose of joy.

Then her call came. She hid the letter under the cover of her table and went. And when she stood in the soft, clear light, smiling her acknow-

lea... .t of her reception, the applause rose to a clamour. And with reason, for she was twice as beautiful as she had ever been before. And she knew it, which instantly made her more beautiful still.

The sense of well-being, which comes from doing perfectly what one always does well, lapped Sylvia in a cloak of cool velvet. More, it was as though the skin that clothed her body had been changed to some close-fitting enchanted fabric, whose every thread was spun of pure joy, an intimate web of wonder caressing her, all over, with a live, pure delight.

"If only he ever came! If only he could see me now!" she thought. And then the magic of her dance shut out all thought, leaving nothing but that soft, close, delicious sense of accurate, spontaneous perfection.

As it happened he had come. He could see her. He had been unable to avoid coming, not to the gallery, in the wig and crape hair disguise which now began to seem to be not only ridiculous—it had always been that,—but unnecessary. She was so wrapped up in her dancing, he told himself, that she would never notice him even if he occupied the box he had always longed for.

He had, by Fate's decree, to take that box. Fate drove him to it—Fate in the person of his Aunt. She and the Uncle had come to town, *en route* for some holiday place abroad, and, being in town,

nothing would serve but that dear Edmund, after dining with them at Morley's, should take them to see this new dancer.

"This Sylvia, as they call her," said the Aunt expressively.

Templar fought feebly, but the only weapon that could have protected him would have been a previous appointment, and he had unfortunately admitted, earlier in the engagement, that he was free that evening. He thought of being taken suddenly ill; but he knew that that would involve the invasion and occupation of his rooms by the hostile forces, and he felt that to be nursed by his Aunt, when he had nothing the matter with him except a broken heart, which he could not disclose, would be the unbearable last straw.

For a thousand reasons he dreaded and detested the occupation of that stage-box in company with his relations. The chance that they would not recognise in "Sylvia, as they call her" the poor little Alexandra Mundy of eight years ago, seemed to him of the slenderest. And how could he bear their wonder, their interest, their surmises, their conclusions? But he telephoned to engage that box, only to learn what he might have expected, that it had been booked a fortnight ago, together with every other seat in the house.

"So we can't go after all," he said, coming back into the hotel lounge, "every seat engaged. We must try something else; there's a very bright little

thing at the Frivolity—quite charming music, I believe."

"Opera?" the Uncle heavily queried.

"Musical comedy," said the Aunt, as heavily; "I saw it in the papers. I can't bear musical comedies—they're all vulgar and they're all silly, *I* think. Besides, I've set my heart on seeing this girl. I can't believe all that about her . . . . you know, what Mr Macdonald said in his sermon last Sunday. Is she really as wonderful as they say, Edmund?"

"Really," said Edmund, "I almost think she is. You must see her the next time you come to town. Shall I go and call up the Frivolity?"

"No," said the Aunt, "if we can't see this Sylvia girl we'll go to the Shakespeare thing. Shakespeare may be a little dull sometimes, but he's always elevating; and nowadays, if you go to one of these new plays you never know that you mayn't know where to look. Now, Shakespeare's perfectly safe—at least, when he's acted. In the book, of course, it's different. That's why I never will have him read aloud in my house. You never know, you see. I'll telephone myself. Edmund—don't you trouble. I want to call up my dressmaker at the same time."

She rustled off in her heavy silk.

"Anything in the paper?" said Edmund, making conversation dutifully. "I hadn't time to look at it this morning."

"Oh, nothing much. Another air-ship smashed—

three or four people run over by motors — the Unemployed bothering as usual. In August, too; you'd think they'd wait till the winter, wouldn't you?"

"I should think it's as unpleasant to starve in August as at any other time," said Edmund.

"Oh! but they don't starve," said the Uncle; "it's all political agitation—there's no real starvation, you know."

"Isn't there, really?" said Edmund drily. He had read yesterday's paper, if not to-day's—yesterday's paper, and the account of the woman who drowned herself and her five children, and he knew that people don't kill themselves and leave notes to say they've done it because they're starving, just to advance the interests of this or that political party. But it is seldom worth while to argue with one's uncle.

"No, take my word for it—it's all bosh, my dear boy—cheap Socialist bosh!"

"Was there any other news?"

"Old Lord Lindore's dead—died of heart in a Paris gambling-hell—shocking life he led," said the Uncle with enjoyment. "And that musical chap—you know, the tenor they used to rave about in the 'seventies. What's his name? Olindo Ferrara—yes. Oh! and by the way, you remember that girl we were talking about when you were down in the spring—little Alexandra Mundy? Or perhaps you've forgotten."

No—oddly enough, Edmund had not forgotten.

"Well, you know that retriever-dog chap—the music-master that all the scandal was about? Well, he's gone off the hooks—a good riddance, I should say. More than one poor girl down our way—ah! here's your aunt. I was just telling Edmund that brute who got Alexandra Mundy into trouble's gone home."

"Indeed!" said Edmund, quite calmly and nicely; "how sad! What did he die of?"

"Pneumonia. Queer thing to have in August. His chest must have been unusually weak."

"Didn't wear flannels next his skin, I expect," said the Aunt crisply. "If you don't wear flannel next your skin, you've only yourself to thank for whatever happens. I'm always telling your uncle so. Am I not, Henry?"

"Yes, my dear, you are," said the Uncle; "and here I am at sixty-eight as sound as a bell."

"Ah!" said the Aunt, "it's all very well. Henry, we must be moving; we're lunching at the Jones's. Good-bye for the present, Edmund. Don't be late for dinner, and I do hope you wear a thick vest under your evening shirt. I always tell your uncle . . . ."

He got away on that, and bought half a dozen papers at the corner of Trafalgar Square, and stood there turning them over with hands that trembled, and trying to look at them with eyes that were too eager to be able to focus the print. He stood there quite careless of the people who bumped and pushed

and hustled by him, until a policeman noticed him, thought he had been there quite long enough, and moved him on.

Then he went down into the Embankment gardens, and presently found something that looked as though it might be what he wanted. The search had been complicated by the fact that Sandra had not told him the man's name. It had not seemed to matter, then.

"DEATH OF A TALENTED COMPOSER.—We regret to record the death of Mr Isidore Somerville Saccage, Mus.Bac., whose compositions have given pleasure to so many. Twenty years ago he was prominently before the public, but he retired into private life unable to bear the bitter jealousies and trivial annoyances incident to his profession, and has since his retirement lived almost the life of a hermit among his books, his flowers, and his beloved music. Double pneumonia was the cause of death."

Mr Templar had never heard of Mr Saccage before, but the *Daily Monocle*, it seemed, had. He turned to the other papers. Each contained the same paragraph, or a modification of it. No other musician's death was recorded. This must be the man. He turned to the list of deaths on the front page. Yes.

"SACCAGE.—At his residence at Stoke Newington, on August the 15th, of pneumonia, Isidore Sommerville Saccage, Mus.Bac. Friends will please accept this, the only intimation. No flowers."

Templar bundled the papers together, got up from the iron seat, and stood a moment in the sunshine. He wanted to take his hat off—to thank Something or Somebody.

"*He's* come across a bit of luck all right, anyhow," said a binder's girl to her pal. "Wish you joy, mister," she said impudently as she passed him, and laughed loud at the exquisite joke.

But Templar said "Thank you very much" so gravely and kindly, that she was abashed; and, mumbling "No offence meant," hurried her friend away and did not even look back. It was to her that he took off his hat.

He got back to his rooms, cut the two paragraphs from one of the papers, and pinned them to the letter he wrote.

The letter was short.

"Where can I see you?" it said, with due endearments. That was all. He wanted her to have it at once. There might be a rehearsal or a matinée or something. If he took it to the theatre now, perhaps she would get it quite soon.

There was no matinée—and no rehearsal. Madame Sylvia would receive the letter when she arrived at the theatre that evening, not sooner. No, there were no seats to be had.

On which Templar demanded to see the management. And the management, being in a good humour, let itself be seen. Templar expected it to be a fat man with thick features and a big cigar between wet

lips. It was a lean, dry man, of at most thirty, with a humorous eye nestling in a net of wrinkles.

"Your business, sir?" it said.

"I want," said Templar very slowly, "a box for to-night. In fact," he added still more deliberately, "I must have it."

"There is not a seat in the house," said the management impatiently; "they ought to have told you so at the box office. Is there anything else you wished to see me about?" He turned towards the box office.

"The circumstances are peculiar," said Templar. "If you'll come three steps this way, I'll tell you something that will surprise you. The lady you call Sylvia is going to marry me."

"That so?" said the management imperturbably.

"There have been obstacles," Templar went on coolly; "these are now removed. My relations wish to see Madame Sylvia, and I have promised to get them a box."

"A line from the lady might make some difference," the management admitted.

"That's just it," said Templar. "She doesn't know. And I want to tell her myself. It's a rather romantic business altogether. You see, we parted for ever, and now it's all right. And she doesn't know. If I tell her before the performance it might upset her—prevent her dancing or something. I shall sit well back in the box—she won't see me,—and then tell her afterwards. It's her last night this week. She'll have a day or two to think it over. Come—I know these

things can be worked. I'll give thirty guineas for a box."

"That's not business," the management reminded him reprovingly. "The box is six guineas." Then it stood in thought.

"How am I to know all this *is* so?" it said.

"I beg your pardon?" said Templar.

"Oh! I don't mean I doubt your word," said the other. "Don't you think that. But if there were some mistake?"

"The mistake will be if you don't get me a box," said Templar. "You know her. How do you think she'll take it when she knows you wouldn't let me in —on this night of all nights?"

The management did know her. It knew that she was capable of leaving him on an instant's pique; and though he might make her pay forfeit, that would not fill his house as she had filled it. Then there was Mr Mosenthal, a power behind those scenes. If this were true—and the management thought it was,—a refusal would only exasperate the girl and her lover, and would not retard that abandonment of the boards which marriage usually spelt. If it were not true— well, this man's six guineas were as good as the next man's. And he seemed a gentleman—he wouldn't make a scene or anything.

"Well?" said Templar.

"Well," said the management, "as a matter of fact there *is* a box. Lady Jute—killed by her own motor this morning—yes, there is a box."

"It is an odd thing," said Templar, relaxing his face to a smile that would have convinced the management more than any words could have done that he was indeed a lover beloved—"it's an odd thing, but somehow I knew all the time that there *was* a box."

Then they both laughed, and Templar left the theatre with the laurels of victory and a six-guinea slip of paper.

CHAPTER X

LOVERS MEETING

THAT was how it happened that when Sylvia stood that night before her audience she stood before her lover, and among the hands that applauded the radiant appearance his hands were.

The Aunt, looking really very nice in her black satin and old Honiton, sat in the front of the box with the Uncle.

Templar, true to his understanding with the management, kept well back among the shadows.

And Sylvia danced. Pan was a Triton now. A glittering scaly fish-tail showed instead of the poor lame foot, and the other foot that did not match. His golden hair was crowned with brown, glistening, wet sea-weed, and from a collar of sea-weed trails of it drooped above his chest and arms. The music he made came from his pipe, but it seemed as though it came from a long sea-shell that he held to his lips.

And Sylvia danced. How pretty she was—how dear! How fresh and sweet, how lovely and beloved! Mr Templar, lurking behind his Aunt, longed to cry out in the face of the crowded house, "She is mine!

She belongs to me!"—to catch her in his arms then and there, and to carry her away to that island which glowed in faint amber and opal and gold far away across the painted sea of the scene behind her.

All the jealous irritation that he had felt in gazing on her face, gay in spite of what lay between them, had vanished now. Now he had eyes to see that she had been brave, not heartless; for as he watched her the conviction grew in him that she also knew that now nothing lay between them—nothing but love. He knew that she knew it, because the unclouded sunlight of joy in her eyes showed him, for the first time, that the light that had been there in the dances of these long weeks had been only the light of a candle carefully lit and guarded. And the delicate, joyous abandon of her every movement was new—new as his own new joy.

The dance ended.

"It *is* pretty," said the Aunt. "Do you remember Miss Clara Vaughan, Henry? She reminds me of her a little. How did you like it, Henry?"

"It's remarkable—remarkable," he said. "She is certainly a very talented young woman. She doesn't look a day over eighteen. And yet, I suppose she must be?"

"Oh! you may depend she's over thirty," said the Aunt confidently. "All these actresses are. But they always make up young. I'm sure it's wonderful how they do it."

"She is only twenty-one," said Edmund shortly.

"Come out and take a turn," said the Uncle. "There's an interval, I suppose?"

"Only a minute or two, while they change the scene," said Edmund, but he rose and followed his Uncle.

Outside, "My boy," the Uncle said, "I'm sorry to see this. I don't want to preach, dear lad—young men will be young men, but I'm sorry to see it."

"I don't know what you mean," lied Edmund.

"You shouldn't look at her like that, you know," the Uncle went on. "Lord! I've been young myself, and no one saw it but me. But you should be careful. There's many a young man has had reasons to wish he'd never entered such walls as these, and——'

"I ought to tell you," said Templar carefully, "that that lady and I are engaged to be married."

"Lord!" said the Uncle, "there—the lights are down—not a word to your Aunt. It's lucky she won't own to needing glasses. She can't see half of it."

Edmund had this to think of through the next, the dance of war.

"She *is* rather clever," was the Aunt's verdict. "Really, Henry, she made me want to get up and go and fight somebody: didn't she you?"

Edmund got his Uncle out again.

"What did you mean by what you said just now?—that my Aunt didn't see half of it. You can't mean that you think it's a thing she ought not to see?"

"Bless my soul, no," said the Uncle, full of a raging

conflict between hurt family pride and "gentlemanly feeling," "of course not. I never saw a more modest dancer—never, upon my word. It's quite amazing. I assure you, if you'd asked me what was the first thing that had struck me about her, I should have said 'her modesty.' I should indeed."

"Then what *did* you mean?"

"Well—the fact is . . . . I'd rather have broken it to you gently, my boy. But if you will have it——"

"I will have it, please."

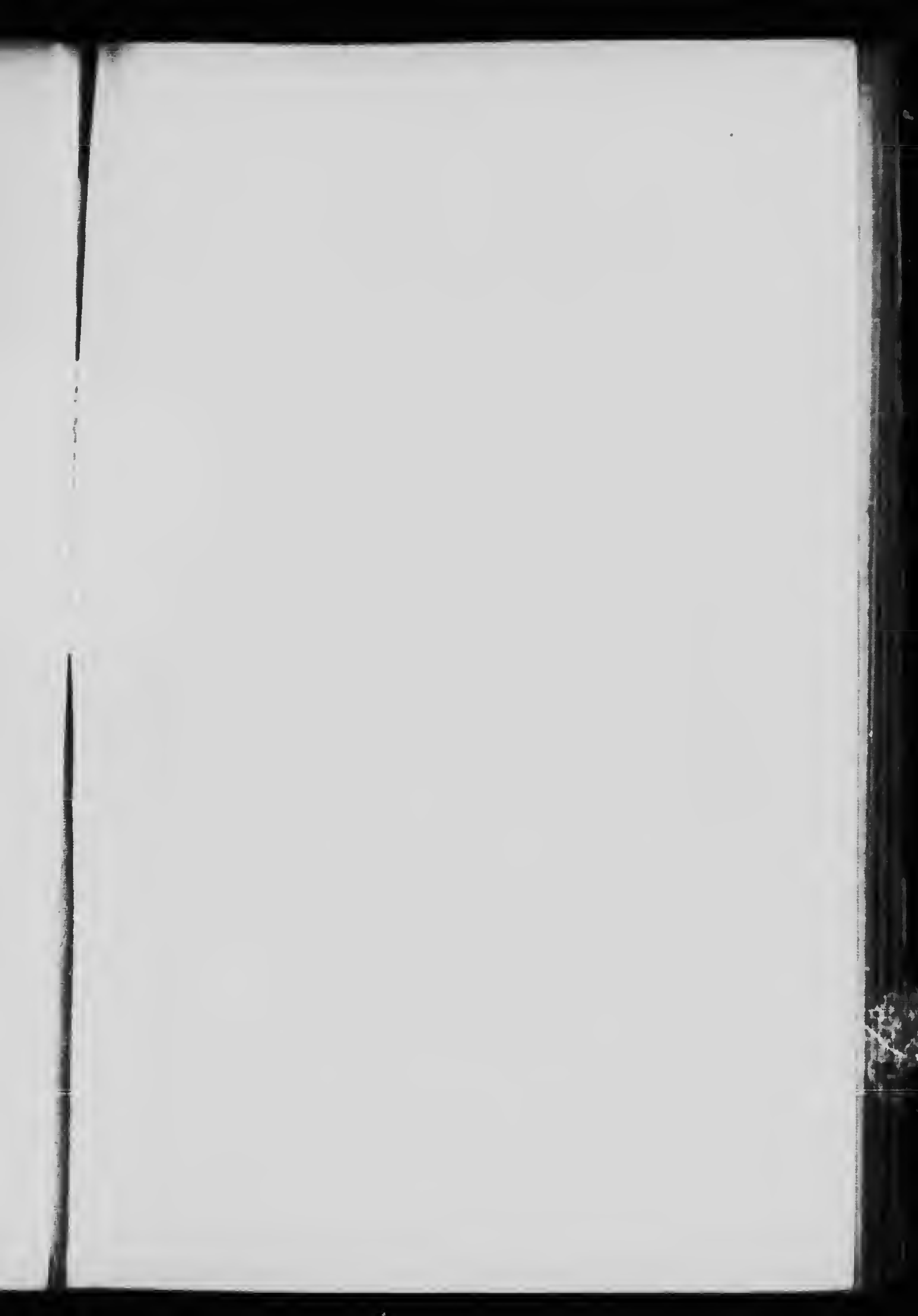
"Then, what I mean to say . . . . this young lady is *the* young lady—that poor, neglected young thing we were talking about only to-day. I recognised her at once, and so would your Aunt if she'd got her spectacles on. It's no use beating about the bush, my boy. That young lady's real name is Sandra Mundy."

"Is that all?" said Edmund with a laugh of relief. "Why, I knew that all along!"

"Oh, well—ah!—then, there's no more to be said . . . . at present, Edmund. We must talk it all over quietly to-morrow—eh, my boy?—and see what can be done."

Edmund, in sharp surprise, blessed the Uncle for his intelligent sympathy. The Uncle was saying to himself:

"I must humour him, humour him—anything to gain time. And then we can look about us and see if she can't be bought off. I wouldn't stand out against anything reasonable. Poor lad—poor young



"POOR LITTLE CARLOTTA! WELL! WELL!"

fool! But I was just like it. Poor little Carlotta! Well, well!"

The curtain was rising for the last dance. It was the dance of Salome. This only, of all her dances, her lover had never seen. The idea of it repelled him —and he knew from her that it had at first repelled her also.

"But I had to do it," she had said: "everyone does it now. Your repertoire's not complete without a Salome dance with that horrible head. But I've made it something different from any of the others. For one thing, I don't take the head off the side-board as if it were the cold joint of beef. *It* just comes to me. Maskelyne and Devant fixed that up for me—and Denny works it. He's not on in that scene."

But now Templar had to see it. There was no way out of it, short of closing his eyes; and that he could not do. The curtain was up.

The Court of an Eastern king: attendants with fans and torches, and fire in braziers on tall iron pillars. On the throne Herod sick unto death: beside him a white-faced, shrinking Herodias. Courtiers, slaves. And the eyes of all fixed on Salome.

Straight drapery covered her from breast to ankle. A half transparent veil was drawn about her in folds that, across neck and face, showed opaque and heavy where the light stuff was crushed and held in folds by the hand beneath her chin. Through it the jewels on neck and arms gleamed fitfully. A golden fillet

confined her long hair, a heavy red gem glowed on her brow, and between veil and jewel her eyes shone like sombre stars.

The king, the queen, the courtiers, and slaves were immobile: they were only the living background to the moving picture of Salome's dance.

She moved slowly, with little steps and the patent consciousness that she was in the presence of the king. She danced to please him. To him, with obeisance and gestures of deferent humility, she dedicated her dance.

And, unperceived by any save those who knew what to look for, a veil of almost invisible gauze fell between her and her living background. A few more steps, a few more gestures of the veiled arms, and another curtain fell—another, as the slow steps traced circles on the marble floor, slid out from one side across the stage—now from the opposite side another—grey veils, falling, falling, gliding across, produced to the utmost the illusion of a gathering dusk, a deepening twilight through which the figures of king and queen and deferent courtiers showed dim and vague as shadows, and the lights of torch and brazier shone like marsh-lights in a marsh mist. The grey veils thickened to darkness—the lights were gone—Salome was alone in a twilight that slowly lightened to moonlight, in which she stood, arms reached out, her veil round her feet.

Then the dance began—all before had been but posturing—the wild dance of a passionate, unreal

longing that ate the flesh as it were fire. It was not joy that gave wings to her feet: it was fear—it was desire. Salome whirled like a leaf in the wind, as pricked and driven by the seven devils that had caught her unawares.

At the wildest of the dance—her arms empty, yearning, reaching out to her desire—suddenly a swift turn, and she held in her arms the Head—the head of him for whom Salome's longings were. A moment before the head was not there. Now it was. Maskelyne and Devant had been adequate.

A movement shivered through the audience as the wind shivers through a field of ripe corn.

Mad delight, achievement, the attainment of the uttermost desire—these were on arms and neck and swaying shape, adorning them like malign jewels; and on her brow her triumph poised like a crown.

Then, through the flame of the pit came an air as from a dewy garden. Passion flickered, waned, and, on a pause of doubt and misgiving, tenderness dawned—tenderness, pity, remorse, regret, a growing horror and anguish, a growing knowledge of Heaven forfeited, of hell made sure, a crescent terror and dismay unspeakable, and under it all tenderness deepening, deepening, deepening, like a flood pressing against a barrier that it must at last break down.

Then, in the moveless hush of the two thousand people who, hardly breathing, hung upon her least pace or gesture, she gathered the horrible head to her bosom as a mother gathers the head of her

sleeping child, and with a cry of love and agony that thrilled the silence as pain thrills a bared nerve, she turned on her audience the full fire of eyes where madness shone, and——

She should have sunk to the ground; the lights should have gone up and discovered Herod and his queen and his slaves, the braziers and the torches and Salome in the midst—senseless from the drug of a dream, of the head of a man still alive in the king's prison.

Instead, as the white lights intensified to show that last awful look, they lit up the face of the man in the stage box.

For Edmund had forgotten aunts and uncles and his promise to the management—his own name, his own identity, with other unimportant things, and had pressed forward to the front of the box between those forgotten relatives, and, hands on the velvet ledge, had leaned his body forward towards her who had, with the magic of her dancing, absorbed his whole being. And when she raised her eyes in that last look that ended all things, she met full in her eyes the eyes of her lover—saw the love, the terror, the bewitchment in his face.

"Ah!" she breathed, with a white smile that shook her audience with a deeper thrill than that laid on them by her eyes—"ah!"

The waxen head dropped to the ground with a dull crash, rebounded, struck the corner of Herod's throne, and split horribly in two. A long breath

indrawn to a thousand lungs sighed through the theatre.

