30 Best British Short Stories

ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК: УЧИМСЯ У КЛАССИКОВ

30 лучших рассказов британских писателей

ORIGINAL

A. Conan Doyle * Oscar Wilde * Charles Dickens * Jerome K. Jerome * David Herbert Lawrence * Robert Louis Stevenson * Walter Scott * Thomas Hardy & Others

Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков

Коллектив авторов

30 лучших рассказов британских писателей / 30 Best British Short Stories

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«Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» – это только оригинальные тексты лучших произведений мировой литературы. Эти книги станут эффективным и увлекательным пособием для изучающих иностранный язык на хорошем «продолжающем» и «продвинутом» уровне. Они помогут эффективно расширить словарный запас, подскажут, где и как правильно употреблять устойчивые выражения и грамматические конструкции, просто подарят радость от чтения. В конце книги дана краткая информация о культуроведческих, страноведческих, исторических и географических реалиях описываемого периода, которая поможет лучше ориентироваться в тексте произведения.Серия «Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» адресована широкому кругу читателей, хорошо владеющих английским языком и стремящихся к его совершенствованию.

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Составление комментариев Н. Самуэльян

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A.J. Alan
My Adventure in Norfolk

I don't know how it is with you, but during February *my* wife generally says to me: 'Have you thought at all about what we are going to do for August?' And, of course, I say, 'No,' and then she begins looking through the advertisements of **bungalows** to let.

Well, this happened last year, as usual, and she eventually produced one that looked possible. It said: '**Norfolk** – Hickling Broad – Furnished Bungalow – Garden – Garage, Boathouse,' and all the rest of it – Oh – *and* plate and linen. It also mentioned an exorbitant rent. I pointed out the bit about the rent, but my wife said: 'Yes, you'll have to go down and see the landlord, and get him to come down. They always do.' As a matter of fact, they always don't, but that's a detail.

Anyway, I wrote off to the landlord and asked if he could arrange for me to stay the night in the place to see what it was really like. He wrote back and said: 'Certainly,' and that he was engaging Mrs. So-and-So to come in and 'oblige me,' and make up the beds and so forth.

I tell you, we do things thoroughly – in our family – I have to sleep in all the beds, and when I come home my wife counts the bruises and decides whether they will do or not.

At any rate, I arrived, in a blinding snowstorm, at about *the* most desolate spot on God's earth. I'd come to Potter Heigham by train, and been driven on (it was a good five miles from the station). Fortunately, Mrs. Selston, the old lady who was going to 'do' for me, was there, and she'd lighted a fire, and cooked me a steak, for which I was truly thankful.

I somehow think the cow, or whatever they get steaks off, had only died that morning. It was very – er – obstinate. While I dined, she talked to me. She *would* tell me all about an operation her husband had just had. *All* about it. It was almost a lecture on surgery. The steak was rather underdone, and it sort of made me feel I was illustrating her lecture. Anyway, she put me clean off my dinner, and then departed for the night.

I explored the bungalow and just had a look outside. It was, of course, very dark, but not snowing quite so hard. The garage stood about fifteen yards from the back door. I walked round it, but didn't go in. I also went down to the edge of the broad, and verified the boathouse. The whole place looked as though it might be all right in the summertime, but just then it made one wonder why people ever wanted to go to the North Pole.

Anyhow, I went indoors, and settled down by the fire. You've no idea how quiet it was; even the waterfowl had taken a night off – at least, they weren't working.

At a few minutes to eleven I heard the first noise there'd been since Mrs. What's-her-name – Selston – had cleared out. It was the sound of a car. If it had gone straight by I probably shouldn't have noticed it at all, only it didn't go straight by; it seemed to stop farther up the road, before it got to the house. Even that didn't make much impression. After all, cars *do* stop.

It must have been five or ten minutes before it was borne in on me that it hadn't gone on again. So I got up and looked out of the window. It had left off snowing, and there was a glare through the gate that showed that there were headlamps somewhere just out of sight. I thought I might as well stroll out and investigate.

I found a fair-sized limousine pulled up in the middle of the road about twenty yards short of my gate. The light was rather blinding, but when I got close to it I found a girl with the bonnet open, tinkering with the engine. Quite an attractive young female, from what one could see, but she was so muffled up in furs that it was rather hard to tell.

I said:

'Er – good evening – anything I can do.'