From the dress circle came the shrill cackle of a school-girl, afraid.

"It's only wax," it said; and an answering titter bore witness that the gallery and the dress-circle were of one brotherhood.

The waxen head, split from brow to chin, lay there plain in the yellow torch-light.

The lights went up in the house.

Then everyone remembered that this was only play-acting, and clapped—clapped and shouted, to lift the roof.

Only a few perceived with comprehension that the lifeless Herodias had become alive, and was stooping over Salome, lifting her, holding her in her arms, and that Herod was coming down from his throne. To most it was just part of the play.

Then the curtain came down. And the audience yelled for their darling—yelled, and yelled again.

But when the stiff curtain swerved aside and the applause doubled itself, it was not Salome who stood there as of old, drooping and sweet, with hands too tired to hold the flowers they threw her, and with lips nearly, but not quite, too tired to smile.

It was the management, almost too definitely in evening dress.

It craved the indulgence of the audience. This tribute of their admiration would delight Madame Sylvia when it was able to report it. But it must

ask them to excuse her from reappearing to receive their kind approval.

"Our beautiful Sylvia," it said, "is overcome by her exertions. She has surpassed herself to-night. And she pays the penalty. She is quite knocked up," it added, with an inspiration of colloquial appeal. "I'm sure you'll understand and not expect her to appear. It's really only because she was so splendid to-night. She *was* good—wasn't she?" it added, following the star of colloquial inspiration. It paused, bowed, and withdrew, to a thunder of sympathetic noise.

"Well!" said the Aunt, "I never saw anything like it—never! The young woman's quite out of her mind, I should think. Don't you, Henry? Don't you, Edmund?"

"Edmund's gone," said her husband; "he asked me to say good-night for him. He suddenly remembered that he'd asked a man to look in about eleven. And it's long past that. Come along, my dear; you must be tired out."

Men are loyal to each other, and respond to the appeal of sex-loyalty even when they are uncles.

Templar was only one of a crowd—the crowd was inquiring at the stage door,—insisting, among a hundred others, on knowing how she was, whether she was better, what was the matter with her, whether a doctor had been sent for, what he said, whether they could fetch anything, do anything——

The police had to move them on, at last. Sympathetic admiration or drunken pugnacity—neither can be tolerated in its fuller manifestation on a London pavement.

Templar had detached himself from the crowd, and taken up a place on the other side of the road. Therefore he was not moved on, and when her motor drew up he was there.

When she came out, hideously muffled, on the arm of the management itself, and followed by quite half a dozen sympathisers, he was lighting a cigarette close by the other door of her motor.

"No, I'm perfectly all right; I don't want seeing home—I'm as well as well. No, thank you—I'll see after the new head myself. Or Mr Denis will. You see, I know exactly what I want. Oh, dear Mr Management, *please* don't bother! I've got everything and everyone I want at home. Thank you; yes—yes—quite comfortable—everything I want, thank you. Yes—of *course* I shall be all right next week. Oh, do please tell him to drive on! Yes, of course he knows where to go. Say *home*. Thank you all so much. Good night!"

In the next street a block of carriages stopped the motor.

"Sandra!" said a voice at the window. "Sandra, darling!"

The motor was already moving.

"Get in," she whispered. "Quick. quick—oh, be careful!"

He had opened the door, entered the motor, and shut its door gently.

"My own—my treasure!" he breathed with other follies as he sank to the seat beside her, and on the instant found her arms round his neck. "Don't agitate yourself. You'll be ill again. It's all right. Oh, my love!"

The motor swirled round two corners into an empty street.

"Pardon, madam," said the voice of the chauffeur, and the car slackened to a snail's pace to give his voice leave to penetrate the scented darkness of the brougham. The two sprang apart. "Pardon; but is it all right?"

"Oh, yes," said Sandra in the scented darkness, "Oh, yes, it's all right. Drive on, please. Drive home. Yes, the usual way."

"It's all right," Templar said, and took his world into his arms, "it's all right. Oh, my dear!" He strove for words, but silence served best, and among her disguising and disfiguring shawls and wraps they clung to each other as people cling who have escaped shipwreck, and come to land on some wonderful island of tropic green and sands iridescent, where soft streams flow and the thicket is ablaze with blossoms, and the air alight with smooth, coloured birds.

The chauffeur always made a four-mile drive of the five minutes that lay between the Hilarity and home.

To-night this round included Hampstead and Haverstock Hill. He need not have troubled. When he drew up at last in Portland Place and asked, "Where would the gentleman like to be set down?" he got for answer:

"He is coming home with me. Yes, the usual way—I told you that before."

The motor devoured a street and half a street, and glided into its garage.

"Put out the lights," said Sylvia through the speaking-tube, "and be careful that there's no one about. Yes, I know you always are careful; but be extra careful to-night, please, Forrester."

"Yes, madam," said Forrester—got down and put out the lamps.

"Now," said Sandra, holding her lover's hands in the dark, "don't say 'oh' to anything. It's all right!"

CHAPTER XI

THE LOVE NIGHT

It was quite dark in the brougham. Sylvia released her lover's hands and reached down to the floor of the carriage. Templar heard a click, and suddenly experienced the descending-lift sensation.

"It's all right, I tell you," said Sylvia, her hands on his arms, "we're just going down."

They were. Very slowly and gently, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, the whole of the inside of the motor began to sink through the floor.

It was an ingenious arrangement, as Templar perceived later. Once in the garage, the pressure of a spring released the catch of a trap door, which fell down at the side of what appeared to be a motor pit. Then the floor of this pit rose to meet the under side of the brougham. Another lever controlled and removed two steel rods which supported the carriage in place, and a third lever, worked from within the brougham, started the little lift on its way. They went down into darkness, and stopped with a jerk.

"Open the door," said Sylvia; "or shall I? Can you feel where the handle is? Now get out."

He got out, on to a smooth floor, and her hands came fluttering to him through the dark. They stood together outside the motor brougham.

"Stand well back," she said, and something moved in the darkness. It was the brougham returning to its natural place in the garage above. They heard it come into position with a soft click.

"Now," she said, "it's all safe, and we can turn on the light. Let me."

Her touch on the electric switch brought the light round them. He looked up at the gleam of the steel shaft that stood up from floor to ceiling of the narrow passage in which he found himself.

"How beautifully simple!" he said. "So that was how you vanished the night that I saw you home? That's a confession, Sandra—I tried to find out where you lived long before I met you on the river."

"Yes," she said; "Forrester told me. I was horribly frightened at the time. Come, let's get out of this place. It always seems to me like a crypt. I believe it's haunted."

It was rather like a crypt; its roof, except for the square space in which the lift worked, was of old, dark brick with grey-green stone groining and pillars.

"What *is* it?" he asked, as they went. Both experienced the need to assure themselves that the solid earth still went round in the orthodox way, the need which comes to us all after great crises of life—which makes us shrink at first from vital explanations and enlightenments and talk about the weather or

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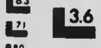

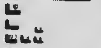
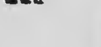

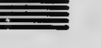
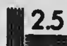
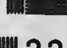
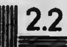

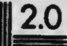

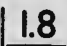
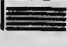
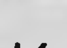
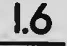

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the Government—anything trivial rather than about that which has thrilled our souls to the very centres of life.

"It's an underground passage."

"Well, yes," said he, and they laughed.

"There used to be a monastery here—it's part of it. The old Duke of Pentland found it when he made our house. He was always fond of underground, you know—and he kept it. He made our house too—mind your head."

They passed through a low arch into a kitchen, a quite ordinary kitchen; then up a flight of stairs and into the room of middle-Victorian souvenirs, she turning up the lights as she went.

"There!" she said, dropping her wraps and looking at him; "now we're at home—this is where I live. It's the House with no Address."

"I see," he said. And did, in a measure.

"It's a wonderful place, isn't it? I'll show you all over it."

"Presently," he said; "you ought to rest now. Can't I ring for some wine or something?"

"There's some in the cabinet," she said, and laughed. "I hope this isn't a dream."

"It's very like one," he said, and got the wine. Tall Venice glasses were beside it in the cabinet, and food on fine china covered with fine damask.

"We'll have supper presently," she said, taking the glass from his hand. "You too—we'll drink each other's healths."

But he was, after all, too conventional a lover to do otherwise than drink from her glass, ostentatiously turning it so that his lips should rest where hers had been.

Then they stood an instant looking at each other.

"How quiet it is here!" he said.

"Yes," said she.

Then there was silence again.

"Come," he said briskly, "you must sit down and rest; and let me sit beside you and hold your hand and look at you and get used to the dream. Tell me things. Tell me all about this wonderful house, and how you found it."

She too still wanted the relief of words that did not touch the truth that lay between them—the truth that had divided and did now unite.

"It was Uncle Mosenthal," she said, and told him of their coming to town.

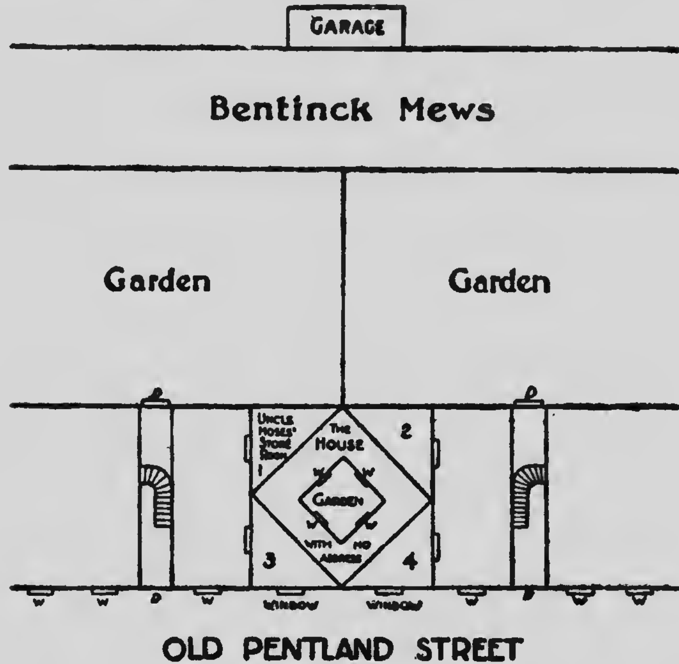
"His grandfather bought the house a long time ago. He owns the whole of this block. It was that old Duke of Pentland who built ours. He sort of dug out the insides of two of these houses, and made our house in the middle—diamond shape, you know—so that nothing shows from the outside. All the windows open into the garden in the middle."

"I don't understand in the least," he said.

"It *is* difficult. I'll draw it for you."

She reached for the papier-mâché blotting-book,

and, his chin on her shoulder as he looked on, drew something like this :—



"I see. But surely people must know of this place —the men who mend the roofs and put up telephone wires . . . ?"

"The telephone men don't notice the shapes of roofs, I suppose; and he has all the repairs done by workmen from his place in the country—brings them up by motor and takes them back every night —the gardener too—and the woman who does our housework. She's deaf and dumb and very stupid, but she works all right. Oh, it's a wonderful scheme! No one but Uncle Mosenthal could have invented it."

"He must be a wonderful man."

"He is. He is frightfully nice, and he's in all sorts of things. He half owns the theatre—and all sorts of companies and things. He calls himself a house-agent. . . . But I know the King has sent for him—for some secret reason or other,—and he had to start for Germany last night. He's a wonderful person—and kind! The world's full of people he's been kind to. That deaf and dumb woman, he saved her life in a fire—his own self."

"And your chauffeur—how did you square him?"

"Oh, he was one of the village boys I used to know at home, and he went into a motor works; and when Uncle Moses had invented the lift and motor scheme, I thought of him. He made the motor and he put in the electric light. He is much too fond of me to give away our secret. . . ."

"But I don't understand how it is that a full account of all this isn't in the illustrated papers every week. The hydraulic power people *must* be interested in that lift."

"It isn't the hydraulic: it's the American elevator. There's a tank on the roof of the house the garage is under, and——"

"I see."

"In the wicked Lord Pentland's time there was just a trap door under the stable and a ladder down. They kept straw there to hide the trap door. It has been such fun. And I always feel so safe here. You see, Uncle Moses is next door. I've only got

to press that button if anything went wrong; he'd be here in half a minute."

"But he's in Germany . . . ?"

"Ah! but when he's at home."

"The rooms in the houses next door must be a funny shape."

"Oh, he has the cornery bits boarded off . . . . calls them store-rooms. That makes it look all right, and of course all the store-rooms have windows on the street. And—oh!"

He had caught her in his arms—almost roughly.

"Why are we wasting our time like this?" he said, holding her. "You could have told me all this when the others were here. Where are they? When will they come in?"

"It's all right," she said soothingly; "they're at The Wood House. Uncle Moses sends his motor down with us sometimes after the performance. At first I thought I'd give up The Wood House altogether—and then I couldn't bear to, after all. But I haven't cared to go since . . . . But it's good for them, and I insist on their going."

"When will they get back?"

"Oh—in two or three days."

"Do you mean," he said slowly, "that there's no one else in this house but you . . . . but *us*? That there won't be?"

"No," she said, "not anyone else. It's home, dear —only you and me."

Through her thin bodice he could feel the sweet

warmth of her body. Her breast heaved quietly against his breast. She put up her arms to his neck and drew his lips to hers. They stood so till it seemed to him that the beating of his heart was so loud that she must hear it even through the self-righteous tick of the carriage-clock on the mantel-piece.

They were alone—they were alone in that quiet house, safe shut in—no one else anywhere, in any of the rooms. They were betrothed lovers; in a few days—to-morrow, if he chose—they would be man and wife. And her arms were round his neck, their faces touched, and against his breast her breast rose and fell.

"Sandra!" he said hoarsely, "Sandra! Sandra!"

"My love!" she answered. "Oh, my love! I have prayed God to give you back to me—and now He has. I didn't think He would. I didn't really believe in prayer. Oh! my love—I believe in it now!"

He kissed her lips, her forehead, undid the clasp of her arms about his neck, and kissed her hands.

"Dear, dear, dear one!" he said, "this is our magic palace! We aren't man and woman: you're an enchanted princess, and I'm your slave."

"You're my prince," she said, and drew up his hands to lie under her chin.

Templar took some credit to himself for being able to say, in quite a natural and hearty manner:

"Princess, your prince is at death's-door. He has had nothing to eat since breakfast."

You know the pretty moan of pity for your sufferings, remorse for her neglected hostess-duties, resolu-

tion to ease your pangs instantly, at whatever cost to herself or the world, with which the woman who loves you receives your announcement that you are hungry? If you do not know it, you have never been whole-heartedly loved by a woman.

She flew to a drawer for napery, flew to the cabinet for food.

"There—the spoons and things are in that big inlaid box on the sofa-table. Yes, the bread here. There are some chocolates over there—in that silver box—yes. Let's have the lily in the middle of the table. Isn't it wonderful for us to have a table with a lily in the middle of it? We've always eaten out-of-doors before, sitting with our feet in wet ditches, like tramps!"

The emotion that had shaken him to the soul had just touched hers with the tips of light fingers, almost unfelt, wholly unrealised. And it was that touch that changed her mood from desperate clinging tenderness to a wild, childlike gaiety.

"The big armchair for you—that's where the master of the house sits. The little Eugénie one for me, so that I can be a humble mouse and catch all the crumbs. Very well—one glass *is* enough. What a good thing we haven't got a butler! He wouldn't approve. When we engage our butler we'll make it a condition that he shall always let us drink out of the same glass."

The worst of saying you are hungry when you are not—or of telling any other lie, for that matter—is that you have to live up to it. Sandra heaped chicken on his plate—like all women, Sandra adored chicken,—

and it was not the chicken's fault if it tasted to him like sawdust. But there was a satisfaction in waiting on her; and the gentle intimacy of the meal eaten together helped him in more ways than one.

They cleared the table, and the carriage clock announced with some asperity that it was one o'clock.

"Ought I to go?" he made himself say.

She opened reproachful eyes.

"Oh, no," she said, "unless you're frightfully tired. Do you want to go?"

His eyes answered her.

"Then don't. Indeed, you mustn't go. There are so many things to say."

She curled herself in the corner of the sofa, and held out a hand to him. He took it, and leaned back in the sofa's other corner, their locked hands at long arm's-length between them.

"You saw it in the papers?" he said.

"No—it was a letter. I'll show it to you."

She drew it, warm, from her bosom.

"How could you carry it *there*?" he said, without meaning to.

"It was the only safe place," she said simply. "And it's not from *him*, you know. It's from a woman."

Written on cheap, dull, black-edged paper, the letter said:

"13 ANDOVER TERRACE,
STOKE NEWINGTON.

"MADAM,—I regret to inform you of the death of Mr Saccage, who has lodged with me for some years.

He was taken ill about ten days ago—double pneumonia,—and from the first the doctor said 'No hope.' He suffered a great deal, but mostly in his mind. When delirious he talked constantly of you, and seemed a prey to regret for the way he had treated you. He exacted a promise from me to write and tell you he died repenting his sins and begging your forgiveness. Again and again he said: 'And I hope she will marry at once—why should she delay an hour? I have stood in her way too long.' Of course it is none of my business, but he said over and over he would not lie quiet in his grave till you were happy and married to the gentleman of your choice. Excuse me mixing myself up in your affairs, but it is not my choice, and I am sure his words when unconscious would have touched any heart. He desired me to send you a packet of letters, which I will send registered as soon as I can find them. Your photo is to be buried on his heart. He said he always loved you, though treating you so harsh on account of his jealousy and you being so cold to him. I do not pretend to understand what it is all about, but no doubt you will know.—Yours obediently, MARTHA CLITHEROE."

They read it together, their hands still locked on the sofa between them.

"I must be rather horrid," she said, leaning across to rub her cheek against his shoulder, "because when I read it I couldn't feel a bit sorry for him. I do now. Perhaps he really was fond of me."

"I daresay he was," said Templar grimly, rose, and put the letter on the table. Then he sat down again in his corner. Sandra had already returned to hers.

"I suppose it's almost as bad as murder to wish that somebody was dead. Do you know, I've prayed he might die. That night I went home and prayed . . . . and now he's dead. . . . It isn't really wicked, is it? Not really. You don't know how horrible he was that night."

She had drawn her hand from his, and was twisting it with its fellow on her knee.

"What night?" he asked, remote in his corner.

"The night after—after I'd lost you. Oh! I forgot—you don't know. We haven't told each other anything, really. I don't want to talk about it."

"Do you mean you've seen him again? Spoken to him? Allowed him to speak to you?" His face had changed—darkened; his features seemed thickened and swollen.

"I—I couldn't help it. He would have come to the house and made a row. It was very late that night. There was a letter from him. I went out and met him. . . ."

"You went out and met that man? Alone?"

"I took my little revolver—I'd gone to bed, after I came home from seeing you. I was tired, ill . . . . I don't know. And I told the others to go to bed and leave some supper for me. And it was awfully late when I went down to get it. Wasn't it horrid of me

to be hungry? But I was. And there was his letter —I *had* to go out and meet him!"

"Were you dressed?"

"Of *course* I was dressed. Why are you like this? What is it?"

"I hate to think of your being alone with that man. Go on."

"I told him to stand where he was, and if he came near me I'd shoot him. Once he moved, and I nearly did. And I wished I could—and nobody know it. I don't wonder you hate me. I am horrible. And then I prayed he might die."

"Go on."

"That's all."

"You haven't told me what he wanted—what he said."

"Oh—horrible things. I can't tell you."

"You shall tell me." He caught her wrists and held them.

"Don't," she said; "you frighten me."

"Tell me, then," he repeated, and his grasp of her wrists hurt.

"About our being married—him and me . . . . and wanting . . . ."

"Did he want you to go and live with him?"

"I don't know. No. He . . . . don't make me tell you," she said.

"Go on," he said inexorably.

"He said if I married you he'd not interfere if I paid him."

"Is that all?"

"Yes." Pause. "Nearly all."

"Go on."

"Or that if you didn't care about marrying me we could live together without."

"Damn!" said he.

"Why did you make me tell you?" she said. "Yes, I'll tell you everything. You're hurting me—let go."

"Go on."

"And he threatened me, and said things about actresses and dancers being all horrid about love and things. That was when I wanted to shoot him. Only, they'd have found his body, and known. Yes—now you hate me. It serves me right for speaking the truth."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him to do what he chose, and that I wasn't afraid of him. But I was."

"Did he touch you?"

"I should have killed him if he had."

"And then?"

"Then I came home; and then I worked as hard as I could—and prayed. And then he *was* dead. He's dead now. And yet you go on like this. And now you don't love me any more. I wish I was dead. I wish I'd never seen you."

"It's a good thing for him *he's* dead," said Templar savagely. "If I'd been there when he dared to speak to you like that, he wouldn't have had much chance of speaking like it again."

"Don't let's think of him any more," she said. "Don't. I can't bear it. Don't look like that. You frighten me. Don't. I can't bear it. I can't bear any more. I've borne so much! You don't really love me. You don't know what I've done and suffered for you. You never will know. Ah!——"

She sprang up wildly. And he, as wildly, caught her in his arms.

"Don't I love you?—don't I? Don't you understand that I can't bear to think of his coming within a yard of you? Don't you know what jealousy means? Don't you know it drives men mad? How would you like me to meet another woman alone at night, in a shrubbery—a woman I was married to?"

"I should know you didn't want to. *I* should trust *you*," she said.

"You don't know how I love you," he said: "it's like a fire in my heart to think of him. Oh! I tell you, it's a good thing for him that he's dead."

"Don't," she said faintly—"oh, don't! I *have* been brave. I can't be brave any more. Forget him. Promise me you'll never talk of him again to me. I shall go mad if you do. I know I shall. Promise."

"I'll promise anything you like," he cried, and his anger transfused itself into passion. "You're mine, mine, mine! Are you afraid of me now? Are you?"

"No," she breathed in a caress.

"You ought to be," he said, and let her go. She

did not understand him. He walked to the window and stood looking out on the dark pit, at the bottom of which was, she had told him, the garden.

She followed, and laid her head against his arm.

"Ah, don't!" she said. "We've been so miserable! Can't we be happy now that we've got each other?"

"I ought to go," he said dully.

"No!" she said, "no. How can I ever let you go again?" She turned her face to his, and her eyes implored.

"There!" he said hastily, and kissed her, answering her appeal.

"It's not all right? You're still angry?"

"No—no—I'm not angry; I'm—I'm tired."

"Lie down," she said; "lie down on the sofa and go to sleep. I'll sit and hold your hand. *I'm* not tired."

"We'll sit down," he said, "and talk of pleasant things."

"Two," said the carriage clock, more in sorrow than in anger.

They took, as before, the opposite ends of the sofa. But in five minutes his arm was round her neck, and she was smiling at him with lovely, innocent eyes—alluring, intolerable. He turned her face so that he could not see it.

"Why," she said, resisting, "how pale you are—and how bright your eyes are!"

"The better to see you with," he quoted.

"What is it—what is it? Aren't you happy?"

"Happy?" he echoed. "There—let's be quiet and rest."

Her arm went round his neck, and she rested there. And so they sat, in a silence electric with his passion. In her only a faint, not-understood longing troubled the joy of that silence—the longing to do everything for him, to be everything to him, to give him everything he wanted, to make him happy. This longing, in the breast of a woman who loves, is as tinder to the spark of man's desire, and thus are kindled the great fires that burn down cities and lay waste happy fields.

And so they sat—he thrilled with the fierceness of the fight within him, and she clinging, yielding, and yet ignorant that there was any fight in him, any demand on her. The natural sweet tenderness of her embrace touched, presently, the springs of tenderness in him: his arm clasped her less closely, more kindly; and when at last she fell asleep in his arms, he held her lightly, securely, fondly, cherishing her in her slumber as one holds and cherishes a sleeping child. Towards morning he too slept.

There are for all of us some moments that stand out for ever, pure gold against the dull dust-colour of life. For him the moment of all such moments was that in which he woke to the chatter of the sparrows in the grey of the London dawn, and found her in his arms.

He would not move, even to lay his lips to her face, lest he should awaken her; he sat still as sleep, while the light brightened and deepened in the strange room, repainting the colours of curtain and carpet that dawn had made ash-coloured, and at last washing away with a flood of pure light the last shadows in the corners.

"Six," said the carriage clock cheerfully, as one who bears no malice. And she smiled and woke, and smiled again.

That they could not pass the day together was a grief that they shared, as they shared their breakfast—as they meant, from now onward, to share all things.

He had promised his Uncle to go round quite early. It was not an attractive prospect, but it had to be faced.

"You'll send a wire for me to Denny at The Wood House, won't *you*? He must come up at once and get me that new head modelled."

It was delightfully domestic—to be there alone with her, to have her pour the tea and charge him with commissions. This was how it was always to be.

"I shall go down to The Wood House to-morrow—yes, I can get the charwoman or someone to stay here if you really think I oughtn't to be alone. But you'll come and see me to-night? I'll arrange with Forrester. . . ."

"No," he said, "I can't do that. But I'll come to

The Wood House to-morrow—no, not to-morrow: hang it! I can't—Sunday, if I may. I'll come down on Sunday afternoon."

She found his hat, in the corner where he had thrown it, fetched him a clothes-brush. He carried the tea-tray for her into the kitchen; folded the table-cloth and put it away.

It was to be always like this.

"Forrester comes at eight," she said. "Come and see the garden."

It was a queer, dark garden, in whose black mould ivy grew, and ferns, and spiky irises. There was a fountain in the middle, with a flagged pathway round it—bay trees in tubs, pink geraniums in stone vases.

"But they soon die," she said. "We have to keep getting fresh ones. I expect there's a Lorenzo head in each of the pots, really, and that kills the flowers. They look just like it, don't they?"

In the passage under the lift she whistled through a speaking-tube to Forrester above, giving him his orders.

"The li[illegible]oming now," she said. "Good-bye! Good-bye!—till Sunday."

There was a respectfully resentful something in Forrester's manner as he adjusted the steel bars of the motor brougham, which forced Templar to say quite without meaning to:

"Your mistress and I are engaged to be married." He found it comforting to add: "She wishes to see

you as soon as possible to arrange for some woman to come and sleep in the house to-night. It is not right that she should be alone here."

"No, sir," said Forrester, "it isn't."

CHAPTER XII

MISS STEINHART SHOPS

THE discomfort which Templar felt in the knowledge that his Uncle knew of his engagement, was considerably alleviated by the knowledge that his Aunt didn't. To this protection he clung, never leaving, all day, the safe anchorage of her apron-strings. He craftily ignored all his Uncle's ingenuously subtle plans for the securing of a *tête-à-tête*. The deft dodging involved changed what might have been a severe duty into an enjoyable game of skill, in which he came off the winner. When he saw them off at Waterloo on Saturday night he came near to pitying the Uncle: so plainly had the itching of an exacerbated curiosity written itself on the old man's features. But Templar was determined that until he could say of Sylvia "She is my wife," he would say nothing.

The train was assuring itself with shrieks and puffings that it really did mean to start presently; the guard was ominous with flags. Another moment, and he would be free. It was only six. He might get down to The Wood House to-night even. His

mind strayed to half-digested extracts of the South-Eastern time-table.

The Aunt recalled it.

"Oh! by the way," she said, "I promised Lady Jones you'd go there to dinner to-morrow."

"I can't," he said. "I'm engaged."

"But you told me you were free."

"That was when I thought you would be here on Sunday," he said, with the smile that was one of the things his Aunt loved him for.

"But she'll expect you. She'll be very much hurt. I promised you'd go."

"Better go," said the Uncle, malicious with baffled inquisitiveness. "You mustn't drop all your old friends. You'll want some nice people for your wife to know some day."

"I can't," said Templar again; "I'm awfully sorry."

"Then we must," said the Aunt firmly. "Henry, stop the train. She'll never forgive me. She's got a party. She asked us. We'll go, and try to apologise for you—though I must say—— Henry, take the umbrellas. Where's my bag?"

"Don't, Auntie," said Templar resignedly. "I'll go." He looked anxiously at the flag, its waving imminent.

The thing was to get them started. If they didn't go now they would stay till Monday. Half a day: though, how he grudged it! Never mind: he was to spend his life with her.

"Good-bye, Auntie dear," he said, and the guard really did, at last, do with his flag what he might just as well have done five minutes before. The train glided away. And Templar was left free indeed of Uncle and Aunt, but chained to Lady Jones's dinner-party.

Sylvia too was chained, for Uncle Moses did not come that morning—would perhaps come to-morrow. She snubbed Forrester's suggestion of a woman to sleep in the house. She was all right; she liked to be alone.

"Yes, madam," said Forrester.

Denny came up at mid-day to see about the new wax head, ordered it at Clarkson's, and lunched with Sandra. He had never known her so gay. While she was making the omelettes for lunch, which she did much better than Agar, he picked up a letter from a rose-wood sofa-table, and read it—a black-edged letter. Then he understood her gaiety. After luncheon she practised her dancing, and he played to her. It was the last rehearsal before Denny's benefit, at which his own music was to be played.

"I like this better than the theatre," he said in the pause after a dance: "this room—the looking-glasses. Sandra, there are hundreds of you here—look!—and hundreds of me. I like that."

"Why?" she idly asked from the green carpet where she rested.

"It's silly," he said, "but I know that one of you—the one farthest away of all—the one we can

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just see — is perfectly contented because she is with me."

"Which one of you?" she asked, and smiled at him.

"This one," he said quietly, and struck himself on the breast—"this one—the one that loves you best, Sandra—best of them all. Though they all love you, of course," he added, on a vague, troubled note—"all of them: even the farthest—the one that we just can't see."

"Dear Denny," she said, and "Dear Denny" again. Then she jumped up.

"Play something new," she said—"something of your own—something very beautiful indeed. I want to invent a new dance—a happy love-dance. I never tried that."

"No—you've never tried that," he said, and lifted the fiddle to his chin.

The plain white folds of the dress in which she always practised her dancing lent themselves to the innocent, joyous beauty of the gestures she sketched while he attuned the strings; but as soon as he drew the bow across them in a wild, sweet, entreating air, her gestures changed, drooped, and saddened.

"That won't do," she said. "It's beautiful, but it's too sad. That's hopeless love, Denny. I want love that's happy—the kind of love that turns everything rainbow coloured."

He swept his hand hastily across the strings. "Yes," he said, "I know." And played again.

"Ah! that's better," she said, as the strong, full notes quivered fuller and stronger.

"But I don't know this music," she said. "I want to practise the dance of worship."

"Yes," said Denny, and the violin broke into silence. "Yes, that was the song of worship. Only, I'd got it in the minor. You see, it's all the same thing. And so is the first one I played. All that's the bits of my Love Symphony that I've not put into it. The best part, I shouldn't wonder."

"I won't dance any more to-day," she said, and her face was shadowed. "You play better than anyone else I know; but sometimes your playing is dreadful. That first thing—it had the note of doom in it, like Tristan——"

"I know," said he; "that note sounds in all love symphonies. But the real note of doom is in my last movement, the one you're to dance the Salome to."

"I hope it'll go all right," she said; "it isn't my idea of the Salome music. It's too triumphant, too alive. The head's dead, you know."

"Yes," he said, "I know. But the triumph's alive. That's just it."

"You're sure they'll have the head ready by Monday?" she asked, to bring him back to lighter things of this world.

"Quite sure—they promised. Are you going to be married, princess?"

The question came sharp as a pistol-shot.

"Yes," she said. "Wish me joy, dear." And she

came behind the low seat where he sat. "Kiss me, dear Denny. This is the most beautiful day of my life. Kiss me and wish me joy."

"Not like this," he said, turned in his chair and sank on one knee, the poor helpless foot dragging awkwardly behind him, and looked up at her, folding his hands as worshippers fold theirs.

"Now," he said. "Now. Kiss me, princess, if you will."

And she bent over him, took the golden head in her arms, and kissed him on the forehead and on the lips.

Next day she went down to The Wood House. The house looked as it had looked while she was meeting him on the river, when the days were days of magic, and it, at nights, the silent house of joy. Nothing had happened: only a china plate had been broken and the key of the ice-safe mislaid. But there was plenty of china plates, and the weather had grown suddenly chill, so that iced food was no longer a necessity of life.

On Sunday morning she went about the garden cutting armfuls of flowers—stocks and dahlias, little red fuchsias from the tall bushes by the door, Japanese anemones, tea-roses, and tight handfuls of sweet-peas. She must make the house beautiful for him. Denny was in one of his states and could not help her. So she was busy.

By two o'clock the house was a flowery bower, and she herself in a pinky white gown with much lace,

that made her look like a rose that has tried to turn into a carnation. Afternoon, he had said. Well, one o'clock was after noon. By two o'clock she was waiting at the window. By three she was standing at the gate. Four o'clock saw her in the meadow down by the road. And by eleven o'clock at night he had not come.

By twelve he trod, noiselessly, the garden path, but by that time the Dragon had persuaded her to go to bed. He could not be coming. There was no train that could get in so late. The house looked dark and unwelcoming. He could not rouse them at that hour, and worry them with his excuses and the explanation of his lateness.

He turned away, his footsteps noiseless on the grass. A blot of darkness lay to the left. That, he supposed, was the shrubbery in which she had met that brute. His soul flamed with anger at the thought of her, alone—unprotected save by her brave spirit, at bay, and her brave hand on the trigger.

"If I had been here," he told himself, "and had had that pistol, I should have shot him like a dog."

He took the path that led through the shrubbery. A late moon was rising between the old cedars on the lawn. Its beams shone in white lines through the stems of the shrubs. The shrubbery smelt of autumn and decay.

Sandra slept brokenly, and awoke with dry hands, tired eyes, and the sense of something wrong. Yes,

he had not come—something had happened. Ah! what could have happened to him?

Her heart leapt and then seemed to stop, and she felt as though she had not had anything to eat for a very long time. She felt a little sick. I think this is what authors mean when they say "her heart sank."

You know the infinite desolating variations that can be played on the simple theme, "What can have happened to him?" Sandra went through them all *da capo*, and then all through them again, as she bathed and dressed.

There was a letter, the letter written by Templar after the chain had been riveted on him by his Aunt at Waterloo. It had been meant to reach her on Sunday morning. You cannot expect a man who has been out of England for eight years to remember all about country posts. It was a very delightful letter, and told her that though he might be late he would certainly come. It cheered her for a little, till she remembered that it had no bearing whatever on The Theme, since, late or early, he had not come. She caught the first train to London. The Wood House was offensively full of flowers, and she was glad to be out of it.

"No, Aunt Dusa, dear," she said; "you must stay here. He may come this morning. I've had a letter saying that he would take a taxi and ride down that way if he couldn't catch the train. It may have broken down somewhere, and then he'll come on later.

If he does, give him Forrester's address, and this note, look. I'll put it on the mantelpiece. I've told him to go to Forrester, and he'll bring him to me. I've got lots of shopping to do. He says we are to be married this week, but I say next. Denny can come up by the four nineteen."

She was glad that she had always insisted on managing everything, when there was no reason why she should impose her will on others. Now that there was a reason, the settled habit was useful. It is a good thing to get into the way of ordering people about on all occasions, and refusing explanations. It makes them easy to deal with, and prevents their asking "Why?" when why is awkward or tiresome.

In the train a new theme mingled with the other. Would there be a letter waiting for her at the House without an Address? Or would, perhaps, he himself . . .? He knew that Forrester came at eight. It would be easy to leave a letter, or to get Forrester to let him in. No, of course Forrester wouldn't do that.

She would hear if he had been, when Forrester met her at Charing Cross. As they neared the station she put on a bunchy, disfiguring tussore cloak, and let down her thick-sprigged veil.

But Forrester was not there. She decided that an omnibus was safer than a cab for a princess travelling incognita, and thus reached Oxford Circus. She went in through Uncle Mosenthal's house; there was a way, but it was dangerous to use it often.

There was no letter from him.

But hope was so strong in her, that when she entered her sitting-room it would not have surprised her to see her lover standing there: he might have worked the lift himself. He was an engineer—he could easily have found out how to do things. He could have found some way of raising the trap-door and making it fast again. It was possible. And what was the use of *making* difficulties?

She had to open every door and look in every room before she could be sure that he was not there waiting for her. But the rooms were all empty, and very orderly and quiet. Agar had done her work early and gone. There was nothing to show that he had ever been there—nothing to remind her of that night of wonder when she had slept in his arms, the morning of magic when she had awakened to find herself there.

The "What can have happened to him" theme was resumed by the full orchestra of fears and hopes, terror and reason. She walked in and out of the rooms, took things up and put them down again—and all to the thunder of that insistent orchestra. It was not the first time by many that she had been alone in the house with no address. Solitude was to her, as to most persons of genius, at times a necessity. The first time she insisted on being left alone in that strange house, Aunt Dusa's sense of propriety had driven her to an appeal to Mr Mosenthal. He had supported Sylvia.

"Ah! young girls! they love to be alone — it is natural—to dream, to regret the pasts they have not had, to taste the beautiful sadness of the young-time, and to be very sorry for themselves. And nowhere can she so safely alone be as here, with Uncle Moses in his houses all around her. Go where you are sent, my good Dusa, and leave the child to her joyous melancholy. She is princess here; do not distract her from her art by questioning her royal commands."

So Uncle Moses, millionaire and incurable romanticist.

She was used to the empty house, and loved the sense of space and freedom conveyed by its inviolable solitude. But to-day she felt shut in—immured. The house that had been the love-nest was now cold and a prison.

She walked up and down, waiting, waiting.

Suddenly she stopped, and through the bewildering orchestra the chord of common-sense made itself heard.

What was she waiting for? She knew perfectly well that he couldn't come here. Forrester was gone, and besides . . . . What could have happened to him? Why—nothing! Some silly business bother. But yesterday had been Sunday, when there is no business. Well, the Uncle might have come back to town and wanted him. A thousand things might have happened —quite ordinary, harmless things, nothing to worry about or be afraid of. Well, but why hadn't he

written? No doubt he had. But letters posted in London aren't delivered in the country till the second post. Why hadn't she waited for the second post? She would go out and telegraph to Denny to bring up the letter if there was one. Of course there would be one.

Even the genius of a Mosenthal cannot keep a young woman hidden in London without allowing her to shop. The fertile, child-like imagination that had secured his success in business of all sorts, had found it simple to arrange a way. Sandra must have a disguise. Aunt Dusa too. Aunt Dusa's consisted of clothes smarter than her real self was ever expressed in—a "soupçon" of shocking pink and a scandalous red wig. Sandra in disguise—a disguise of her own designing—was a white-haired lady in an old-fashioned hat and veil, and a mantle of elegant shabbiness.

She became the white-haired lady, and went out through a door expressly contrived to lead her, through a short passage, to the first floor of Uncle Mosenthal's house, there to emerge boldly on to the landing by a door on which the name of Miss Gertrude Steinhart, Palmist, shone in white letters. She sent off her telegram, and then, with a self-control that was its own reward, shopped.

If nothing had happened—and of course nothing had,—then Sandra Mundy was to be married almost at once; and Sandra Mundy's wardrobe would never do for Sandra Templar. So Miss Gertrude Steinhart shopped; and the young women who served her

thought her wonderfully sympathetic with the bride who was to wear all these lovely things. The old lady seemed to know exactly the tastes of "someone who was going to be married," and was as exacting for her, they thought, as any bride could be for herself.

By the time Miss Steinhart had spent a hundred pounds or so, and ordered the fluffy, rustling prettinesses to be sent home to her address, Sandra was ready to believe what she had so earnestly told herself: that everything really was all right—that she should see him at the theatre to-night—that he would perhaps come home with her as he had done that other time.

So she let herself in by Miss Steinhart's door, humming the allegro of Denny's symphony. And a letter lay on Miss Steinhart's table. "Ah!" she said, without time for the wonder as to how it had come there, "he *has* written." She caught up the letter and tore it open. It was not from him. It was from Forrester.

"How exactly like life!" she said, as she turned the page. A respectful note detailed a broken collarbone, achieved during a boxing bout at the gymnasium. She had often wondered how Forrester passed his spare time. Now she knew.

You may be as distracted as you choose because your lover has failed to keep his appointment. But business is business, and Sylvia's business was to insist on the public's minding its own. Of course she could get into her house in the Steinhart disguise that served her quite efficiently in her London ex-

cursions, but it was not easy to assume that disguise in the theatre. She had the disguise there, in duplicate and a tin deed-box with Richard Mundy on it, that had held the legal papers of the grandfather's unfortunate financial experiences. One never knew what might happen, and Uncle Moses had thought it safe to have it—in case of accidents.

"Never in this so complicated life, my maiden," he had declared, "do we of any day the forthbringing know. Be forearmed. The most unlikely dangers the most probable certainly are."

But it is one thing to have a disguise ready; another to assume it. Her dresser, and—oh! it would never do! She would be giving away the secret of an invaluable alias to the dresser—to a whole little world of interested recipients. Besides, there were the presents and the flowers. Miss Steinhart couldn't carry those off—nor could Sylvia leave them behind.

It was plain that she must have another chauffeur. But . . . . yes, she knew all that. All the same, there must be some man she could trust.

In one of those inspirations that only real talent knows and only real genius trusts, she thought of the driver of the taxi-cab from the stand in Trafalgar Square, who already, on at least three occasions—two of Forrester's influenza, and one of his failure to receive a letter,—had driven her. She liked his face—it was the face of the falcon; she liked his voice. And the idea of appealing to his chivalry appealed to her romance.

So, on the moment's impulse, rather enjoying the liberty of action given her by the absence of Eagle, Dragon, and Lion, she went, in a common hansom, to St George's Church; and when the hansom had crawled away like a wounded thing, she walked across to where the taxi-cabs lay sunning themselves in a row like pigeons on a farm roof. Fortune was kind—or at least responsive. The man she was looking for was there.

A white-haired lady in a shabby mantle of Parisian cut stood on the curb and spoke.

It was interesting to feel that as you spoke, you held, so to speak, your life—and anyhow, your secret—in your hands. It was also interesting, though not so pleasant, to be looked at by a man, even a taxi-cab driver, with complete indifference. It was an experience to which Sylvia was unused.

"You have driven me once or twice, I think?" she said.

"I think not," he said, touching his cap.

"At anyrate, you have driven Sylvia."

"Ah!" he said, and his eyes met hers. His attention stiffened as a pointer does at a sitting partridge. And the indifference that had piqued her had disappeared.

"Would you care," said she, risking all, "for a private situation? Sylvia's chauffeur is ill——"

"Yes," he said. "You are Madame Sylvia."

"But can you leave? Don't you have to sign

something pledging you to stay for ever—or something like that?"

"I forget," he said; "perhaps I did, but in any case——"

"It's all very silly and secret," said she, "but I shall have to ask you to promise——"

"It's unnecessary, I assure you," he said. "The sillier and the more secret, the more delighted I shall be to enter your service."

"Then I may rely on you absolutely? The wages are good, I believe. A pound a day," she said, and instantly wished that she had not said it.

"Most handsome, I'm sure," said the driver of the taxi-cab. It was absurd of Sylvia to say "I beg your pardon," but she did it.

"Thank you," he said; "I can get rid of this thing"—he kicked the taxi-cab gently—"in an hour. Where shall I report myself?"

"I thought," she said, "if you would drive me home *now*, I could explain things—it would take too long, and I can't go on standing here,—and then you could come back later. Put the hood up, please."

He opened the door for her. But at Regent's Circus she stopped him.

"I've been thinking," she said: "will you come to this address in a quarter of an hour? It's better that you shouldn't be seen driving me there."

In a quarter of an hour Sandra opened Miss Steinhart's door to the falcon-faced driver of the taxi-cab.

"Come in," she said. "You'll understand—the whole thing is like something in a book."

"*New Arabian Nights*," he said, "only the other way round. Will you allow me to say that I am very grateful for the chance you are kind enough to give me, and that I consider myself very fortunate in being permitted to take part in a secret? There are so few nowadays," he added plaintively, "what with the newspapers and advertisements and wireless telegraphy."

"You see," she said, and quite without knowing it she spoke as to an equal, "it's most important that no one should know where I live. It's really a condition of my life: I couldn't stand it, otherwise."

"Of course not," he said.

"You'll find it all very odd," she said; "it's like the *Mysteries of Udolpho*. I'll show you the whole thing, and then I'll explain."

She led him along the passage, showed him the lift and its workings, and then led him into the bare room with the Middle Victorian embellishments.

"Now, what you've got to do," she said, "when you fetch me from the Hilarity, is just to drive into the garage and put out the motor lamps, then loose those pins: and be a very long time lighting the gas. That's all."

"You're trusting me a good deal," he said: "it's extremely good of you."

"I had to trust someone," she said.

"Exactly," he said. "That's the beauty of it, that I should happen to be the someone."

Sylvia was surprised to find herself conscious of a faint, not unpleasing sense of excitement—of things happening. Poor Forrester! But it was interesting to meet new people. How few people she had spoken to since she came to London!

"And you come to the garage at eight—for orders," she said. "I think that's all."

"You'll forgive me," he said, "if I don't quite know the ropes. You see, I've never had a situation in a private family before."

Something, not his voice — his face, perhaps,—gave to the statement the decoration of inverted commas.

"There's something else," said Sandra. "I am engaged to be married to Mr Edmund Templar. If he comes to the stage door to-night, tell him to wait at the corner of Dean Street and Old Compton Street and after you have taken me from the theatre go there for him. Oh! and Forrester, my old chauffeur, always drives a long way round—to mislead people you know."

"I quite understand, ma'am. Thank you. And when am I to be at the garage? At half-past eight?"

"At nine," said Sylvia.

He hesitated a moment, and then said gravely:

"You engaged me on an impulse. But one so often regrets this sort of impulse afterwards. Please

don't, this time. I am perfectly competent with motors, and I am as safe as houses—really, I am."

"Thank you," she said, "I am sure you are. Here's the key of the garage. It's in Bentinck Mews, number seven. I'll let you go out that way, and you'll see how the motor works."

"The rest of the family," said the new chauffeur—"do I have to call for them anywhere?"