She said she didn't know what was the matter. The engine had just stopped, and wouldn't start again. And it *had*! It wouldn't even turn, either with the self-starter or the handle. The whole thing was awfully hot, and I asked her whether there was any water in the radiator. She didn't see why there shouldn't be, there always had been. This didn't strike me as entirely conclusive. I said, we'd better put some in, and see what happened. She said, why not use snow? But I thought not. There was an idea at the back of my mind that there was some reason why it was unwise to use melted snow, and it wasn't until I arrived back with a bucketful that I remembered what it was. Of course – goitre.

When I got back to her she'd got the radiator cap off, and inserted what a Danish friend of mine calls a 'funeral.' We poured a little water in.... Luckily I'd warned her to stand clear. The first tablespoonful that went in came straight out again, red hot, and blew the 'funeral' sky-high. We waited a few minutes until things had cooled down a bit, but it was no go. As fast as we poured water in it simply ran out again into the road underneath. It was quite evident that she'd been driving with the radiator bone dry and that her engine had seized right up.

I told her so. She said:

'Does that mean I've got to stop here all night?'

I explained that it wasn't as bad as all that; that is, if she cared to accept the hospitality of my poor roof (and it *was* a poor roof – it let the wet in). But she wouldn't hear of it. By the by, she didn't know the – er – circumstances, so it wasn't that. No, she wanted to leave the car where it was and go on on foot.

I said:

'Don't be silly, it's miles to anywhere.'

However, at that moment we heard a car coming along the road, the same way as she'd come. We could see its lights, too, although it was a very long way off. You know how flat Norfolk is – you can see a terrific distance.

I said:

'There's the way out of all your troubles. This thing, whatever it is, will give you a tow to the nearest garage, or at any rate a lift to some hotel.'

One would have expected her to show some relief, but she didn't. I began to wonder what she jolly well *did* want. She wouldn't let me help her to stop where she was, and she didn't seem anxious for anyone to help her to go anywhere else.

She was quite peculiar about it. She gripped hold of my arm, and said:

'What do you think this is that's coming?'

I said:

'I'm sure I don't know, being a stranger in these parts, but it sounds like a lorry full of milk cans.'

I offered to lay her sixpence about it (this was before the betting-tax came in). She'd have had to pay, too, because it *was* a lorry full of milk cans. The driver had to pull up because there wasn't room to get by.

He got down and asked if there was anything he could do to help. We explained the situation. He said he was going to **Norwich**, and was quite ready to give her a tow if she wanted it. However, she wouldn't do that, and it was finally decided to shove her car into my garage for the night, to be sent for next day, and the lorry was to take her along to Norwich.

Well, I managed to find the key of the garage, and the lorry-driver – Williams, his name was – and I ran the car in and locked the door. This having been done – (ablative absolute) – I suggested that it was a very cold night. Williams agreed, and said he didn't mind if he did. So I took them both indoors and mixed them a stiff whisky and water each. There wasn't any soda. And, naturally, the whole thing had left *me* very cold, too. I hadn't an overcoat on.

Up to now I hadn't seriously considered the young woman. For one thing it had been dark, *and* there had been a seized engine to look at. Er – I'm afraid that's not a very gallant remark. What I mean is that to anyone with a mechanical mind a motor-car in that condition is much more interesting

than – er – well, it *is* very interesting – but why labour the point? However, in the sitting-room, in the lamplight, it was possible to get more of an idea. She was a little older than I'd thought, and her eyes were too close together.

Of course, she wasn't a – how shall I put it? Her manners weren't quite easy and she was careful with her English. *You* know. But that wasn't it. She treated us with a lack of friendliness which was – well, we'd done nothing to deserve it. There was a sort of vague hostility and suspicion, which seemed rather hard lines, considering. Also, she was so anxious to keep in the shadow that if I hadn't moved the lamp away she'd never have got near the fire at all.

And the way she hurried the wretched Williams over his drink was quite distressing; and foolish, too, as *he* was going to drive, but that was her – funnel. When he'd gone out to start up his engine I asked her if she was all right for money, and she apparently was. Then they started off, and I shut up the place and went upstairs.