"They come home with me usually," she said, "but to-day they're away—except Mr Denis. No," she said on a sudden impulse, "Mr Denis will not be here to-night. You will just have to fetch me."

"Can you trust your servants?" he asked abruptly.

"We haven't any—only an old deaf and dumb woman who comes in the mornings. I told you it was all like a fairy story."

"Aren't you afraid to be alone here at night?"

"No," she said: "why should I? And Mr Mosenthal's usually within call—only just now he's in Germany."

"Does your chauffeur remain on duty here during the day?"

"Not usually. If I want you to stay I'll tell you. There's a little den for chauffeurs in the passage near the left. It's quite comfortable. Forrester uses it. There's electric light and books and a writing-table, and all that. Oh! and do you mind telling me your name?"

"I mind extremely," he said gravely. "It is part of the Arabian Nights character of your environment

that I should be unable to tell you my name. Would Smith do, just to call me by—John Smith?"

She stood looking down for a moment; then looked at him with candid eyes, and said:

"I am so glad I found you! I know I can trust you, completely."

"You can," he said, "and it's an exquisite promotion for a poor dog of a taxi-cab driver."

When Sylvia got back into her sitting-room her anxiety about her lover came to her in a flash—like light when a blind is withdrawn,—and she found, fully formed at the back of her mind, the determination that Denis should not be here to-night. Nothing should prevent her seeing Templar alone—hearing his explanations—having his hands in hers, her head on his shoulder.

So when Denny, newly arrived by the four nineteen, came in for tea—he brought no letters,—she said:

"What about going back to The Wood House to-night, Denny?"

"Aren't you dancing?"

"Yes—but after . . . . wouldn't you enjoy riding home in a taxi-cab through the moonlight?"

"If you would. Yes, it would be very beautiful. Yes, I should."

"I didn't mean me," she said, a little confused among the tea-cups. "I shall stay here. But I thought you'd like it—all alone, you know—a sort of adventure. You know you love adventures."

"I'm not sure that I love adventures as much as I did. I'd rather stay with you. But I'll go if you say so."

"Well, I think you'd find it fun. I shall be too sleepy to talk to-night," she lied, a little ashamed but quite determined, "and I'm sure you'll love it, really."

"Very well," he said, "but don't trouble about me. It's enough that you want to be left alone."

That made her still more ashamed, but triumphant too. Now the way was clear. Nothing would come between her and her lover. He would come home with her to-night, and she would tell him that she could be married this week after all.

Why should she run the chance of another day like this? Love, it seemed, had power to turn the most ordinary mishaps into nightmare horrors. She would not give Love the chance of playing her this trick again. How silly she had been—and how wretched! And all for nothing! She would see him to-night.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HEAD

DENNY had gone to the music-room, and was playing that same air whose spirit she had likened to that of Tristan. Sandra was tired—tired to the soul. All these new dreams and sensations and half-understood awakenings coming into a life that had for many months held only hard work and deserved successes, had worn her out. She was like a man who, long living on bread and water, abruptly dines too well. She now experienced a sort of emotional indigestion—a desire not to have any more. The little adventure of the new chauffeur had been the last course—the course too much. She wanted to be quiet—not to have things happening—to go to bed early, and sleep long.

It seemed to her that what would be the best of all would be to see him at the theatre—to hear what had happened to keep him away from her; to say a few fond, tired words as she drove back with him from the Hilarity, and then to say good-night to him at the top of the lift; to go to bed and to sleep, and sleep, and sleep, and to wake up in the morning to

the soft cradling sense that he loved her, that he couldn't help not having come on Sunday, and that they were going to be married quite soon (she would tell him that in the motor); that everything was perfectly right, and that there was nothing to worry about. She would wire for Dusa to come up to-morrow. She longed for another woman now to whom to show her "trousseau things."

Yet to-night she would be alone in the House with no Address. She had arranged to get rid of Denny. Was it not foolish to waste a chance like that? If her lover insisted on coming in to say good-night .... Well, if he wanted to, very much .... She threw away the lily, now nearly dead and smelling too sweet; and, going into Gertrude Steinhart's room, telephoned to the florist in Regent Street for roses—red roses—plenty of them, and at once. Miss Steinhart was a good customer. The flowers arrived quite quickly. Sandra carried the wooden box into the House with no Address, and filled bowls, vases, tall glasses, and fat pots. Then she remembered how she had filled The Wood House with flowers yesterday, and he had not come. It was a bad omen. She swept the roses, dripping, into her looped skirt, made to throw them into the dust-box in the kitchen—and hesitated: that seemed a desecration. After all, flowers were flowers, and why be profane? Finally, she carried them into her bedroom, and filled vases, wash-hand basin, jug and tumbler with them. The omen would not work there. From that distance

they could not prevent his coming. She wanted him to come, then? The farewell in the motor would not, after all, content her? Who knows? It is certain that she did not know herself.

She and Denny drove to the Hilarity together.

"You're sure the head's all right?" she asked as they went. "It must be right to-night, because this is your benefit—your music. Everything must be perfect."

"I'm quite sure," he said. "Would I fail you? What is Salome's dance without the head—the dance of love and horror? It is a better head than the last one, too. It's made of omething different: not wax—a new composition. It's much more like life—like death, I mean. You'll find it will inspire you, princess. I wish I could see you dance it. I hate having to work that silly trick to take the head from you. It means I never see you dance Salome. I want to see you dance. . . ."

"Couldn't you get someone else to work the thing?"

"No—never. Promise me you'll never let anyone else give you the head or take it from you. It's not much I can do for you—don't let anyone else do that. But I do want to see the dance just this once. The first and last time."

"Well, look here. . . ." The jealous love in his voice moved her. She was going to be so happy herself; she wanted to make everyone else happy. At that moment she would have denied Denny

nothing. And this was such a natural, loving, flattering little wish of his! "I'll tell you what. Slip up and see the dance. You can easily get back in time to take the head. And I'll dance my very best, dear, to please you." She found his hand, cold and thin as a bird's claw, and pressed it between her warm palms.

"You're always doing something for me," he said. "Every bit of life I've had you've given me. It all belongs to you, princess."

"Then I'm very rich," she said lightly. "I think I am the richest girl in the world. But I wish I wasn't so tired."

"You won't be tired when you begin," he said. "I often feel like that—as if I couldn't be troubled to lift the bow,—and yet when I begin—the first note—glory and fire! it's all changed, and I feel that I could play for ever. But you have to keep alive—not to rest too long. If I didn't play every day—if I were to keep my hands still for a day and a night and another day,—I should never play any more, never be tired any more, never want to play or to rest, or to do anything at all ever any more, for ever and ever."

The slow, dreamy voice made it seem necessary to break in on it with sharp commonplace. This kind of talking—"mooning," Aunt Dusa called it—always preceded the worst of his states.

"Well," she said, "you're going to play your very best to-night, and I'm going to dance my very best. And to-morrow you and Aunt Dusa will come up to

London, and we'll have a special supper party, and enjoy ourselves very much indeed; and next month we shall all have a holiday, and you can go to any place in Europe you like and see new things, and everything's going to be lovely."

She kept the tap of small talk running till they came to the stage door, when she scurried in, bundled up unrecognisably, as usual. Denny followed, on his crutch. She turned back quickly, and, before she had time to beckon, John Smith was beside her.

"If Mr Templar—the gentleman I spoke to you about—if you see him don't forget to tell him to wait in Dean Street, and we can pick him up as we go."

For it had suddenly struck her that perhaps he would not come into the theatre, lest the sight of him should unnerve her as it had done the last time.

He might just wait opposite the stage door as he had done that other night that seemed so long past, and was really only four days ago.

Denny's symphony began. He had insisted, at the last moment, that the orchestra should only perform the last two movements. For the others he made new arrangements. The forest dance began, was beautiful as always, but the more severe among the critics observed that Sylvia was not at her best. The same critics did not fail to perceive that Pan surpassed himself. Never had he played so perfectly, and never before had he played on the stage without the accompaniment of the orchestra; for after the

first air the orchestra was silent, and the sound of the flute alone showered clear bird-notes, faster and faster, in an air that no one in the audience had heard before. And as the tender gaiety of the air asserted itself again and again through the bird trills and flutings, the spirit of it entered into Sylvia, and the forest dance became a dance of youth and spring and happy love.

In the sea-dance the orchestra supplied only the murmur of a sea far away; the flute, hidden by the shell, made the music for it. And the music was the Love Symphony's second movement—doubt, yearning, sadness, regret, and longing beyond words. Sylvia wove it all into the dance, and it became a new dance—a dance that troubled the hearts of those who beheld it, stirring old memories and the ghosts of forgotten desire.

The dance of worship was like nothing that she had ever done. Thrilled in every fibre by the music, and by the wild leap of her genius to answer it, Sylvia robed herself for the Salome dance. She never left much to her dresser; to-night she left nothing. Dusky draperies, gleaming jewels—she put all in its place with fingers that did not tremble, but were alive to their tips with conscious mastery of the coming hour. In each of her dances to-night she had gone beyond all that her genius had ever taught her to do. The Salome dance should surpass those last dances by just so much. To find that she could, without anything that could be called a rehearsal, adapt her

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dance to Denny's new music, exalted her with the pride of achievement and the confidence of proved power.

She leaned her hands on her long dressing-table, and looked at her reflection in the glass. The expression was exactly right—she had caught it at last: the look of the woman tormented by the flame of desire, beaten by the rods of terror and remorse—a woman on whose jewelled head were heaped the sorrows and despairs of a lost world.

"My!" said her dresser, "you do look awful, miss! Keep it up. That'll knock 'em!"

"I mean to," said Sandra, smiling brilliantly.

"You do, every time," said the dresser. "But to-night you've done the trick and a bit over. I never heard anything like it. Howling like wild beasts they was. There ain't no one like you, miss, and never has been. And you deserve it every inch. That's what I say. There's heaps of time; they ain't got the throne on yet. Here's your veil. I suppose we shall be seeing you in a white one with orange blossoms one of these days."

"What makes you say that?" Sandra asked, stock-still with the veil in her hands.

"Well—no offence, miss, but you keeping yourself so *to* yourself—of course we know it's because you've got a gentleman that gives satisfaction. And you aren't one of the kind you could think of anything short of marriage about."

"Well," said Sylvia on the impulse of the full

moment, "the fact is, I am. Going to be married, I mean."

"Lor!" said the dresser, overcome by surprise, "if I didn't think so! Well, miss, I wish you joy, and I do hope it won't be quiet, at a Registry, and the papers saying, 'Secret Wedding. Dancer weds Peer.'"

"It won't be that," said Sylvia.

"What I mean is," said the dresser, "I hope we'll all be there to wish you joy, for of all the dear, kind, good ladies! What might his name be, miss, if I might ask?"

"Mr Templar—Edmund Templar," said Sandra; and really, if you come to think of it, there seemed no reason why she should not say it.

"Well," said the dresser, "he's a lucky gentleman—that's all I can . . . . There—there's your call, miss. You go on and knock 'em."

Salome's dismal draperies swished through the narrow passage, and the orchestra called, called, called, in the deep, troubled notes of the last movement of the Love Symphony.

The dresser, when she had laid everything in order, strayed out to chat a little with the stage carpenter, and told him the romantic news and the name of the fortunate man who was to marry Miss Sylvia. There was—any way you look at it—no reason why she should not have done so. Sylvia had made no secret of it. The carpenter, for his part, saw no reason for secrecy. Thus, before the Salome dance was over,

everyone behind the scenes knew Sylvia's beautiful secret, and even the name of her fo.tunate lover. Dressing-rooms, corridors, and green-room hummed on the news like bees on a honeyed flower.

And on the stage Salome was treading the first measure of her dance to the music of the Love Symphony's last movement. She had only heard the airs of it, roughly represented by Denny with flute and violin. The stately, tragic splendour of it, the fulness of the orchestration, the mastery of the technique caught her in a web of wonder that he, her poor, dear, lame Denny, should be the master that this music proved him. But the web broke almost on the instant, to set her free to interpret the music; and almost before the conscious power so to interpret it had crowned her soul with pride and sovereignty, all conscious effort vanished, swept away like a veil in a storm-wind, leaving her soul naked and subject before the music's supreme control.

She danced, and her audience were held by her magic and by the spell that held her. The house was hushed to a breathless rapture of horror and delight.

The grey veils descended; slowly the king and the queen, the courtiers, and the slaves faded away, and Salome danced alone among the shadows.

The little ticking sound which warned her that it was time to take the head was, for the first time, heard by the audience. In the swirl and swing of her dance she caught at the head, and whirled it with

her in the wild rhythm of her going. And at the touch of it, there came for the first time to her nerves, strung far beyond their natural pitch, the sense of what it was that she was representing.

She had danced the Salome because the management and Uncle Moses told her that she must dance it. And she had said that the wax head was "gruesome" and "horrid" and "creepy"; but she had felt these things only with the surface of her soul. Now in its very depths she felt that she was dancing to express the horrible desire of a woman for a dead man, and that the head that she held in her hands was the head of that man who in life had been desired, but whom now no one would ever any more desire. It may have been the texture of the head that drove this new-old thought home to her; it was, as Denny had said, of some material other than wax—a new composition. It was colder than wax, and heavier. Its surface yielded a little to her finger-tips. A dead man's head, she thought, would feel just like that. She wished Denny had ordered another wax head—she was used to the wax head. This one was too heavy, and she didn't like the feel of it. It was like the indiarubber stalks of artificial roses—only colder. She would have a wax one like the other, after to-night.

And all the time her dancing feet twinkled to the passionate, tragic rhythm, and the head swayed in her hands to the rush and pulse of the passionate tragic air.

This head was heavier, but it was more inspiring too. One ought to feel what one was dancing. The features of the head were masked by the flowing hair and beard just as the wax head's had been; but there was something about it that made the dance real—real. Suppose it really were the head of some-one she loved—Edmund. Oh, horrible! But she caught it to her breast in a transport of imagined anguish: if Edmund had not loved her, and she had really been a dancing girl, and had asked for his head —not expecting to get it,—and then held it, adored, desired, but still unpossessed, in her hands! She raised the head above her in an agony of almost real emotion, and the music throbbed its agony into hers. Denny had been right—this *was* the music for the dance of love and death. She was creeping over the stage now, in wide curves, the head cradled in her arms as a mother cradles a child.

"Ah!" she sighed on a note of incommunicable triumph and despair, and the music drew towards its ending. The machine ticked like a death-watch in an old wall, and she resigned the head at the right moment—the only act in which her dance resembled any dance that she had ever danced before. The grey veils lifted, and Salome lay, her dance ended, before the feet of Herod and Herodias.

And there was a hush of moments before the applause broke out. They rose in their places—they shouted for her—men clapped and shouted themselves hoarse—women screamed their Bravas and tore the

flowers from their bosoms to throw on the stage. But Salome would not show herself.

"I am tired," she said.

"They'll shout the house down," said the management: "you *must* go."

"I won't," said Sylvia; "let them shout."

She dressed quickly and got to her brougham, already heaped with flowers and packets and letters. She had thrown herself back on the cushions, her heart beating almost to the choking point, and the motor was a couple of hundred yards on its roundabout way before she remembered Edmund. She had not seen him. She had not even looked for him.

"Drive back," she said. "I've forgotten something. I mean . . . ."

The chauffeur stopped the car and came to the window.

"If it's the man you spoke to me about," he said, "he was at the theatre an hour ago asking for Mr Denis."

"Did he see him?"

"I believe so, ma'am. He stayed a very short time, and then went away in a hansom."

"Did you see Mr Denis?"

"About a quarter of an hour ago, madam. He put one or two packages into the brougham, and went off in a taxi."

"Did he say anything?"

"He told me to be very careful of the big parcel, ma'am. It was priceless, he said."

"That'll do," said Sandra. "Home, please, as quickly as you dare."

Why had he asked for Denny? To find out whether she would be alone? Would she find him waiting for her? Or perhaps he had wanted to leave a message for her, and had asked for Denny so that she might not be talked about at the theatre? That would be like him. And if he had done that she would find Denny at home. He would have gone in as usual by Miss Gertrude Steinhart's door, and with her lover's message. Well, she would be glad—yes, even if it meant that she could not see her lover alone. Poor Denny! what a brute she had been to want to get rid of him on the very night of his success! To think of him, driving down to Yalding all alone on the very night when his music had set the crown on her triumphs—the very night when she ought to have had him near her, praising him, thanking him, making his triumph sweet with the sweetness of hers. Decidedly, she was glad that Denny would be at home.

She looked out eagerly as the motor turned into the windowless cul-de-sac at the end of which the garage was. Her lover might be waiting there for her; but he was not. John Smith ran the motor into its garage, and closed and locked the outer doors before extinguishing the lights and working the lift for her.

Then he came to the door of the brougham.

"Will you allow me to come in with you, madam,

to carry your parcels?" he asked. "And you might be nervous, going into an empty house alone."

Sandra thanked him. "I'm never nervous," she said, and at the word knew that, for the first time in her life, she was. "And I don't think it's necessary, indeed," she added. "I expect Mr Denny will be there."

"I think not," said John Smith. "I heard Mr Denis telling the commissionaire at the theatre that he was going away to rest."

"Was that after he saw Mr Templar?"

"It would be after that, madam."

"But I think we shall find him at home, all the same."

But they did not find him at home. Instead they found Uncle Mosenthal, back for an hour or two from Germany and his secret business, very cheerful indeed, uncorking champagne and quite incoherent with excitement and enthusiasm.

"Ah!" he cried, "you are heaven-blessed in the service of such an incomparable danseuse to be. She is prima-donna assoluta—goddess over all the goddesses that ever on heaven's floor danced have. Drink, Forrester—drink, mein lieber—drink to the incomparable Salome."

"It's not Forrester, uncle. It's our new chauffeur, John Smith. It's all right, really."

Uncle Mosenthal turned and looked at the new chauffeur.

"John Smith?" he said, and looked very straight

into the man's eyes. "I see. Well—Mr John Smith will be honoured to drink your health, my child."

"I drink to your happiness, madam, if you will allow me," said the chauffeur primly, glass in hand. And he drank.

"It is the new head," Uncle Mosenthal went on. "I wish I had thought to bring it from the theatre. We would have crowned it with roses"—he pointed to the sheaf of bouquets that Smith had brought up—"and set it on the table and done honour to it."

"It was not the head: it was Denny's music. Wasn't it glorious?" She was glad that the head was not there. She was in no mood for that sort of mumming.

"The music was of the finest—he is the child of Tchaikovsky and the grandchild of Beethoven. Why is he not here for me to tell him so?"

"He was tired," said Sandra in a very tired voice; "he wanted to rest."

"Oh, well, he will have all that is left of his life in which to rest and praised to be. But the head we could have praised to-night. I wish it were here. I see it with the roses. Ah! Uncle Moses is the old man for the romance—eh? And the House with no Address the true home of romance. Is it not so, Smith? You also, like me, love the romance. Good-night! Schlafen Sie wohl!

"You have luck always," he said. "That man—how did you find him?"

She told.

"You know something about him?"

"We have met before," said Uncle Mosenthal: "not as to-night. But I say nothing. Let him keep his secrets, and he will let us keep ours."

As Sandra unwound her wraps she became aware of an impression of having seen—and not at the time noticed—that while Mr Mosenthal had been speaking the chauffeur had been trying to attract her attention, and to direct it, when he should have attracted it, to the further room where the parcels were that he had carried up from the brougham. Of course, there had been a letter from Him, and Denny had put it in the brougham with the other things. But why hadn't he told her so? Perhaps he had meant to tell her when they got in, and had not liked to speak of it before Mr Mosenthal.

"I'll change my dress," she said gaily. "I won't be a minute, uncle."

She passed into the next room, and turned up the light and gathered all the letters from the table. Among the parcels in brown paper and pink paper and white paper—parcels tied with blue ribbon and silver string and common twine,—was a large bundle in a black cloth. She touched it curiously—lifted a corner. It was the Head. Denny must have sent it home; it was broken, perhaps—injured in some way. She was not going to have Uncle Moses find it. She did not want the thick-skinned jests of his Teutonic romanticism. She gathered the head up with the letters, and ran up to her room, full-scented

with the roses she had hidden there, laid all that she carried on her white pillow, changed her dress to a white and gold kimono, and went down to Uncle Mosenthal and the champagne and the lights and the supper and the loving flattery and the thought of her triumph. Edmund's letter lay among the other letters upstairs—the letter that would explain everything, make everything right. The letter could lie there waiting for her, and the knowledge that it was there would sweeten, while it lengthened, the hour that she must spend with the old millionaire, pleased as a child with her success, glad as a father in her joy.

It was a good hour, after all. She told him all about the pneumonia and her new freedom, and he was kind and quiet and gentle; and when he left her to catch the midnight train he blessed her as a father might have done.

The moment he was gone she turned out the electric lights and ran upstairs, extinguishing lights as she went. Arrived in the thick rose-scent of her room, she lighted the wax candles it was her fancy to have in just that room which sheltered her dreams, and turned to the bed for her letter.

The head lay there, as she had laid it; oh, no! not just as she had laid it, for it had slipped from her pillow and rolled down on to her quilt, and lay there among the letters.

She lifted it to hide it away—the sight of it gave her an uncomfortable little shock. It was not a nice

thing to have in one's bedroom. She would take it downstairs.

As she touched it she touched also something else —something wet and sticky. There was something on the head. How horrid! some of the paint must have run—or the new composition had melted. It was all over the letters too, and the white quilt. She dropped the head, and went to the dressing-table where the candles burned in their silver candlesticks. The stuff on her hands was red. Almost as if . . . .

The thought was intolerable. She could not bear it an instant. With the courage of terror she sprang to the bed, lifted the head again, and carried it to the dressing-table where the candles were.

She stood there a very long time, quite without moving. It was not possible to move. For it was not paint that had run. And the head she held was of no new composition, but of the old composition—as old as Adam. And the stains on her hands were of blood—and the head that she held in her hands was the head of a dead man.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEATH-NIGHT

WHAT would you do, dear reader, if at midnight and alone, in a house with no address, you found yourself before your toilet-table, with its neat, familiar furniture of cut-glass and silver, and in your hands the head of a dead man?

You might scream and go mad, and be found in the morning a harmless lunatic fondling the dead thing in heaven knows what merciful delusion. Such things have been! There is a story of a dead hand, but it is not this story.

Or you might drop the head and run screaming out of the house and tell the first policeman you met your incredible tale.

Or you might just conceivably, if you were very strong indeed, be strong enough to hold on to your sanity and your self-control. But I venture to affirm that not one in a hundred women could achieve this.

Sandra did. But then she was the chief among ten thousand—strong, self-reliant, brave. All her

life's training had been a training in self-reliance, in strength, in courage.

In the old days of the New Forest, Denny and the old nurse had depended on her for all the things that make life endurable. It was she who schemed and planned to secure happiness and a measure of freedom for all three. Uncle Moses had seemed to manage every detail of the life they had led in London. It was he who had given her the romantic entourage of the House with no Address—had launched her, and wrought on the robe of her fame the embroidery of mystery that should enhance and adorn it. But under and through all this her own desire and intention stood firm as a rock. She had made up her mind that night at the Mount when her grandfather lay dead, and she stood looking down on his quiet face for a long hour, examining her conscience, questioning her memory, and at last deciding that to his memory she owed nothing. All that he had done for her, in feeding her, clothing her, teaching her—or rather, paying others to feed, teach, and clothe—all this he had taken payment for, full measure, in the neglect of years and in the final cruelty of that "school for delicate and backward girls." It was on that night that she had decided what to do. She would go to London and make a home for herself and her old nurse—give Denny a chance to give to the world the music that was in him. She would dance to thousands, and be a stranger to them all. She would fence herself round with a wall impassable. She

would "keep herself to herself," and no one should have more of her than the sight of her dancing. She had planned her white-haired disguise before she met Uncle Moses, and found in him that vein of romance which rhymed so well with hers. He had done for her what she had determined to do for herself, and if he had not done it she would have done. There was a vein of hardness in her, running beside the vein of romance—as there is in all those who make their dreams come true.

She stood there, with a dead man's head in her hands, perfectly motionless, perfectly silent.

A man who has fallen from a cliff and is caught by some kindly stone or bush projecting from the cliff-face, feels at first nothing but the whirling sense that all is lost, and that he is but delayed an instant on the headlong way to death. But before he can feel this more than superficially he realises that, if all his thought, all his strength, all his wit and will are raised to their highest power, he may yet live. At first the thought, the strength, the wit, and the will concentrate on one thing: not to move—not to precipitate the disaster. Help may come. But when, presently, he has drawn breath and feels that his support is firm, he will, since no help comes, dare to shift his position a little—raise a hand a thousandth part of an inch at a time, to feel very slowly, very cautiously for some hold for that hand. He grasps a piece of the rock, tries it, finds it firm and trustworthy. Then with his foot he reaches out for some support, finds it, ventures

to open his eyes, to consider whether, and how, he may change those supports for others, finds a way growing clearer—difficult, dangerous, but still a way—up the cliff face, and so, straining to its utmost every power of mind and body, he slowly, slowly, slowly climbs up, and at last throws himself, half-insensible indeed, but alive, on the smooth, safe turf, where the scent of the wild thyme is and the skylarks sing, and there is a footpath by which living men go home across the fields. So Sandra.

The first thought was: "The wax head has changed to this. I knew it was a horrible thing to do that dance, and the wax head has changed to this: that means I am mad. It is not really the head of a dead man: it only seems so to me."

But quite soon she knew that what she held had never been wax. And when she knew this—certainly knew what it was that she held in her hand,—her thought was:

"It is all over. Now I shall go mad."

The next: "If I can hold out another moment against this horror that is closing round me, something may happen, some help may come. I may not go mad. It is horrible to go mad. Hold on to your senses, Sandra—hold on, hold on!"

Then the certainty that no help would come—that she was alone, and that if she were to be saved she must be her own saviour.

And, growing, growing, the knowledge that if she could only move her mind—give it some support

to cling to.—it might yet be saved from the abyss over which it hung as by a thread.

Her mind reached out for something to hold on to. Red roses? No. Someone had made a horrible joke about roses—a long time ago. Something else—something else——

And all the time the horror was tightening boa-constrictor folds round her mind, in a pressure more and more difficult to resist. And all the while she held the head, and gazed at it, immobile as itself. That was when she felt that if she moved it would be to give the signal for the sluice gates to be raised and the flood of madness let loose to overflow her soul.

"Hold on!" she said, "hold on!" Slowly her intelligence reached out, caught at the silver brushes. By thinking very hard of silver brushes—yes, they were sold in shops where crowds of people went in and out, and the sun shone in at the door. Yes, and there were other shops—Hamley's, with the masks. They were not real faces. No—that support would not bear yet. The world was full of people—full of people all kind and friendly. No one could have done such a thing as this. "Yes, keep on thinking; think hard—it's your only chance."

"It isn't a real head," she said aloud, and got her eyes away from it.

She was almost at the top of the cliff now. She had got her eyes away from the head, but the room was horrible to her—more horrible now than the head itself.

"Hold on," she said, "hold on! You'll do it yet."

She did not lay the head down while she fetched something to cover it. She knew well enough that she could never have gone back to it. She carried it to the washhand-stand and wrapped the towels round it. Every nerve crisped, she walked slowly—it was so necessary not to hurry, or one would run; and if one ran, one would never stop: one would run round and round for ever, up one staircase and down the other, till one dropped dead. And then heads and heads and heads would come crowding out of the darkness and look at one as one lay.

"If I could get downstairs," she told herself, "and turn on all the lights!"

She moved with the exaggerated caution of a man who knows that he is very drunk, and is determined not to act otherwise than as sober men act.

She had the bundle of towels in her arms.

"Now," she told herself, "open the door—quite slowly; go down the stairs and turn on the lights as you go. There is no one in the house. Nothing can leap out at you or come behind and—no, don't think of that—go right on—that's right!—light all the lights. You can leave them burning when you go up to bed. That's it!—only one more flight. Steady!—here's the sitting-room. You're doing it—you're doing it. You're not beaten."

She got into the room, shutting the door behind her, be sure. Quite steadily and quietly she went to the Buhl cabinet, opened it, and put the head, in

its wrappings, on the red velvet- ed shelf, shut the door quickly—it was the first quick movement she had permitted herself,—turned the ornate brass key, and drew a long breath, holding the key in her hands.

Then she turned to the door to go upstairs again to her room, to lock herself in—to be safe away from *that*.

But . . . . it was unthinkable: this room where the head was became in that instant a place of refuge from that room upstairs where it had been, where the blood lay on the letters and on her quilt, and the red roses smelt so strong and sweet and sickly. With an instinct of fortifying what had suddenly become a sanctuary from her terror, she locked the door. She wished there had been a door between this and the next rooms. It was not nice to think that behind that curtain was darkness, the same darkness that was in the room upstairs. She made herself draw back the curtain—its rings were noisy and set her heart beating again,—turned on all the lights in the dining-room and, further, in the mirrored room where someone that she used to be had danced that afternoon. As the light awoke, her own white shape leaped at her from the mirrors like a crowd of ghosts. She got back to the room where the head was, and again it seemed to her less horrible than any other place in that house.

So far, the head had been to her only the head of a dead man. Now, like a cold hand on her heart, came the question—whose? She had felt that it

was dead—she had seen that it was dead,—but the long hair had fallen over its face and she had not seen the features. Constricting her heart, came the thought that had come to her while she danced that night with that thing in her hands—that thing which was perhaps looking at her through the enwrapping towels, through the inlaid brass and turtle-shell of the cabinet door. Dead men could see through doors, perhaps.

The thought, the ghastly thought, clamoured for recognition. She held her breath a moment, clenched her hands, and let it come. If that head should be her lover's, disguised with flowing hair—the work of some madman—mad with desire and jealousy? Such things had happened. Jealousy did make men murderers. She had read of such things. Some of her letters had breathed hints of such things. And there had been vague threats. That man—— But he was dead—and pneumonia keeps you out of mischief for a little while before you die. She had not really seen the face. . . .

She had not looked through her letters to see if there were one from her lover. The letters were lying on that bed—red and white and black and white, like the cards in the forest a very long time ago. She could not go back into that room—even for His letter.

And perhaps there was no letter. Perhaps *that* was why he had not come—that, in the cabinet.

Love was a very faint emotion—like a little candle in face of the fire of terror that burned her. But, also,

it was a *different* thing. She had loved Edmund—she was sure of it. If she were a different girl, like other girls, the thought of his love would sustain her.

But how could his love sustain her if He were now only It—behind the locked door of the cabinet?

Unless you have ever been as frightened as she was, you will never understand how she found at last the desperate courage to put that key into the key-hole of the Buhl cabinet. I cannot explain it to you. I am not at all sure that it was not the wild hope that the terror she felt might not melt into grief—thus becoming bearable—if she should find that the head was the head of her lover. Isabella and the Pot of Basil showed for an instant, like a magic-lantern picture, against the blankness of her fear.

She looked round: there must be some help?

She found it—in the half of the second bottle of champagne that Uncle Moses had opened. So few minutes had passed, as clocks count time, that the wine was still fresh and bright. She poured out a glassful and drank it. Another.

"They say it helps when you are afraid," she told herself, and some comic phrase about "Dutch courage" drove her, shrinking, from a laugh that would have been the knell of her self-control.

She did open the cabinet; she got out the head, laid it on the table, and folded back the towels. The black hair was all over the face. The neck, where it had been cut off, was tarred, and the tar had cracked, and the accumulated blood oozed through.

"I shall go mad presently," she told herself; "but I will know first."

She caught at the long black hair and pulled fiercely. It came away in her hand, and she shuddered as it came. The beard too . . . . it was of the same texture. It, too, yielded—and under the brilliant blazing crystal chandelier, with its score of electric lamps, she saw the face of the dead man.

It was not her lover: it was her husband. Her husband—someone had murdered him. But her husband had died of pneumonia—and yet he had been murdered. No one could believe that unless they were mad. Then it had happened. She *was* mad—and nothing mattered.

Now she could do what she had wanted to do all the time. She could scream. Nothing mattered now, so why deny one's strongest desire? Mad people might scream as much as they liked.

Have you ever heard a hare scream just before the dogs get it? It is one of the most exciting moments in the sport of coursing. It is a sound that goes to the heart of the weak-stomached sportsman, and sends him home swearing. It is like the cry of a baby suddenly and terribly hurt.

Just such a cry was Sandra's—a very little cry, for lips and tongue and throat were parched.

Quite a little cry; yet the echo of it came to her ears, and it seemed to her that it had been echoed by every one of the reflections of her that she had seen in the looking-glass room.

The head lay there on the table—terrible, accusing. She had wished him dead. Well—he was dead. His eyes were closed—his mouth calm. It was a better face than the living man had had.

How did one go mad? When one had screamed, what ought one to do next?

She swayed to and fro slowly, rhythmically, and the head lay there. What next—what next?

It was then that the knock came—a knock on the room door. A knock, urgent, insistent, in the House with no Address—the house where she was alone.

CHAPTER XV

THE INTRUDER

It is a strange and terrible moment when something knocks at the door, and you within, alone with your fear, filled with it as a glass is filled with water, know that beyond the door something waits—something that *cannot* be there, since the house is empty.

Because you must either say "Come in!" to it, or you must go and open the door to you know not what.

Sandra did neither. She cried out again as the hare cries, though she knew as she did it how unwise it was to cry out, and thus to rivet on herself the attention of the thing on the other side of the door—the thing that could not be there, because the house was emptv.

I shall not tell you what her tortured imagination figured as standing at the other side of that door. You would not believe or understand, because you have never stood at dead of night by a table on which a head lay—a head that you had danced with, danced to—the head of a dead man.

The door shook to a hand that tried the latch. I

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shall not tell you what hand, in her madness, she thought it might be.

"No, no, no, no!" she cried. And on that the door burst open with a crack and a report like a pistol's—and something stood in the doorway an instant, then came slowly into the room.

Sandra cowered, but she had not dared to hide her eyes. They widened, wavered, gladdened. And then at last she laughed.

There are ears in which that laugh still rings.

The next moment she was holding the arms of the newcomer above the elbow, and saying, over and over again:

"Oh!—thank God!—it's you, it's you, it's you, it's you, it's you!"

The new chauffeur, at the same time, was repeating with equal iteration:

"It's all right, it's all right, it's all right, it's all right, it's all right——"

When he became aware of the head, he did not start or exclaim: he just threw the towels over it as though it were some unimportant if unsightly object, and closed the door,—she holding to him all the time.

Then he said, in a voice that she had not heard—a voice gentle, equal, confident:

"Everything is perfectly all right. Nothing can hurt you while I am here. *That* can't hurt you. Come away from it."

He would have led her into the further room, but she held back.

"I'm not so frightened here. The other rooms are worse. They seem full of it."

"I see," he said in a tone of cheerful comprehension, "I see. Shall I put it away? It's a practical joke, I assure you—not a nice one. We shall have it all explained in the morning."

"I'm glad you came," she said reflectively. "It must be horrid to be mad. May I hold your hands?"

She held out hers as a child frightened in the dark holds out its hands to its nurse, and the chauffeur took them.

"You understand," he said, "I shan't leave you. I felt certain that you would want something to-night. I stayed in that little room of Forrester's, and I was in the vaulted passage and heard you call out. Just think. It's all nonsense"—his voice was firm and kind,—"it's only a horrible practical joke. Some medical student . . . ."

"It is the head of my husband," said Sandra. "Who sent it to me?"

"Your husband?"

"Yes, I tell you—yes!"

"You got it . . . ?"

"It was passed to me through the machine. You know the head seems to come to me from nowhere while I'm dancing. And Denny must have put it in the brougham with the . . . . the presents, you know."

"You were married to . . . . to him?"

"Not really—oh! what does all this matter? But

who sent it? He died of pneumonia last Wednesday —and I was engaged to be married to someone else. Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"You will sit down on this sofa," said the chauffeur, "and drink some wine."

"I have."

"Then you will drink some more. Don't worry—don't think. Believe me, it is all right. Yes, I will hold both your hands. Is there anyone I can call? Mr Mosenthal, you said——"

"*No!*" cried Sandra, with a vehemence that she herself could not have explained; "and besides, he's gone back to Germany. Don't leave me, for God's sake! and don't call anybody." She drew a long breath, that trembled on a sob. She took her hands away to lay her face in them.

"There was a letter, I think," she said presently, looking up, "from him—that I was going to marry, you know. . . . *He* couldn't have sent the head—to show me that I'm really free? Could he?"

"He might have," said the chauffeur bitterly, "but I don't think he did. Don't think of it. Haven't you any friends you can go to?"

She shook her head forlornly.

"There was a letter," she said again.

"Yes."

"I put all my letters on my pillow. And the head," she explained, as a child explains the unexplained troubles that have come to it—"Mr Mosenthal had been making jokes about it: I didn't want him to see

it. When he was gone I went up—oh!—and the head had—it had *moved.*"

"It couldn't. There must be someone in the house—someone who is playing you this"—he choked on an adjective—"this silly trick. There must be someone." He moved towards the door. But she held him.

"No, no, no," she said, "it didn't really move; I put it on the pillow, and it had rolled down—that's all; and where it's been cut off they've tarred it, and it . . . . it was all over the letters. And if there's one from him I want it."

"I will go and get it," said the new chauffeur.

"And leave me here with it? I—I could go up with you."

They went up like lovers, the chauffeur's arm round her, and both her hands in one of his. He got the letters, she standing holding on to the wooden rail of the bed.

"It's all right," he said. "You see, there's nothing here—it's all right."

"How horrible roses smell!" she said. And he got her down again.

"When you have read your letter," he said, "you will let me send for the police. The person who played this trick on you must be caught and punished."

He would not use the ugly words crime or murderer, but she used them.

"It's not murder," she said: "he died of pneu-

monia. Oh! I didn't think there was anyone in the world who hated me enough to do this to me—it is cruel, isn't it?—except him, and he's dead. He couldn't have sent me his head himself, could he?"

She laughed again. "No—I don't mean that; that's silly, of course. I mean, could he have left it in his will, or got someone to promise to send it? I shouldn't be so frightened if I thought that was it. It would be just like him."

"Of course that's it," said the chauffeur heartily. While she spoke he had wiped the letters with his handkerchief so that the stains on them were, at any-rate, dry.

"See if the letter you want is here," he said, and pushed her gently into the corner of the sofa under the electric light.

"No—none of them," she said, turning them quickly. "Ah, yes! this packet. Open it—my hands feel so funny."

He cut the string and laid the open packet on her knee. There were letters in it—letters torn at the edges, obviously not of any late writing. A fresh sheet lay at the top. She caught it up and read.

"But I don't understand," she said, looking up at him, "I don't understand."

If you had been the new chauffeur you would have done as he did. He took the letter from her hand with a "May I?" as though it were some unimportant note on business.

And he read; and all the time he was reading she

was plucking at his arm, and saying over and over again very quickly: "What does it mean? What does it mean? What does it mean?"

This was the letter.

"I have found out the lie about the pneumonia death. I found your husband. I am going abroad. I wonder what you will do with the head? I think I am mad, but I can do nothing more. I did what I could not help doing. I did it for you. I enclose your letters to him. You may wish to destroy them. You did not know how I loved you; but perhaps this will show you. Good-bye. If it were not a mockery from me to you, I would say 'God bless you.'

"E. T."

It was her second love-letter.

"What does it mean?" she was still saying as he let the letter hang in his dropped hand and looked at her, meeting her eyes.

"I am afraid it means—you poor little thing, be brave! You will have to think what you will do. Was he jealous, the man you were engaged to?"

"Yes."

"Of the—of the man you married?"

"Yes—but it's not possible. . . ."

"Never mind about it now," the chauffeur urged. "The thing for me to do is to fetch the police."

"Not till you've told me what it means," she said steadily. "I am not afraid now. Look, my hands are quite steady." She held them out for him to see.

He took them and held them, looking masterfully into her eyes.

"You'll be brave if I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Courage is the only respectable thing in the world."

"I know."

"Well, then, it means that your husband wasn't really dead when you thought he was, and that your lover found him—found him and killed him. There was a fight, very likely. I'm certain your lover didn't *mean* to do it. He couldn't have been such a fool."

"And the head?" she asked, with a brisk confidence that led him on.

"I'm afraid when he saw what he'd done he must have gone mad—it's horrible, but you've got to face it sometime,—and—and cut off the head, and—and——"

"And passed it off somehow on Denny as the false one that I have for the Salome dance. Yes, it might be that. But I don't believe it. You don't know him. He simply couldn't do a thing like that." His heart vibrated to the note of love and sorrow—the brave, unreasoning, pitiful faith of a woman in love.

"You don't know what men can do when they're jealous—and in love," he said. "There's a murderer inside every one of us—only we keep him down."

"Oh! he might have killed him," she said almost indifferently, "but he'd never have sent that thing to frighten me. And he never did," she said—"never.

Let me see the letter again. I'll stake my life on it he never did that."

"But he has done it," said the chauffeur. Only he said it to himself.

She re-read the letter.

"What," she said slowly, "does he mean by wondering what I shall do with the head?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the chauffeur.

"And why did he send it?" she asked.

"What you said—to show that the man was dead. And then he couldn't bear the thought of what he'd done. He must be mad. I don't know."

"But I do," she said, "I know." And it seemed to him that she shuddered in the grip of that new knowledge. "Oh! it's all gaps and blanks, and all muddled and mazy, and nothing fits; but I see through it to *that*. I know."

He did not ask her what she knew, and she could not have told him.

"Will you be advised?" he said. "Let me go for the police. It's the only safe thing you can do."

But something in the muddle and maze, among the gaps and blanks, said NO to that. It was not a doubt of Templar—she told herself that it was not that. What she said was: "I can't be left alone, not here—with that. . . ."

And at the word the horror that had lifted a little fell on her suddenly like a heavy pall thrown over her from behind, so that she cowered and her hands fluttered in his like captive moths.

"No, no," she said, "in the morning, when it is light—I can do anything when it is light. Oh! it is moving inside the cabinet—I heard it move. It did move on my bed. I only pretended to myself that it didn't move. It's moving now. . . ."

Only the clasp of his hands controlled her.

"Be quiet," he said, "be quiet. Yes—there was something—I heard it. I heard something too, but it wasn't *that*. Listen—listen!" She held her breath and pressed her hand over his mouth, so that he too, to calm her, listened. And there was a sound, a sound in the empty house—the creaking of a board, and then, quite plainly and not to be mistaken, a low, moaning sigh.

"There!" she said, tense, "I knew it was. It is."

"Nonsense!" he said, moving briskly towards the door. "There's someone in the house."

"Take my revolver. Here," she said, and opened an inlaid box. "Oh—no, it isn't here. I don't know where it is."

"I don't want your revolver," he said.

"But it doesn't matter. You won't find anything——"

"Oh, yes, I shall!" he cried, furiously glad of a chance of action to relieve the tension of pity and other things. "Yes—come if you like, but keep behind me—I shall find someone right enough." And to himself he said, "I shall find her lover."

He opened the door, and stood listening to the silence.

Then again, from the silence of the empty house the sigh.

"Ah!—be wise—stay here," the chauffeur said. "I'll see what it is. It's burglars, probably. *Il ne manquait que cela.*"

But "No," she said, and "No" again. And she held his arm tightly. The touch of something that was alive and friendly seemed to be the best thing in the world—the only thing.

"I *must* go, you know," he said with gentle reasonableness.

"Me too," said she childishly.

"Very well—I will go first. You can come after me if you like."

"No," she said again. "Something might come behind me. Let me go first. Everything's easier if you face it."

"Be good, and stay here," he tried again. But it was useless.

"Then let us go together—as we did when we fetched the letters," he said.

"I shall go first," she insisted. "And you will see that nothing comes creeping up behind me, won't you?" That something might so creep was possible. He yielded.

Thus for the second time they went up the stairs, for it was from above that the sound had seemed to come.

The electric lights still glowed steadily. They looked into every room on the first landing. It was

near the top of the second flight that she stopped suddenly, as an electric light stops when you turn off the switch. She was three steps ahead of him, so that she could see the landing and he could not.

"I am not at all afraid now," she said in a cool, new voice. "Turn round. Look downstairs. I want to say something to you."

He turned in obedience.

"Now," she said, "will you trust me?"

"You know I do."

"Well—don't look round. I've just seen something that changes everything—something that makes me quite brave—something I don't want you to see. Will you go back and wait for me at the bottom of the stairs?"

"You're asking a very hard thing," he said. "No—nonsense! I can't let you go alone."

"You must," she said, "You think because I've been so frightened to-night that I'm not brave; but I am. When there's anything to be done I never break down—never. It's only when one can't do anything."

"You know who is up there?

"Yes. Let me go."

"No," he said, "I can't let you go alone. It's not safe!"

"Ah!" she said, "that's only because you don't understand. Go down. You're thinking of madness and murderers. It's not that. If I call out you can

be up there with me in half a moment. Oh! for pity's sake—for God's sake, do as I tell you!"

Then he went down.

"God forgive me if I'm a fool," he said as he went. He stood at the stair-foot, his hand on the broad balustrade, his foot on the third step, ready to spring up to her if she should call.

He heard movements overhead: heard a door open, heard her voice in low, passionate tones of pain and pity—heard another voice . . . . And he stood still. It will be counted to him, when the time comes for counting things, that he stood still, and waited, loyally—curiosity, excitement, and something deeper and stronger warring sickeningly in him.

Then she came down the stairs, leaned down towards him, and said: "It's all right. Come down."

Arrived in the parlour, she spoke.

"I am not afraid at all now. I have trusted you, and I am going to trust you more. I trust you as I trust myself. What I found up there . . . . it's someone I love very much, and he's . . . . oh! it's no use pretending about it. He is . . . . he has . . . . oh! how odd it is when words go away and hide like this! He killed my husband . . . . I don't know why yet, nor how . . . . and he's shot himself. He was mad—you were quite right; but he's not mad now. I think he's dying. You must go for the doctor. And get a nurse—a Catholic sister. They don't blab."