There happened to be a local guide-book in my bedroom, with maps in it. I looked at these and couldn't help wondering where the girl in the car had come from; I mean my road seemed so very unimportant. The sort of road one might use if one wanted to avoid people. If one were driving a stolen car, for instance. This was quite a thrilling idea. I thought it might be worth while having another look at the car. So I once more unhooked the key from the kitchen dresser and sallied forth into the snow. It was as black as pitch, and so still that my candle hardly flickered. It wasn't a large garage, and the car nearly filled it. By the by, we'd backed it in so as to make it easier to tow it out again.

The engine I'd already seen, so I squeezed past along the wall and opened the door in the body part of the car. At least, I only turned the handle, and the door was pushed open from the inside and – something – fell out on me. It pushed me quite hard, and wedged me against the wall. It also knocked the candle out of my hand and left me in the dark – which was a bit of a nuisance. I wondered what on earth the thing was – barging into me like that – so I felt it, rather gingerly, and found it was a man – a dead man – with a moustache. He'd evidently been sitting propped up against the door. I managed to put him back, as decorously as possible, and shut the door again.

After a lot of grovelling about under the car I found the candle and lighted it, and opened the opposite door and switched on the little lamp in the roof – and then – oo-er!

Of course, I had to make some sort of examination. He was an extremely tall and thin individual. He must have been well over six feet three. He was dark and very cadaverous-looking. In fact, I don't suppose he'd ever looked so cadaverous in his life. He was wearing a trench coat.

It wasn't difficult to tell what he'd died of. He'd been shot through the back. I found the hole just under the right scrofula, or scalpel – what is shoulder-blade, anyway? Oh, clavicle – stupid of me – well, that's where it was, and the bullet had evidently gone through into the lung. I say 'evidently,' and leave it at that.

There were no papers in his pockets, and no tailor's name on his clothes, but there was a note-case, with nine pounds in it. Altogether a most unpleasant business. Of course, it doesn't do to question the workings of Providence, but one couldn't help wishing it hadn't happened. It was just a little mysterious, too – er – who had killed him. It wasn't likely that the girl had or she wouldn't have been joy-riding about the country with him; and if someone else had murdered him why hadn't she mentioned it? Anyway, she hadn't and she'd gone, so one couldn't do anything for the time being. No telephone, of course. I just locked up the garage and went to bed. That was two o'clock.

Next morning I woke early, for some reason or other, and it occurred to me as a good idea to go and have a look at things – by daylight, and before Mrs. Selston turned up. So I did. The first thing that struck me was that it had snowed heavily during the night, because there were no wheel tracks or footprints, and the second was that I'd left the key in the garage door. I opened it and went in. The place was completely empty. No car, no body, no nothing. There was a patch of grease on the floor where I'd dropped the candle, otherwise there was nothing to show I'd been there before. One of two

things must have happened: either some people had come along during the night and taken the car away, or else I'd fallen asleep in front of the fire and dreamt the whole thing.

Then I remembered the whisky glasses.

They should still be in the sitting-room. I went back to look, and they were, all three of them. So it *hadn't* been a dream and the car *had* been fetched away, but they must have been jolly quiet over it.

The girl had left her glass on the mantel-piece, and it showed several very clearly defined finger-marks. Some were mine, naturally, because I'd fetched the glass from the kitchen and poured out the drink for her, but hers, her finger-marks, were clean, and mine were oily, so it was quite easy to tell them apart. It isn't necessary to point out that this glass was very important. There'd evidently been a murder, or something of that kind, and the girl must have known all about it, even if she hadn't actually done it herself, so anything she had left in the way of evidence ought to be handed over to the police; and this was all she *had* left. So I packed it up with meticulous care in an old biscuit-box out of the larder.

When Mrs. Selston came I settled up with her and came back to Town. Oh, I called on the landlord on the way and told him I'd 'let him know' about the bungalow. Then I caught my train, and in due course drove straight to Scotland Yard. I went up and saw my friend there. I produced the glass and asked him if his people could identify the marks. He said: 'Probably not,' but he sent it down to the fingerprint department and asked me where it came from. I said: 'Never you mind; let's have the identification first.' He said: 'All right.'

They're awfully quick, these people – the clerk was back in three minutes with a file of papers. They knew the girl all right. They told me her name and showed me her photograph; not flattering. Quite an adventurous lady, from all accounts. In the early part of her career she'd done time twice for shop-lifting, chiefly in the book department. Then she'd what they call 'taken up with' a member of one of those race-gangs one sometimes hears about.