"The police," said the chauffeur for the twentieth time that night, and yet he was not at all a stupid man.

"Ah!" cried Sandra on a note of indescribable anguish, "don't *you* desert me—don't *you* try to do 'the proper thing.' You can have as many police as you like presently. Oh! I know he won't live long—my dear, my poor! He did it for me. . . . Oh! it's not fair—it's not fair! Will you go for the doctor, or must I go?" She stamped her foot.

"Can you trust the doctor?"

"He's Uncle Mosenthal's slave. Uncle Mosenthal saved him in some trouble or other. He's always attended all of us. Oh, go—go!"

"I don't like to leave you."

She came closer to him.

"Why do you keep on saying the same things over and over again? Don't you understand?" she said. "I thought you weren't stupid. But one never knows. Don't you see? This *real* thing—that he's done it—it wipes out all that silly horror. What's a dead man's head in a cupboard compared with him, dying in that awful pain because he loved me? Don't you see it's my fault — my doing? Don't you see that nothing in the world counts except what I can do for *him*—now he's done this terrible thing for me? And you think I'm afraid to be left!"

She turned with a rush, almost winged, to the cabinet, unlocked it, took out the head, and set it on the table.

"There!" she said, "it's nothing to me—less than nothing. I'd sit and hold it in my lap all night, if it would do *him* any good."

"How you love him!" said the chauffeur in a low voice. "Let me put that thing away. Yes—I'll go."

He replaced the horror in the cabinet, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"You'll not stay here?"

"No—I shall be with him. Give me the brandy—that little goldy decanter. Now, go. Oh, thank God I've got a man to help me to-night! Go—go—go! Thirty-seven Harley Street. Don't leave a message. If he's not in find out where he is and bring him home. Yes—take the brougham, of course. He knows all about it."

When he had gone she flew up the stairs and into an attic room. On the bed lay a man, in shirt and trousers. The white of the shirt was brownly stained, and through the sash that she had tied round it five minutes before fresh red was already oozing.

She threw herself on her knees beside the bed, kissing the pale cheek and closed eyes—laying her own cheek, warm now and red, against the cold lips tightly closed.

"Oh! my dear—my poor!" she said again and again, "my poor love!—my darling!"

The heavy lids lifted an instant, and the pale lips moved.

"I oughtn't to have come here. It was for you—

I think—but everything's so odd. If you could get the doctor and put me together a little—I should like . . . . to . . . . tell you how it happened. It does hurt . . . . I thought it didn't hurt . . . . I thought it just ended . . . . Sandra . . . . darling! . . . . darling!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SERVING-MAN

THERE was no sunlight in the garden courtyard where the pink geraniums were, and the Pot of Basil urns, and the little fountain forgotten these many hours, yet still industriously playing, rising and falling and plashing conscientiously in its dingy stone basin. But the morning light was there—the light that makes all things new.

John Smith, standing at the window of the bare sitting-room with the Middle Victorian trimmings of the House with no Address, looking down at the fountain and the ferns and the trailing pink flowers. There were pink flowers from that garden in a Venice glass on the table; a white cloth too; a chocolate service of Dresden china, pink also, with dainty panels of impossible shepherds and shepherdesses coquetting amid incredible landscapes; silver: the pretty equipage of the first breakfast of a stage marquise. In the little kitchen a kettle was spurting and spilling on the gas stove.

The man by the window turned now and then to glance at something curled up in the corner of a

sofa—something covered b[illegible] an Indian shawl that rose and fell to soft [illegible]ng. He glanced, but he did not look, because [illegible] knew as well as you or I do that if you look at a sleeping person long enough you wake it.

He had had adventures a many, being one of those to whom adventures come as the commonplaces of life do to other men. But yesterday, and the night that followed yesterday, these surpassed all that had ever happened to him. As adventures were natural to him, so, it seemed, was romance natural to Sylvia. She attracted it as the magnet attracts needles. And now the poor little magnet, bristling with steel points undesired and unsought, slept. But metaphors are silly beasts anyhow, and why should a story-teller take any pride in training them to run on all-fours?

Yesterday had been wonderful, and the night of it more than wonderful. There had been the terror of the child, and his soothing of that terror, his sense that he was able to control her soul, to master her fears. There had been that sound on the stairs —her advance—his inaction; then the sudden incursion of competent science and calm devotion into that strange house. There had been things to do—things to fetch. Then, when the nurse was established beside the man in the room upstairs, and the doctor had gone—having made Sylvia swallow a sleeping draught and bidden her rest, "to be well and strong to look after *him* to-morrow,"—the house

had grown quiet again, and he and she had been alone in that room with a third, a dominant, insistent presence—intense wakefulness: not the mere absence of sleep, but a living possessing force. The results of sleeping draughts are not calculable even by the supreme physicians whose address is Harley Street, and the opiate had only served to quicken every nerve, to excite every thought which it was meant to soothe.

Sylvia had sat in the deep chair and talked. The chauffeur had wondered now and again through the hours whether she realised at all that it was to her chauffeur that she was talking. When in the slate-grey beginnings of dawn shivering came to her, and he made her lie down and covered her with the Indian shawl, he knew that he knew her heart and soul as no other man had ever known them. And he had felt that that heart and soul would never thus be known by any other man in this world. She told him everything—happenings of her childhood, her youth. She told him the tale of her marriage. She told him the little, poor, sad life-story of Pan. The dreams and hopes that her lips had never before had words for: all these she laid before him as a child lays before its friend the treasures of shell and seaweed it has picked up on the fringe of the sea. Only one thing she did not tell him—she said nothing of her lover: she did not breathe the name of the man who lay between life and death in the room upstairs. Of all else she had spoken, frankly, com

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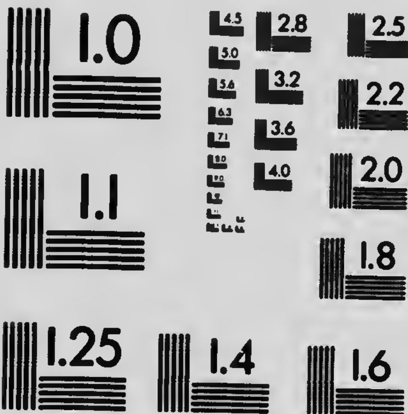

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loosened, to her shoulders, her eyes vacant and wandering.

"Ah!" she sighed, "yes—I remember."

Her feet found the floor.

"How good of you," she said, "to be here when I woke. The nurse hasn't been down? He hasn't roused?—hasn't asked for me? No, or of course you'd have waked me. I must go and see."

She went out. When she came back, hair bound up and hands and face fresh from cold water, he was in the kitchen.

"You must have breakfast," he said. "I'm quite a fair cook. I shall make you scrambled eggs."

He insisted, and she yielded, though breakfast seemed a silly, useless convention that she had once admitted and now saw through. She found it pleasant to be taken care of. It gave her the sensation of warmth to the heart, which you feel when you come in out of the cold and find the fire burning redly and the curtains drawn by someone who has thought your coming long. Besides . . . .

"If ever you needed your pluck you need it now," she told herself, and was wise enough to see that courage is more nourishingly fed on eggs and chocolate than on the empty need of it. But . . . .

"You too," she said. "I shan't eat unless you do."

"When you've finished . . . " he said. She laughed bitterly.

"Do you want to teach me my place?" she said. "Don't let's pretend any more."

Then he in turn was wise, and did not ask her what she meant.

When the meal was eaten and the table cleared, only its pink flowers remaining, he came and stood before her.

"And what," he said, "are the orders for the day?"

She looked at him blankly. But the blank gave way to a look that thrilled him. Because it said: "Why do you ask me? You are the master. It is you who must tell me what to do."

Her eyes were years older than Sylvia's eyes of yesterday, and she was very pale. There were purple settings to the Irish eyes, but her dress was neat as always. There was in her air no trace of what novelists call "the disorder of the past night."

"Well," he said, "what's to be done? Will you be advised, and let me go for the police?" I am sorry he was so one-ideaed, but such was the fact.

"No," she said; but he knew that if he chose he could make her say "Yes." He did not choose. And what he knew she admitted. For she went on, and her voice was pleading: "Not yet. Not to-day. You won't make me do it to-day."

"I am your servant," he said: "it is for you to give the orders."

"Don't," she said.

"Well, then?" said he.

"I think I want Aunt Dusa. Will you telegraph for her? And you'd better wire to Denny too. Denis, Wood House, Hadlow."

He went out to do it. When he came back
brought a slab of newspapers under his arm.

"I didn't wire," he said. "They've found the . .
They've found your husband. Dead," he add
unnecessarily. "Mrs Mosenthal's been got at. Sh
told everything she knows. But she doesn't see
to have given this address. But everything else
yes. If you wire for her someone else will see t
wire before she does, and follow her, and the gan
will be up. So I didn't wire."

"Thank you," she said, "and I've been thinkin
while you've been out. You see, it isn't safe-
to have that thing in the cabinet when we're bot
away. Someone might get in. And, now they'v
found his body, what you tell me about Aunt Dusa—
she's a dear silly!—she might suddenly think she wa
doing me a service by bringing people here. Yo
never know. If even *you* can think of nothing bu
police, be sure it's the only thing she'd think of. I
you could stay here it would be all right. But you've
got to drive me to the theatre and bring me back
While we're away anything might happen."

"Well?"

"So I've decided what to do. I shall take the
head to the theatre and dance with it again. That's
the only way of making everything perfectly
safe."

A weaker man would have urged her weakness.
This man said:

"You're strong enough to do it. But why torture

yourself? Let me get the wax head from Clarkson's. It's sure to be ready now. And I'll take the other in the brougham, if you like. There it will be safe enough."

"No," she said. "Your precious police that you're so fond of—they might search the brougham. You never know. Now that they've found the body they'll look for the head, don't you think? And the one place where they won't look for it is in my arms. Did you hear anything about Denny?"

"No."

"They don't know who did it? They don't know that?"

"The police say they have a clue, so we may conclude they know nothing."

"I'm afraid of the police," she said. "They think of things, sometimes. You never know. I shall take it to the theatre, and arrange the dance so that it never leaves my hands. It's the only safe way."

Her voice was sullen, stupid, obstinate.

He said what he could. The scheme was a mad one. But he saw that her sanity was bound up in it. And she resisted his entreaties, knowing that if he chose to command she would not resist. But he did not choose. Instead, he suddenly yielded.

"Very well," he said, "have it your own way. Now I must go out. My lady must be fed—and not merely on eggs. I will go to Appenrodts and get things for you to eat."

"You too," she said.

"Thank you. You'll be all right—just for a littl while?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I want you to be here. Bu go just for a little. And you'll come back here afte you've driven me to the theatre to-night. And i anything—if he—if anything happens come and tel me. You see, I must dance," she explained carefully "if I don't, everybody will be asking questions. And there are no answers to the questions they'll ask You see that—don't you?"

"I see," he said. What he saw was that the idea of this supreme martyrdom of dancing, on that night of all nights, with the head, would "keep her up," as they say—make her strong to bear what would have to be borne. Whereas, if she yielded to all the impulses that bade her stay with the beloved— the bandaged, bloody thing that lay upstairs,—she might yield also to the whole inrushing tide of feminine emotion and be swept who knew where . . . . to the mad-house, perhaps.

"There's one thing," she said, "I've thought of. That tar—it gave way—do you think rubber solution . . . . ?"

"The very thing," he acquiesced with careful alacrity.

It was not a pretty scene. She looked out of the window while he did it. But she was only gaining strength to look at the finished work.

"Yes," she said, "that's exactly what I meant.

How clever you are! Put it away—while I go to see how he is."

He put it away, but not in the cabinet. Then he went out—to get food and the evening papers, whose first edition, by a charming irony, is published at eleven in the morning.

When he came back she said:

"I'm glad you're going to be here. You'll be here to-night when I have to go up into that room to dress. It's all right now, you know—it's all right now, of course, and I don't suppose I shall feel differently then. But I might. I might. You see, it'll be dark then—and—I haven't been into that room again. Would you mind going in—into my room, I mean—and taking those roses away? And taking the quilt off the bed? Put it away somewhere—anywhere, in one of the attics. I'm sorry to be so silly—but I don't want to give myself the chance of being sillier still to-night, that's all."

"You are very wonderful," he said.

"I'm a silly coward," she said bitterly.

"You're the bravest woman in the world," he said, and went up to her room as to a sanctuary. He put the roses where he had put something else; and so Uncle Mosenthal's romantic dream of the head among red roses was realised in a dusty attic, with no one to see.

. . . . . .

The management at the Hilarity was in despair. Sylvia had announced her intention of altering the

Salome dance, and had declined, on that evening, to dance any other dance than the Salome. Pan, it seemed, was not well enough to appear, and she would not dance the forest dance to any other piping.

"Besides," she insisted, "I am overtired. If I do anything besides Salome, I am afraid I shall break down altogether. And how would you like that?"

Her eyes told the management that her pale lips spoke the truth—she *was* ill. And her voice told him that argument or persuasion would be equally useless. Besides, he had learned to recognise that Sylvia, unlike most of the women he had known, always meant exactly what she said—to him. Also he had seen the papers, knew that a headless body with its name conveniently on a card in its pocket had been identified as her husband—and he thought himself lucky that she would dance at all.

"Heartless little beast!" he said. "All women are. But I thought she was different."

He embodied her plea of illness in a clever little speech, which predisposed the audience to be lenient to the Salome dance if it should fall below its usual level, and if it should rise above that level, to be enthusiastic. He mentioned her bereavement, adding: "They had been long separated. But I am sure you will appreciate our Sylvia's courage in keeping at least one of her engagements in such circumstances."

The orchestra tuned up; the conductor collected eyes like a hostess at a dinner party, and the music

A CLEVER LITTLE SPEECH

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began. It was the last movement of Denny's Love Symphony, to which again the curtain rose.

The alteration which Sylvia had announced to the management was a singular one. Salome crouched in the middle of the scene, surrounded, as usual, by Herod and his court. She crouched, huddled up on the ground, her veil wound about her in fold on fold of cobweb-colour, and, crouched there, she swayed slightly to the rhythm of the opening theme. And the lights lessened and the grey veil of twilight descended. With the first change in the temper of the music the twilight awakened to moonlight, the music increased in complexity and in volume, and on a crash of the drums and cymbals, Salome rose to her full stature, holding high above her, in outstretched arms, the head.

The effect was electric. Through the still house ran audibly the almost hiss of a breath quickly in-drawn between teeth. She paused on the attitude—a long pause. And the orchestra paused too. Then with the leap of the music to the magnificent insistence of its tragic theme, the dance began.

You will have noted that each time I have had occasion to speak of Sylvia's dancing at the Hilarity, I have indicated that she did, on each occasion, surpass herself. I have indicated this because it was what happened. I want you to see her popularity increasing day by day, the magic of her charm rising, little by little, to its zenith.

And this dance to-night marked, indeed, the zenith

of her fame. It was the dance of love and death—
the composer of the symphony had dreamed it.

Her other dances had been already dances that
other woman had imagined or could have execu
But this dance did not merely appeal as a work
art: it appealed as the work of nature. It *was*
thing that hitherto the Salome dance had represen
Plainly to be seen, and comprehended by the poo
critic in the gallery, the meanest enthusiast in
stalls, it was the dance of Love and Death.
music seemed to uphold rather than to accomp
her movements, and, when the triumphant tr
finale had thundered forth and the court of H
sprang out from the darkness of dreams into
sudden light of reality, Salome reeled wildly—
head dropped from her hands and rolled bumpin
the footlights. The curtain slid down quickly.

The conductor spoke a quick, sharp word, and
orchestra dashed brilliantly into the March f
Faust. Two attendants came on to change
numbers, and a third, a very young man, saunt
along between footlights and curtain to pick up
head. He stooped over it, touched it, and went
without it—not sauntering. An attendant of ma
years came out and took it away.

That was the last that any audience ever sa
Salome and the Head.

. . . . . .

Behind the curtain the management, fussing r

a limp, insensible girl, found himself touched on the arm.

"Beg pardon, sir—there's something odd——"

There were whispers. The kindly people of Herod's court—king, slaves, and courtiers surrounding the unconscious Salome, sympathetic for her courage in attempting the dance on that night of all nights, heard words.

"That discovery—the headless body." "The head's alive—dead, I mean." "Police." "Get ourselves into trouble."

Herodias, who was a little deaf, but handsome and kindly, looked about for some practical service that she might do to the sufferer.

"The head," she said, with a born actress's solicitude for a valuble 'property'—"wax scratches so easily. Where's the head?"

"Hush!" said the group that was whispering—and so loudly that even Herodias heard.

"She's mad, you know," said Herod—"must be."

"The more reason she should be looked after," said the management. "My dear boy, it's got to be done. You don't want us all to be lagged for accessories after the fact, do you? It *must* be found out. She must be quite off her chump, poor girl! They won't do anything to her. It was her husband—the body, you know. And now, here's the head. Mad as a hatter, of course. They'll look after her quite kindly. And, anyway, her dancing career is over."

"Well, look here," said Herod: "wait till she comes to, and then send for the police if you must. But do let her get to her dressing-room and get her outdoor things on. You're not bound to have the poor child carted away dressed up like that."

"My dear Vandeleur, I can't do it," said the haggard management, "not at any price, dear boy. What's that you say, Somerville? Her chauffeur wants to speak to her. Ah! she's coming to. Let him come along. *That* can't do any harm, can it?"

So the first face she saw when she came out of the black sea where she had been drowning was that o John Smith.

"I'm all right now," she said; "let's go home. Ah where is it? The head! Where's the head?"

She sat up, looking round her.

"Oh—the head's all right. Don't worry about that But you must come at once. The doctor says *he'* dying." The chauffeur spoke low.

She reached for his hand and pulled herself up by it, and the others watched as folk watch a play.

"Says he may last till morning, but probably no more than a couple of hours," Smith whispered.

"I'll come now." She suddenly let go his hand turned, and made for her dressing-room. No on stopped her. The management reflected that Vande leur's suggestion, after all, had something in it. Th girl must get her clothes on.

"It's no use your waiting," he said to th chauffeur. "She won't be coming yet awhile."

The chauffeur went down to his motor and waited. The management posted a sentinel in the way by which Sandra would come out of her dressing-room.

To Sandra's confused brain the fact that the head had passed from her hands meant only danger—vague, but terrible danger. And not to her. Only, people might stop her with questions—questions that would keep her from the side of her beloved. Instinctively she put on the wig and the clothes of Miss Gertrude Steinhart.

Her dresser was below, drinking in the details of the horror. Sylvia was engaged to be married. And her husband was murdered. She had killed him, and gone mad and danced with his head. Horrible! But how interesting!

The sentinel let Miss Steinhart pass. Quite unnoticed by the few understrappers whom she met, she went out of the stage-door. No one bothered about a shabby old lady; no one had time even to look at her.

She took no notice of the chauffeur, who followed her, accommodating his machine to her pace. In the next street he caught her up, stopped, and opened the door of the motor for her.

When they stood in the vaulted passage, she turned to him, tearing off the white wig and the shabby mantle.

"Remember," she said, "whatever happens, you know nothing, nothing. You did not know it was in

the cabinet. You never saw it. Remember that—not just for your own sake, but for mine."

"You . . . . what you danced with was not reall the head?"

"Look at my hands—the rubber . . . . Of cours it was; it was the only safe thing to do—to tak it to the theatre and dance with it. I told you meant to do that. And you see I did it. How coul I know I should faint and drop it? I never fainte before. It would never have done to have left it her —when the secret of the house might be found out a any moment. But now it's all up."

"Look here," he said, and frowned, "this i serious. When you were upstairs to-day I too that head out, and put the wax head in its place. thought you would not notice till you got to th theatre, and perhaps not then. Are you *sure* it wa the real head?"

"Yes," she said, and shuddered, rubbing her hand together.

"Then someone must have moved the wax hea and put the real one back."

"Where did you put the head—the real one?"

"In the attic. When you were upstairs with—when you were upstairs I took the head up and pu it with the roses, and put the wax one in th cabinet. Somebody changed it. And now we sha have the police here in about half an hour."

"Can't you stop them?"

"I can try," he said; "but to leave you alone . . . .

There really was a singular sameness in this man's utterances.

"I shan't be alone, you know," she said. "But if you could keep the police away—for a little while—it won't be for long."

"Is it so much to you," he said, "to keep them away to-night?"

"It's everything," she said.

"Then it's done," said he. "Don't be in the least anxious. I'll keep the police away."

He hesitated.

"I wish," he said, "that there had been more than that I could do for you."

"You've done everything," she said—"everything."

"May I kiss your hand?" he asked, in the tones one uses who asks another to pass the salt. "I may not see you again for some time. . . ."

She looked at him, and in his eyes saw the light of the fire that burns on altars.

"Oh, don't," she said—"oh, don't be unhappy!"

"I don't intend to be," he said, "but just now . . . . I have a fancy that I should like to tell you something. May I tell you . . .?"

"Yes," she said, and she said it in a whisper, and she knew that she ought not to have said it in a whisper. But when he spoke, the thing he said was not what she had half-feared, half-wished to hear. He said:

"You've heard of sudden conversion, and a change of heart, haven't you? Well, I want you to know

that that's what you've given me. You've change the values of all the things in the world. Nothin looks as it used to do. I've thrown away everythin that's worth having in life—and I didn't know tha I wasn't throwing away rubbish. But you've change all that. I know now exactly what the things I'v thrown away were worth. And I shan't throw any thing more away. 'The Converted Chauffeur: tract for the lost,'" he added, and smiled. "Good bye!"

"Good-bye!" she said. And in that moment o gratitude to him for what he had not said, she love him. She looked at him a little wildly, and hel out her hands. He took them, kissed them gentl and gently let them fall. It was then that sh suddenly put her hands on his shoulders and kisse him.

"Dear child—dear, foolish child!" he said, "tha was good of you. I shall remember that—as lon as I live. You're very brave, very fine, very generou You're sure you love that man?" he said. "I've n right to ask, but I must ask."

"Yes," s said—"oh! of course I love him. Oh I am sorry. Oh! I wish there were two of me," sai she, "for then I should love you too."

He stood a moment awkwardly. "Don't be sorry, he said. "I'd rather love you than not—though know it's no good. God bless you, dear!"

He came back again to say yet once again "It's all right, don't you worry."

"I know well enough," said John Smith, as he went, "I know well enough how she loves him. And now to embrace the adventure in the true Sydney Carton manner, and risk all that there is left to risk, 'to keep a life she loves beside her.'"

So he went out into the street, made a brief call at a certain address, and then found a policeman, asked him the time, offered him a cigar, remarked on the fineness of the night, and added carelessly:

"By the way, who's the proper person to give yourself up to if you happen to have murdered anyone?"

"Ha!" said the policeman acutely, "you want it to put in a book. We're often applied to for information by you literary characters. You'd be surprised. Your villain, sir, when overcome with remorse for 'is crime, could make a statement to a constable on duty, as it might be me, who would then blow 'is whistle to acquaint 'is mate with something being up. On his mate arriving on the scene, the constable would conduct the criminal to the nearest station, where he would report the confession to his inspector, who would then take down the prisoner's statement. The prisoner would pass the night in the cells, and be brought before the magistrate in the morning. Habeas-corpus Ac, sir, in case you wish to seem auto-da-fé with the subject in the book you're writing."

"Thank you," said the chauffeur. "You put with admirable clearness. And now you'd bett blow your whistle."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that I give myself up for the murder Isidore Saccage."

"Eh?" said the police.

"It was I who killed that man Saccage. An o quarrel, and I was delighted to get the matter final settled."

"You will 'ave your joke, sir," said the policema laughing heartily and fingering the cigar in h pocket, "and you did it well. But you didn't ta me in, sir. Not for a moment, you didn't."

"I am not joking, my excellent friend," said t chauffeur. "I am the man you want."

"But we've arrested the real murderer."

"Whoever you've got, you've got the wro man."

"You can't come that game on me, sir," said t constable firmly.

"Your faith in me is most affecting," said t chauffeur with a touch of exasperation. "If you kindly direct me to the police station I will s whether your inspector shares it."

"You're kidding," said the policeman sus ciously.

"I should have thought it might be advantageo to you—lead to a rise in your profession, if you w to be the one to place me face to face with

outraged majesty of the law. But you know best, of course."

"Do you mean to tell me," said the constable, shaken, "that you murdered the deceased and cut his head off?"

"And presented it to Madame Sylvia at the Hilarity theatre."

"Lord!" said the police, "you don't mean it?"

"I mean exactly what I've said. Blow your whistle."

The man blew it.

"They'll bring it in of unsound mind, sir," he said consolingly. "I'm certain of that, from what I've heard of your conversation. It'll be during the King's pleasure. . . . Unless," he added doubtfully, "unless it's all a hoax."

"Shall I show you how I did it?" said the chauffeur, coming a step nearer. "I could easily show you. One man's throat's very like another's."

"Steady on, sir," said the constable. "I hope I haven't said anything to annoy you." He backed, and blew the whistle again with considerable access of fervour.

"Did you ever," the chauffeur went on conversationally, "take a man's throat in your hands, and feel the life go slowly out of it as your fingers went in deeper and deeper? I assure you it's a sport that's too much neglected."

"Hi, Wilson!" shouted the policeman to the slow, heavy boots at the other end of the street, "hurry

up, can't you?—Yes, sir, I daresay it's a very agre
able amusement. We might step along towards m
colleague, sir. It would save time."

"What," quoted the chauffeur gaily—"what
time to one whose thoughts are on eternity?"

"Oh, lor!" said the constable, "you take my arr
sir, and don't say any more as can be used again
you. Take my arm, sir—and anyone as meets
'ull only think it's a common drunk I'm takin
you for."

The chauffeur reeled against him as the secon
policeman came up.

"Catch hold of him, can't you? He's drunk, or el
off his chump," the first whispered: "says he's t
Yalding mystery. And what's more, I'm not at
sure that he ain't."

. . . . . .

As in the margin of an etching you now and th
see some little detail of the picture worked out—
forget the technical term, if I ever knew it,—so
present to you here the suggestion of a stricken m
hurrying through the night with his hands held w
away from him. He makes for the river, where the
is water and clear moonlight, and all is very st
There is nothing in the calm night that threatens
pursues, but as he goes he looks behind him aga
and again, and he avoids the hedgerows and th
shadows, keeping to frank meadow and open towin
path where the moonlight is. Because behind h

lies a wood, very dark, and in it that which he will not let his remembrance face. Not now. Not yet. Later. There is a little legend under the drawing, too, hardly decipherable. But we can decipher it. It is "The Sunday Night."

CHAPTER XVII

THE CAT FROM THE BAG

"CONFOUND and damn!" remarked the news-edit of the *Daily Monocle* in the fierce light that beats upo his office table—"what a squandering of head-line Enough to keep us all yelling for a month of Sunday And all to keep pouring in like this! What's tha Don't tell me any more; I don't want to know. I' got my bellyful of news, and a little bit over to put the savings-bank." He tore open an envelope. "C yes—go on. Keep it up. Don't mind me. Do you take breath on my account. The Honoural John Ferrier has given himself up!—described h he did it—shocking details! 'Full confession in t left boot!' The waste of it—the wicked, want waste, my boy! Why, couldn't he have nursed sickly conscience in a decent retirement for a we or two? Why, the man himself—his being here all's enough to star the front page with for a week."

"Is he," asked the sub., "anyone in particular?"

"Oh, gods!" cried the editor, "is he anyone particular! He's everyone, practically speaking. T youngest major in the army, V.C. at twenty-c

daughter of a hundred earls—I mean eldest son of Lord Ferrier of Ferrars, disappeared six years ago—unpleasant business about cards—some woman—forged his uncle's name. Spartan uncle—detectives on the track—clothes with card-case all complete on the beach at Hastings. I always thought that card-case a bit fishy myself. But everybody else would know best; they always do. Ripping good chap he was, too—but a bit too cape-and-swordy—swaggered through life in dandy spurs, twirling his moustache. The kind of chap adventures happen to, don't you know. He seemed to get them regularly as other men get their meals. Always in some shindy or other—and always coming up smiling when you thought he'd gone under for good. Well, anyhow, this is *our* scoop. He was up with me at Balliol; kept on my staircase. I bet I know more about him than any other Johnny in Fleet Street. Get out, my boy—take a couple of sticks of brimstone and the office matches, and make a little hell of headlines of your own. Oh, yes—bother the suffragettes and the Eastern crisis. Cut everything out—or down if it won't go out. Only let me alone. I'm on the biographical lay. The Hon. John Ferrier. His Thrilling Past. His Personality. His Disappearance. Reported Drowned. The Unknown Woman. The Forged Cheque. The Spartan Uncle. The Chauffeur's Disguise. The headlines go down the column like ladder-rungs. God forgive us! It's a dirty trade, is Journalism."

The editor of the *Daily Monocle* has indeed had his fill of events. For it is Tuesday night. The body of Saccage was found yesterday. And a man has given himself up for the murder of the man Saccage, and the police are looking for Sylvia the dancer, whose husband the dead man was, and who is supposed to have had some share in the murder; for did she not dance, holding the dead man's head in her hands, clasping it in her arms, pressing it to he[r] bosom? Yes—and on two nights. Almost certainl[y] she danced with it twice. For examination of Messr[s] Maskelyne & Devant's clever magic-working machin[e] by which the head was given to the dancer, seemin[g] to come to her out of space, evoked by her longing showed on this machine, last used, as everyo[ne] agrees, on the Monday night, definite traces of bloo[d]. So the police are looking for Sylvia. And it seem[s] that they do not at all know where to look, for t[he] daily Press is informed that they have a clue. Al[so] they would like to find Denis, the handsome, talent[ed] lame boy who played so well and whose magnific[ent] symphony, etc. . . . It is plain to the Press that t[he] guileless youth was made a tool of—the head w[as] given to him to pass to Sylvia as she danced, and [the] horror of it has evidently overcome him. He [is] probably by this time out of his mind. Several peo[ple] now remember that he was deathly pale when he [left] the theatre after Monday's performance. The dea[th-like] pallor was so striking as presently to be rememb[ered] distinctly, even by people who had not happened

see him that night. It will be easy, the Press opines, to trace this unfortunate victim of the passions of others. His deformity, though cleverly disguised on the stage, is, of course, matter of public knowledge, and his mental condition, etc. . . . And Mr Templar, the lady's lover, will also have to be questioned—when they can find him.

Then to the Press, replete with details all new and all invaluably shocking, comes detailed news of the indiscretion of Mrs Mosenthal, sister-in-law of Moses Mosenthal, so well known in theatrical and financial circles and, it is whispered, even, under the rose, in circles diplomatic. Revelations of a popular dancer's private life. Secret marriage of Sylvia. Crowding on that:—Identity of Sylvia, Granddaughter of Richard Mundy, the Tallow King. Her father married Goosie Glanders (Mary Anne James), the Gaiety chorus-girl. And now the Honourable John Ferrier! The biography of every person involved would have filled columns in a slacker season. The pity of it! It was too much. All is fish that comes to a journalist's net—but the Salome scandal, as the Press, with happy originality, combined to term it, presented a miraculous draught of fishes which Fleet Street was frankly incompetent to utilise.

If only the people concerned had been more considerate, more reticent, more consecutive, the thing would have kept us going for weeks. As it was, every fresh item of news was an added outrage. And the fact that Isidore Saccage, whose name had appeared in the

deaths, with that cynical touch about the flowers, was not really dead at all when the papers said he was, but had, with his tongue in his cheek, himself written that paragraph of decent regret which all the papers had printed—this was the last unbearable morsel in the surfeit under which Fleet Street groaned. He had told the woman he lived with (Mr Saccage's unfortunate paramour distracted with grief. Her life-story—another column! No space!) that he had given himself out as dead "for a lark—to see what people would say about him—to see if he were really appreciated." (Solemn column article on the psychology of swelled head.—No space!) Also on the Friday night he had told this abandoned creature tha he had lost a pocket-book in a wood, near a hous where he had gone a week before to "look after hi own interests." (Interview with the woman—the las person, except the murderer, who is known to hav spoken to the murdered man. By our own corre spondent.—Crowded out.) Told her this when h had had a little to drink. We all have our failing (Special didactic articles on drink in relation to crim and to the discovery of crime, by Lady Henr Somerset. Regret extremely—No space!)

And so the stylographic pens niggle, and th fountain pens scrawl, and the typewriters tap and clic and the linotype machines do their weighty, incredib magic in a thousand glaring offices; and Sylvia- Sylvia whom all the pother is about, is sitting ve quiet in an upper room of a house with no addre

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THE HAND OF A MAN WHO IS DYING

holding the hand of a man who is dying. A black-robed, wimpled woman kneels on the floor in one corner of the room. There are a lot of red roses all about the room. The man in the bed asked for them, and they came. A bearded man in black stands by the bed, holding the patient's other hand.

"Give me something to make me strong," a low, grating voice says from the pillow—"just for a little—to tell her."

The doctor shrugs his shoulders. "It can't really hasten the end," he says to himself. "Still . . . . all right, my dear fellow—in a moment."

He goes out, shutting the door very carefully. You cannot hear any voices through the door, but you get an impression that outside it people are whispering. The doctor comes in again, leaving the door open—a foot or so. You can see that there is a light on the landing outside.

He goes to the mantelpiece and mixes something in a glass—something reddish, with a faint opalescence.

"Now," he says, "drink. You'll feel a new man in—eh—um—yes—in about three minutes. And as soon as you feel you can speak, speak. There won't be much time. I mean the effect of the drug soon goes off. And you're not to worry. I shan't forget anything you've told me. Everything will be perfectly right." He speaks in his quiet, strong, professional tones, slips a practical hand under the head of the dying man, and lifts it so that he can drink.

"Ah!"—the pale lips breathe through the wetness of the draught—"thanks—but go. Only Sandra now. No one else."

The doctor touches the nurse on the shoulder, and they go out. The door is left open; but the man on the bed cannot see it, and the woman who sits by him can see nothing but what lies on the bed. And those two are left alone.

"Better": the word comes in a gasp from the drawn lips of the sick man.

"Wait," she says, "you'll feel much better in a minute. The doctor says so."

He waits. She holds his hand—lifts it—lays it against her face. Then she lifts her face, and when her eyes meet his she is smiling—not one of those pitiful smiles that poets say are sadder than tears, but a brave, bright smile that is like the smile of the girl who danced in the forest to the piping of Pan.

He lies breathing evenly, and with each new breath seems to draw in new strength—new life. His chest ceases to be hollow—his dull eyes grow liquid and awake—his features lose that look of having been pinched and moulded by some cruel hand. On a long, quiet expiration of the breath he speaks.

"How I love you!" he says.

"And I you—I love you too," she urges passionately.

"Ah, yes, I know," he says; "but . . . . "

The remembrance of that hour will stay in her ti[ll] she dies. Not as at first, a maddening memory, a

infinite sorrow that makes life a desert and joy a desecration—but as a part of life, a sombre picture, unbelievably beautiful, inexpressibly tragic, that is to be the background of all the happiness and clear hope and love that life will bring her.

For now one spoke who loved her. And he showed her all his heart. The cordial the doctor had given served its turn. He did not go out into the darkness with his tale untold.

Before he had said a dozen words her arm was round his neck, and it was with his head on the breast of his adored mistress that he told the story that he had to tell. Many people, afterwards, hearing the story, pitied him. I am not sure. There are many ways of love.

"And so," he said, "I read that letter and I knew that he was spoiling your life. And he had mocked at me. Princess, always when people mocked at me I wanted to kill them. And I knew about your happiness and your sorrow, my dear. And I had finished the symphony, and you had sent me—no—what was I saying?"

"I had sent you away—because I thought *he* might come. And he didn't, he didn't. I shall never forgive myself for that. But that was afterwards, dear."

"My princess, do you think I don't understand? Wouldn't I have sent God himself away, and the whole Company of Heaven, if I'd thought there was the least shade of a shadow of a chance of your

coming to me—if you had loved me? Don't you understand that I understand?"

"Yes," she said, and "yes" once more, and "Oh, my dear, but all the same . . . ."

"He's dead," said the man who so soon was to be dead also. "That's the great, beautiful thing that makes all my life worth while. He's dead. He can't trouble you any more. That night—it was Friday—I heard the gate go. And . . . . princess, you know how silly people are when they're in love—I thought it might be you . . . . come down for the fun of the thing, by moonlight. And I went out. You know what it is to love anyone. You know what I felt when I undid the bolts. One of them stuck. I couldn't bear it—I remember I thought I'd take that bolt off in the morning and hammer it to little bits for coming between you and me. And I got out, and there was a light in the shrubbery, and all the music of all the worlds sang in my ears, and said, 'She's here—she's here'—you understand that, don't you?" he broke off to ask anxiously, "because you know what love is."

"Yes," she said.

"And then—Sandra—I hadn't got my little friend—but I wanted you so. You know how I go when I haven't got it. No, I forgot—I've never let you see me like that. That was silly of me. I shouldn't mind now—your seeing how I crawl about. It looks funny; I've watched myself often, moving about the looking-glass room. It's very amusing—like a her

with its wing clipped. My wings were clipped, princess, almost from the beginning. Clipped wings —the angels must find that silly, don't you think?"

"Drink the rest of this," she said; "you'll feel better then."

"I remember," he said after a few moments of silence and deep breathing, "I thought it was you— and I found *him*. And I knew he was dead, because I'd read your letter. So I spoke as you speak to ghosts, you know. 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,' I said, 'what do you want?' And he said, 'In the name of common-sense and a man's rights and a reasonable income, I want my pocket-book. And I've found it. Good night, my crippled worm! Drag yourself back to your earth. By Jove! I should like to see how you work it with that funny little leg of yours!' That's what he said, princess."

"Yes?" she said.

"I don't know what I said. And he said, 'If you dare to tell a soul you've seen me—promise you won't,' he said, and he pulled out a knife, very long and sharp. Both sides were sharp, dear—I found that out afterwards."

"Yes?" said she: it began to sound like a response in some strange religious service—the worship of an unknown god.

"And I got his legs, and threw him down—and I got the knife away from him, and I got my hands on his throat."

"Yes?"

"And when I found he was quite dead I found the knife. And, princess—it seemed such a pity to run the risk of there being any mistake. So I made sure —I cut his head off. I covered him with mould and leaves, all but the head. Then I cut it off—it was hard work, but you know how strong my hands are. But it took a long time. I thought I should never get . . . . No—I won't, that's not what I want to say."

"It's enough," she said. "Rest now, darling."

"No. Because it was after that I went mad. My symphony—the last movement, you know, was shouting in my head. And I wanted to see you do the dance of love and death, with *That* in your hands. I thought you'd be glad. It was to be a triumph dance. You see," he said gently and reasonably, "it seemed so perfectly right then that he should be dead. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes," came the response.

"I got my jacket off, and I rolled the head in it, and covered up the place I'd taken it from. Then I went to the tool-shed and got the tar they'd used for the fence, and I took It in—and tarred it. It all seemed so right. I thought I was so brave and clever, dear! And I put it in the ice-safe. That's why the key was lost—you remember?"

"Yes."

"The ice-safe sounds half-horrid and half-silly now. It seemed perfect then. Things do look so different, don't they, afterwards?"

"Yes."

"And I brought It to London, and passed it to you —and I saw you dance—to my music, and you *were* my music. That was what it was all for. I felt that then. And then I slipped back and took It from you, and I put it in the brougham and went home while you were saying 'How do you do' to Uncle Moses— I saw you at the theatre. But that new chauffeur of yours was watching, watching. And the curtain was drawn back and I couldn't wait. So I went up into my room. Princess, your door was open and I saw the roses in your room, but I wouldn't go in. And I put the bedclothes over my head, so that you shouldn't hear. It was your revolver, dear. I'm very sorry I used that—but I hadn't another. And of course by that time I knew it was the only thing to do. I'd seen you dance my symphony, and I'd killed him. There wasn't really anything left—was there? I thought I'd got it right against my heart. The beating felt like that. But perhaps the heart's in a different place when you're crooked, like me. Is it, do you think?"

"Oh—rest," she said. "Don't talk any more, darling. Rest."

"Not yet," he said, and smiled. "There's plenty of time for resting. Oh, princess, it did hurt! And then I tried to find someone. It was so lonely. And then you came."

"Yes."

"And doctors and nurses—and horrible fears that

they might cure me. But they can't do that—can they? You wouldn't let them do that—would you, princess?"

"I wouldn't let them do that!" she said: "they can't do that." She stroked his face gently. "That's all, isn't it? You won't talk any more—just lie here like this."

"There's only one other thing. I hope you found the wax head for your dance to-night. I put it on the piano, where you'd see it."

"I never went in there."

"I think I must have been delirious or something. It was while you were giving the nurse her dinner. I got up and moved about. You think I couldn't—but you see I *did*. The head was in the other attic. I found it there, and then I thought I must find the wax one. I got down somehow—and looked for the wax head. Clarkson promised to send it to Miss Steinhart. I don't know how I got down and looked, but I did—and it wasn't there. And then I thought of wine—and I opened the cabinet with my key, and there was the wax head. And I thought what a good place to hide His head in. So I fetched it. It seemed the right thing to do."

"Yes. Ah—rest!"

"It doesn't any of it matter, in the least, of course," he said in a changed, flat voice: "the only real things are that I love you, and that he is dead. I see now what a horrible way I took to give you my present, dear. But his head was really all I had to give—except the things you don't want."

He had raised himself on his elbow and his eyes embraced her.

"Don't—your bandages."

"I don't need them any more," he said. "Princess, it's a royal death to die—on your heart. . . ." He laid his head again on her breast, and as her arms held him more closely his arms went round her. "Oh, it's worth it!" he said; and then, "Oh, princess—it's worth it—but it does hurt. . . ."

. . . . . .

"That will do perfectly," said someone outside the door, and he spoke to the doctor. "Whatever little unpleasantness the lady may have to go through will be quite temporary—quite temporary, I assure you. You managed it beautifully. Nothing could have been better. Your shorthand notes complete, Baynes?"

"Yes, sir," said a subordinate voice.

"Quite like a play, yes. You managed wonderfully, doctor."

"It wasn't my idea," said the doctor; "it was her chauffeur."

"Indeed!" said the voice. "The man who gave himself up? Very interesting."

"Excuse me," said the doctor—"I think he's dying."

But he was not dying. That last disadvantage of living had ceased to be. The Thing which Sandra clasped in her warm young arms had nothing more to fear from life.

When they laid him out, he looked, so said the professional death-dresser, just like an ordinary man. "With the shroud over him," she said, "you'd never believe he'd been a cripple. He looks as straight as you or me."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KNIGHT-ERRANT

IN sweeping up the stage after the drama, one comes across odd things.

The affairs of Mr Edmund Templar must now, rather late in the day, engage our attention. After all, he is our hero—we owe something to his emotions. On a certain Sunday night when he came out of the shrubbery and went to the water to wash the blood from his hands, he knew one thing at least: that Saccage, who was dead now, had not died of pneumonia. Therefore Sandra had lied to him, and that letter had been a forgery.

Murder is an ugly thing; and when it stalks, red-stained, among the flowers and tapers of love's pretty temple, the flowers are apt to fade and the tapers to go out. Figure to yourself Edmund Templar, delayed by a defective taxi-cab, ending his long journey on a borrowed bicycle, propping this up at his love's shrubbery-gate—longing to see her, to kiss her lips, to look into her eyes, yet tenderly doubtful whether he ought, so late, to intrude, breaking her rest. As he goes through the shrubbery he knocks

out against a tree the pipe that has consoled him in the night's disappointments, slips it into his pocket—or means so to slip it, but it slips not into but past the pocket and falls among the dead, sodden leaves. He is conscious of its fall, but not so immediately as to locate to a foot or two the spot where he will be likely to find it. He turns back, strikes a match, and begins to search among the leaves.

His foot turns on something soft, and at the same time hard—too soft for wood, too hard for wood-fungus—something that gives and yet resists. He has not thought of the Tugela for long enough, but he thinks of it now. He strikes another match, stoops, looks—touches, draws back. What he has set his foot on is a dead hand.

This was the situation. Now to see how Mr Templar met it.

He covered the hand with leaves, and stood still, very uncomfortable, and as yet hardly more than that. The rest of the body was buried—only the hand had crept out, beckoning to vengeance. Elements other than discomfort disengaged themselves.

He uncovered the hand again—pulled at it gently; an arm in a dark coat-sleeve came up out of the earth at the pull. It was a man's arm—that was something. He now allowed himself to admit that he had feared it might be a woman's. That man—her husband with his horrible threats . . . . He might have . . . . Well, it was not woman's arm.

He dared not strike another light. No man cares to run the risk of being found at dead of night in a shrubbery where he had no business in the company of a dead body. It is much safer to go openly to the police and explain exactly how you came to be in that shrubbery, and what you have found there. This is safer for you, and more dangerous for the murderer.

For a few hours afterwards Mr Templar was thoroughly proud of the self-possession which, in face of a really nerve-shaking incident, enabled him to spend a short time in consideration of all the circumstances, before he should set off for Tonbridge and the police-station. He stood there, very pleased with his calmness; and as he stood, the moon, surmounting some obstructive bough, shone on the hand and arm—also on a piece of coat, brought out from under the mould by the movement of the dead arm that he had dragged from its hiding-place. It was the part of the coat that had lain over the dead man's heart when it was alive and beating. There was a breast pocket—something square-ended sticking out from it—a pocket-book. Mr Templar, overcoming with a sense of power certain shrinkings, pulled the pocket-book out. The leather was wet and clammy. And then, all in a breathless minute, he perceived that the body had not really been buried at all—it had just been covered over with loose earth and leaves—placed, as it seemed, in part of a shallow trench or gully that ran across the shrubbery, prob-

ably for drainage in the winter floods when half the Medway country is under water.

Templar, much less calm than he had been, and with a growing sense of a growing nightmare, found himself lifting the leaves from the coat in matted double handfuls ; he brushed the earth from it with the side of his hand as your parlourmaid brushes the crumbs from your dinner-table with the appropriate implement.

Such an industry, practised by moonlight, tries a man's courage. But Templar was strengthened by a quite incomprehensible determination to see the face of the dead man.

He did not see it. Instead, he saw what made him doubt whether he were, in deed, seeing anything but some mad, silly dream. There are limits to the things that one can see in the moonlight, limits to the things one can do. He struck a match, looked once again, turned from the shrubbery and ran.

You will be surprised to learn that he went back. But that was after he had washed his hands in the river and had, under a hedge and by the light of the borrowed bicycle's other lamp, looked at the pocket-book. There were cards in it: and the name on those cards was Isidore Saccage. And there were letters: and the handwriting was a girl's, and th name at the end of them was Alexandra Mundy.

It was in a blinding mist of sick horror tha Templar went back to the shrubbery. He could no face the thoughts that came crowding. Not now-

not now. But at least . . . . he had loved her . . . . he would not be the one to hasten the inevitable consequences of her crime. He would not leave its horrible evidences uncovered. The words of Rupert of Hentzau rang in his ears: "I cannot kill where I've kissed—I cannot kill where I've kissed."

Had he had a spade, and had his search for the face ended differently, he would even have tried to bury the thing more deeply—to put off the day of just retribution. For, you observe, it did not then occur to him to doubt that Sandra was responsible for this man's death—that she had either killed him or directly inspired the killing of him. That chauffeur—a suspicion that Templar had dismissed as unworthy, now revived—that chauffeur Forrester loved her, dared to love her. He was certain of it—the way he spoke; and . . . . He was a strong, burly brute. He could easily have . . . .

It was difficult to cover the thing again—the soil and the leaves were scattered; he had to collect other leaves from the further stretch of the gully; he scratched mould up with his fingers and laid it with the leaves—more leaves, more mould. He trampled the heap firm, laid loose leaves over all, and at last, a little breathless, got away.

The river was waiting for him, lying quiet in the moonlight, the river on which he had first seen her. He dipped his hands in the water again and again.

"My God!" he said, and "My God!" many times. But he would not let himself think till he had reached

the Anchor with his borrowed bicycle, and was shut up alone with his bedroom candle in the little bungalow by the river's edge. The weir sang in his ears as it had done on that first night. But he heard a different song.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, he let the thoughts come. He told himself the tale from the beginning, the tale of this rash adventure in the land of unknown love, the tale that was ended—thus:—

He had seen a child in a wood. No—that had nothing to do with the story. He had seen a dance at a theatre, and, determined to "see life," had pursued her. She had not been what he expected—and he had loved her. Her husband had turned up—threatened her. She had defied him. Then had come that desolate time of separation. Then the husband had turned up again, and . . . . somehow, *this* had happened. Then she had been free. She had forged that letter saying she was free—put the advertisements in the papers—and then . . . . He remembered the night when she had slept in his arms, and a hateful thought came with the remembrance. All that time she was playing a part—all the time that she lay in his arms she had known that this thing was lying among the dead leaves. She was playing a part. And if one part, why not another? Had the innocent allurements that had so enraptured and tortured him been really something quite different—the calculated lures of a woman ex

perienced in such scenes? Had he been fooled—fooled all through? "I can't believe it," his heart protested. But his brain insisted on the affirmative answer.

"You see, we hardly knew her at all," said the brain; "we were easily deceived."

"We knew her very well," said the heart. "She has been driven mad by this man's persecution—and got rid of him; but she was not *that*."

"I don't *want* to think it of her," said the brain with a fine impartiality; "but facts are facts."

"Whatever she's done I love her," said the heart.

"Nonsense!" said the brain; "let's get on with the story."

But that was the end of the story. So the brain and heart began again at the beginning and went over everything a second time. And so on till morning—the morning that was Monday.

Mr Templar shaved and dressed and went to town. He went to that address from which Mrs Clitheroe had written of the pneumonia death—because the heart had suggested the radiant idea that perhaps that thing in the wood was not Sandra's husband at all, but only someone with Sandra's husband's pocket-book in his possession. Why—that man himself might be the murderer, and the victim might be—oh, anyone. Such a man would have a host of enemies.

Thus the heart, hopefully.

The brain said: "No such luck!"

Nor was there. There was indeed an Andover Terrace and a number 13, but no Mr Saccage had ever lodged there: no gentleman at all had ever lodged there. The faded lady who opened the door to him had not come down to letting lodgings, she thanked Heaven, and her name was not Clitheroe or anything like it.

Templar went home and wrote a letter to the woman he had loved—enclosed the letters he had taken from the pocket-book, and in the evening left them with Denny at the theatre.

If you have ever loved a woman whole-heartedly, have been on the verge of rapturous marriage with her, and have then discovered, in the most horrible way, that she has lied to you, and is either a murderess or the inspirer of murder, you will be able accurately to picture to yourself the conflicting emotions of Mr Edmund Templar.

If these things happen not to have happened to you, you will not understand or sympathise with his feelings, and no words of mine can make you.

But you will understand that 64 Curzon Street was no heaven; if there had been nothing else there was, towards evening, the constant straining of his ears to catch the possible shout of news-vendors:

"Shocking discovery in Kent! Arrest of the murderer!"

What a horrible thing it was to have happened to a man! You note that it was his own suffering and not hers which, up to now, wholly engrossed him.

"I've been a fool," he said. "I'll get out of London, anyhow. I can't stand it. And I must get rid of the pocket-book."

A leathern pocket-book belonging to a murdered man is a dangerous thing to throw away. To burn it is difficult, and, in any case, needs a fire. To ask his housekeeper for a fire in August were simply to court suspicion and inquiry. He thought of his Aunt, affectionate and sympathetic to chills; the merest suggestion of a cold caught would, in her house, ensure a fire roaring in the big fireplace of the spare bedroom. He would go down to the New Forest. He did.

And, arrived at Lyndhurst station, he got out there, as once on a Spring morning eight years ago. He had not meant to do it. Nor did he mean to look for that enchanted glade where a child had danced to the piping of a lame boy.

But he found it—a little changed, a little grown, bush and tree; but the glade—the sylvan theatre, without doubt, the same.

He threw his suit-case down on the moss that had felt her feet—threw himself down beside it, and for a very long time he lay there and did not move.

And as he lay his heart spoke, and his brain, at first silenced, was in the end convinced.

From the past, in that quiet place the spirit of the child who had danced there—the girl who had slept in his arms, came out and looked into his soul with quiet, reproachful eyes.

"How could you doubt me?" it said. And, "How could you believe, on any evidence, that I was that?" And, "We knew each other so little? Yes—but think what you do know of me—what your heart knows. Is it not enough?"

It seemed to him as he lay there that he had sloughed something—an ugly skin that had cramped his heart's beat and made blind his eyes. Bands had been loosed that bound him to base things—faith had been set free to soar to things beautiful and dear. It was wholly unreasonable, like all divine revelations—incredible as, save to faith, all great truths are; but as he lay there the thing happened. In gradual enlightenment, in a torture dearer than any joy he had known, he saw her as she was, and saw himself as he had been—base, cowardly, faithless—denying his love at the first doubt, deserting his beloved at the first trial.

And then remorse, regret, self-contempt, love, faith—all merged in a passionate movement of pity and protection.

What he had believed—he, with all his knowledge of her, with all his love to guide him—what he had believed others would believe! And he had run away, leaving her to face—what?

The thought brought him to his feet. Back, back now, this moment, to be where he ought to be—where he desired to be—at her side—to help her to face what had to be faced!

She would be dancing to-night. Of course she

knew nothing of that thing in the shrubbery. She would be dancing. He would see her at the theatre —go home with her, tell her the horrible thing—very quietly and gently and carefully he would tell her—and together they would tell the police, and go through with whatever of horror, of inquiries, and inquests had to be gone through. If only she had not already found it out! If only she was not already bearing, alone, some unknown horror of fear and bewilderment!

If only it were not too late! It was.

It was not till he was in the train that he remembered the letter he had written her. What would she think? What had he said? This was Tuesday evening. It was twenty-four hours since she must have received that letter. How she must be hating him! Or would she only suffer—dumbly, patiently, as women do? He prided himself on the knowledge such generalisations represent. If only he had not been in such a hurry to dissociate himself from every possible danger! What was it he had said in that damned letter? He could not remember the wording, though he tried over and over again. Oh! if only he had not written!

Excellent reader, never write letters in a hurry—cruel letters, that is. Love-letters you may pour out red-hot, and post before the ink is dry. But not cruel letters. Give yourself a day or two for reflection. Life is a rum thing. And you never know.

In spite of the letter, the two hours in the train

were happy ones—the last happy hours, by the way, that he was to have for some little time. The reaction from the horrors of his dirty suspicions, his silly certainties; the knowledge—for it was no less—of her perfect purity and innocence, and of his own reborn loyalty, now insisting on its immortal and changeless character, exalted this foolish young man to an intoxication of Quixotic proportions. He was glad this had happened, even though it would entail certain unpleasantnesses for her. Now, indeed, he could show her how he loved her. He would stand by her—help her through everything—be, as well as lover, friend, wonderful counsellor, angel from Heaven.

He was not more foolish, perhaps, than other young men; he was only more—well, never mind—but I own that he ought, the night before, to have bought an evening paper, and not merely to have waited breathlessly for those newspaper cries which do not sound in Curzon Street. Had he done so he would have known that early on Monday morning a young milkman had, whistling, taken the short-cut through the shrubbery to The Wood House, and had noticed a curious bulge in the middle of the gully that ran through it. In his light-hearted, bucolic way he had kicked that bulge with his serviceable bucolic boot, had paused curious at the suggestion his kicking foot conveyed to his calf-like brain,—had stooped to investigation, and had run all the way to Yalding without once looking behind him, where, for all he

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THE WASHING OF A MAN'S HANDS

knew, the thing he had put his hands into was following fast on his footsteps. Arrived at Yalding, he fell down in a fit—the first of many, and was never again the same light-hearted, whistling young milkman.

There had been telegraphings and telephonings, and the police had gone to The Wood House—to find Aunt Dusa breakfasting alone on bread-and-milk. Something on a hurdle, under a sheet, and the threatening words of an enterprising inspector, in whom France had lost an admirable *juge d'instruction*, paralysed Mrs Mosenthal's discretion. Not all the visiting-cards of that which would visit no more had been in the letter-case. There was one, dog's-eared, in the waistcoat pocket of what lay under the sheet on the hurdle. Aunt Dusa lost her head and found her tongue. The evening papers knew all about Mr Saccage and all about Sandra who was Sylvia, and all about Mr Edmund Templar who was the lover of Sylvia who was Sandra, the wife of the thing under the sheet: no—its widow.

Nor was there wanting—the police were in luck that day—the testimony of the Anchor, to which Mr Templar had returned so late and with such muddy boots, nor that of the shepherd visiting a sick ewe, and witnessing by moonlight the double washing of a man's hands in the river. With admirable rustic cunning he had kept in the hedge shadow, and followed to the Anchor the man who washed—Mr Edmund Templar, the lover of the dancer whose

husband was lying murdered in the shrubbery of her house.

That was why, when Mr Templar presented himself at the Hilarity, sent in a note to Sylvia, and waited in the vestibule for an answer, he was kept waiting quite an appreciable time. Just long enough, in fact, for the management, which had read the evening papers, to send out a trusty messenger, and long enough for that messenger's return.

The messenger returned with some men in blue helmets, and one, in authority, with a peaked cap.

Mr Edmund Templar, full of love and remorse and pity and the protective instinct, waiting for his love's answer to his loving entreaty for an interview—an explanation of his hateful letter, wondered idly what they wanted.

Enlightenment was not delayed.

Mr Edmund Templar looked round indignantly at a touch on the shoulder, and found himself arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Isidore Saccage.

They took him away in a cab.

CHAPTER XIX

RELEASE

To be arrested in error for a crime of which one knows nothing, is a trying incident; but one survives it. Edmund Templar was little the worse for his experience. Indeed, it is possible that his character was permanently benefited—steadied, as it were, by the contact with the iron-strong realities that clip the murderer like the teeth of a rat-trap. At anyrate, whatever else he does he will never do murder. He knows now that he is not the desperate character which he believed himself to be, and he will never again say, even in his nobler moments, or even to himself, that if he had met this or that man face to face he would have shot him, no matter how personally repugnant may be to him this man or that.

The palpitating publicity of a coroner's court is no light thing; but when your heart is vibrating to a different measure — to a measure of immeasurable grief and pity and regret and love, the greater acts as opiate to the meaner pain. You come through it somehow. Sylvia did.

And even John Ferrier, least fortunate of the three

whom the law, wide-armed, clutched, faced quite gallantly the sentence of two years' imprisonment for that old forgery, the sentence which he braved for a woman whom he knew for some thirty-six hours, and whom he knows as no other man will ever know her. He faced the sentence, but Uncle Mosenthal saw to it that he did not have to endure it.

"There are wires and wires," he said, "wires that you see not, that continually cross and cross and cross and intertwine. And it is not a few of them that I hold in my hand. And it is little enough to pull wires for the child of my heart—I, Uncle Moses who was not here when most he needed was. And my Berlin mission was all they desired. I am the beloved of princes; so fear not, my pigeon—he who suffers for you shall not suffer long. And you to the Riviera go, with the good Dusa, and look at the sea and grow strong and forget; and Uncle Moses will for you a beautiful villa find—a villa with a beautiful name. No more of the House with no Address."

The House with no Address was indeed no more. Its history, its architecture, its mechanical contrivances, its secret passage, its approaches, its inmates, had been for a day the admiration and despair of the congested Press. And the crowds that gathered before the fronts of the houses that concealed it, and the mews with the mysterious garage, had to be controlled and moved on by the police.

Our drama is as improbable as life itself. Can

one label it more definitely? Its penultimate scene is at the Ringwood house, where the Aunt and the Uncle toast their feet at the apple-wood fire.

"There's no wood like it," says the Uncle. "I never let them waste the orchard thinnings."

Mr Templar is there, in his demure dinner-jacket,—a little thinner, a little more serious. To be the hero in the story of Salome and the Head takes something out of a man, I assure you.

"It's most shocking," the Aunt is saying, and she prides herself in the tact which withholds her from saying, "This is what comes of your goings-on." "I'm not strait-laced, Heaven knows, but the scandals that came out in that case—well! And that house. You *see*—it makes you see—there must always have been something wrong, or why be so deceitful and careful, not having any address and a house inside two other houses, like Chinese puzzles? Up to no good, you may depend, from the very beginning. I always said, and I always will say . . . ."

"My dear Louise," the Uncle interposes, "the girl wanted to keep straight. That's why she had that rummy house—to keep off . . . . to keep off," he adds lamely, with an eye to the proprieties and the Aunt's feelings, "to keep off undesirable acquaintances."

The Aunt daresays.

"You may say what you like," says the Uncle—there was a passage at the inquest which has

reassured and makes him generous—"that girl was straight as a die."

The Aunt comes as near to a snort as the daughter of a minor canon of Worcester can come.

"You're quite mistaken": the Uncle's generosity expands; "she was perfectly straight. Where is she now? Tut, tut—I saw it in *The Telegraph*—did you notice, Edmund?"

"She is at Juan des Pins," says Edmund shortly.

"Of course. We drove over there from Cannes." The Aunt remembers it perfectly. "All sand and pine-woods. Just the place for a déclassée actress. Poor girl! it was a pity!"

The connection between sands and pine-woods and actresses déclassées is obviously plain to the Aunt as the nose on anybody's face.

"I daresay she'll marry well—when things have blown over a bit. That lame boy—all alone in the house with her. And Mr Ferrier behaving as he did! It all tells against a girl. It all tells," the Uncle opines, "but these things blow over. People are much more charitable than they used to be."

"People are less particular about right and wrong Henry. That's what you mean. It's the Board School education and the spread of printing among the lower classes. It's breaking down all our landmarks. Nothing's wrong now. I may be old-fashioned, but I do believe in respecting the ten commandments."

"And which do you think *she* hasn't respected?" says Templar, using the poker a little violently.

"Oh, well," says the Aunt, as though deploring the breakage of every commandment and the very stone tables themselves, to boot, "there's one thing I'm thankful for, these profane Salome dances have been stopped by law. I can't think what the Government was about not to stop it long ago."

"Perhaps the Prime Minister admired the lady's dancing," suggests the Uncle with a decorous little chuckle.

"You never know, do you?" the Aunt agrees. "These smart-set people. And that sort of girl attracts men." She speaks as though the attraction were a wilful vice.

"Well, whatever she's done she's paid for it, poor girl!" says the Uncle.

And then Templar stands up.

"She's done nothing," he says, "nothing. She's the victim of circumstances."

"They always are," says the Aunt, and sniffs.

"It's not her fault. Look here. I want ' tell you something."

"Better not, dear boy," says the Uncle hastily. "Let bygones be bygones."

"Bygones? What I mean to tell you is—that I'm engaged to be married to her."

"But she expressly said you weren't," the Uncle is surprised into saying, "at the inquest. The coroner asked that."

"Ah!" says Templar, and the tenderness in his voice sets the helmet on the aunt's armed hostility,

"that was her noble unselfishness. She didn't want to compromise me."

"I'm glad she had so much decency," says the Aunt. "Of course you're not engaged. How could vou be engaged and the girl not know it?"

"I'm going to her to-morrow," says Edmund, standing up. "I got her address from her uncle this morning—and, Aunt Louise, believe me, she's everything that you'd wish my wife to be, and when we're married I shall bring her to you. You've always been like my mother," he adds appealingly.

"Henry," says the Aunt, "be so kind as to light my bedroom candle. I'm too much upset to bear any more. We'll talk this over in the morning, Edmund."

But in the morning Edmund is gone.

. . . . . .

It was in the white sand by the pine-trees a
Juan des Pins that our hero and heroine met again
They had not met, except with a sea of faces be
tween them at the coroner's court, since that da
whose dawn had found her asleep in his arms. H
went to her hotel. Uncle Moses, rubbing his hand
at the prospect of the happy ending of Sandra'
tragic story, had joyfully yielded her address. Th
hotel people had indicated the direction of her wall
And between sea and pines he found her. She wa
sitting on the white sand gazing out towards th
Ile Sainte Marguerite—the Island of Prisoners.

"Sandra," he said, and she turned her pale face towards him.

"Why have you come?" she said.

The question was keenly embarrassing.

"To—to fetch you," he said, trampling the embarrassment under the foot of a tremulous self-assertion.

"Why didn't you come before?"

"I thought you ought to be quiet a little," he said, "and I did not know your address till the day before yesterday."

It was impossible to explain to her the doubts and hesitations that he had fought and conquered, but he felt rather noble as he remembered them.

"We will be married at Nice," he went on confidently, tenderly, "at the Consul's. My aunt and uncle long to know you," he added falsely. "Oh, Sandra! what is it? Haven't you forgiven me?"

"No," said she.

"Can't you forgive me?"

And "No" she said again.

"But I love you," he said, as though that settled everything.

"No," she said for the third time.

"I don't love you? If you only knew!"

"I do know. You don't love me—you never have loved me. You don't know what love means. Denny knew. He died for me. But you . . . . the moment anything happened—anything that wasn't romance and pretty kisses and *Family Herald* sentiment—you

sheered off, hid in a corner, left me to do the best I could. And you wrote me that letter."

"I was mad," he said. "I found . . . . I found the body. For a little while I was quite mad. I did doubt you—I don't deny it; I was a fool—I was a beast. But almost directly I got sane again. I tried to come to you, and they arrested me."

"And I," she said, and turned her tragic eyes on his, "I found the head—and your letter. But I never thought that you were a murderer. And you—you believed that of me."

"I was a fool," he said again, weakly.

"And if I had believed it of you, what do you think I should have done? I should have gone to you—helped you—stood by you—died for you, if that could have done you any good. But you—you believed that I had done *that*—and done it for love of you,—and you skulked away and left me to bear it alone."

"You're most unjust," he said, and felt what he said, bitterly. "It was a most ghastly shock finding the body."

"*I* danced with the head. I danced with it a second time, so that someone I loved—oh! not as I loved you, and as you pretended you loved me—so that someone I loved should have a few hours of peace and die at home and not in a prison cell. Go away. I've no more to say to you."

"But . . . . you can't mean it": he choked on the words. "You're overwrought, dearest. I love you. Forgive me."

"Never in this world," she said. "Go!"

Then the cur that lies curled up asleep in all of us awoke in him, and growled.

"Oh—I see!" he said. "I'm sorry I was so dense. You were quickly consoled."

"Consoled?" she said, in what was almost a cry.

The cur showed its teeth.

"Oh—I see!" said Mr Edmund Templar again: "of course there's some other man."

It was then that she stood up and looked at him.

"Yes," she said, "there *is* another man. Thank God there is another man, a different sort of man—a man who gave up his liberty for *me*—and for *you*. He thought *you* were the murderer—I never thought it, but he did. He thought you had had the misfortune to kill that man and the courage to shoot yourself—for me. He didn't know you as I do—did he? And to give me a few hours with you, and to make your dying hours peaceful—but *you* weren't dying, not you, you were trying to get away from being mixed up in my troubles, weren't you?—he went to prison for us—for me and you."

"Oh!—*that's* the man, is it?" said Templar. "Well—two years is pretty light for a forger, and . . . ."

"There's no sentence for cowards," she said.

"Sandra, I love you!" he cried, in a last appeal He knew it to be vain, but the situation demanded it.

"And I," she said, "love the man who sacrificed

everything for me. And when he comes out of prison I shall be at the gate. And if he'll have me I shall marry him."

"Ah!" said Templar, the cur rampant. "And you'll be Lady Ferrier some day, won't you? That's always something!"

And at that last outrage she softened.

"Ah, don't!" she said: "you won't like to remember that you said that. Remember, we did love each other—for a little while."

. . . . . .

But when he thinks of Salome's story, which is also his story, it is just that one last yelp of the cur in him that Edmund Templar cannot forget.

The Aunt, when she heard that after all there was to be no marriage between her nephew and the dancing woman, summed up the situation thus:—

"I never believed that Providence would allow such a thing. Never. It would have broken my heart. I knew it could never be permitted. And I was so terrified that it might happen! And poor, dear Edmund, how shamefully she deceived him! The girl must have been mad. To refuse Edmund! But there was something very queer and underhand about the whole business, even before the crimes began. And that wretched cripple, too. Ah, well, 'there's a Divinity doth shape our ends.' I've always been convinced of that."

. . . . . .

They let prisoners out very early in the morning. At eight, I think. At eight o'clock on a March morning the sun can shine very gaily. The old walls stand up strong and spiky against the new sky. The great gates open, and tired people come out, blinking, into the light. Sometimes they come out into a world where no one wants them except the police. It must be a terrible thing to be wanted by no one but the police.

But sometimes it happens that a man coming out of hell finds heaven waiting for him — hands that implore his hands—a face that his coming illuminates, as a candle lights up a Chinese lantern—eyes that see nothing in the world but his face—a heart that beats to a tune of wild gladness. And all that his long prison life has painted for him as lost for ever, out of reach, out of hope, is waiting for him in the chill, sweet morning, waiting with arms held out, saying: "Take me, for I am thine!"

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