My pal went on to say that there'd been a fight between two of these gangs, in the course of which her friend had got shot. She'd managed to get him away in a car, but it had broken down somewhere in Norfolk. So she'd left it and the dead man in someone's garage, and had started off for Norwich in a lorry. Only she never got there. On the way the lorry had skidded, and both she and the driver – a fellow called Williams – had been thrown out, and they'd rammed their heads against a brick wall, which everyone knows is a fatal thing to do. At least, it was in their case.

I said: 'Look here, it's all very well, but you simply can't know all this; there hasn't been time – it only happened last night.'

He said: 'Last night be blowed! It all happened in February, nineteen nineteen. The people you've described have been dead for years.'

I said: 'Oh!'

And to think that I might have stuck to that nine pounds!

Stacy Aumonier
Where Was Wych Street?

In the public bar of the Wagtail, in **Wapping**, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasize the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so – one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends, and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter – indeed, to every one's knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply-faced young man who was known as The Agent. Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he 'arranged things' for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner. The other two people were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high, whining, insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, The Agent, whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

'Where was Wych Street, ma?'

'Lord!' exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. 'Don't you know, dearie? You must be a young 'un, you must. Why, when I was a gal every one knew Wych Street. It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like.'

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat, and said:

'Wych Street used to be a turnin' runnin' from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'Oh, no, old boy,' chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference. 'If you'll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of **the old Globe Theatre** that used to pass by the church.'

'I know what I'm talkin' about,' growled Meadows. Mrs. Dawes's high nasal whine broke in:

'Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?'

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap. He looked up.

'Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys – when I was **Covent Garden** way. It was at right angles to **the Strand**, just east of Wellington Street.'

'No, it warn't. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street.'

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognized them at once as three of what was known at that time as 'The Gallows Ring.' Every member of 'The Gallows Ring' had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry

devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shoplifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

'The Gallows Ring' was not popular in Wapping, for the reason that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West-end. They considered 'The Gallows Ring' an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference – an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

'Ben, you're a hot old devil, you are. We was just 'aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?'

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

'Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, 'cors my aunt what died from blood p'ison, after eatin' tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop –'

'Yus,' barked Ben, emphatically. 'I know where Wych Street was – it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to **Waterloo Station**.'

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, thought fit to intervene.

'Nope. You's all wrong, cap'n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where the Strand takes a side-line up west.'

Ben turned on him fiercely.

'What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I've told yer where Wych Street was.'

'Yus, and I know where it was,' interposed Meadows.

'Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'I didn't ask yer what *you* thought,' growled Ben.

'Well, I suppose I've a right to an opinion?'

'You always think you know everything, you do.'

'You can just keep yer mouth shut.'

'It 'ud take more'n you to shut it.'

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar: 'Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling – please.'

The affair might have been subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

'Don't you take no lip from 'im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, 'e always thinks 'e's goin' to come it over every one.'

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben's supporters gave her a gentle push backwards. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of 'The Gallows Ring' fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

'Don't! Don't!'

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man who had pushed her through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orming closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man's skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

'Beat it! Beat it for God's sake!' called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid ***hors de combat*** by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walls. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in the pursuit, merely fled indoors. The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of an empty house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

'If they cop us, it means swinging.'

'Was the nigger done in?'

'I think so. But even if 'e wasn't, there was that other affair the night before last. The game's up.'

The ground-floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and – the most precious possession – three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky; then Ben said: 'We'll be able to keep 'em quiet for a bit, anyway,' and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur, 'It means swinging, anyway.'

And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street. It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door, Sub-Inspector Wraithe, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motor-car, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison-gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door with a bullet through his heart. The medical officer to the Court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, 'almost like an explosion.' Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annexe of Messrs. Morrel's piano-factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded.

At the inquiry held under Chief Justice Pengammon various odd interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young **K.C.**, distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box. 'Now,' said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, 'I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these

other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the Wagtail, enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?'

'Diseases, sir.'

'Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?'

'Pardon?'

'Was there a serious dispute about diseases?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, what was the subject of the dispute?'

'We was arguin' as to where Wych Street was, sir.'

'What's that?' said his lordship.

'The witness states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was.'

'Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?'

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

'Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship's description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little further east – at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin's in the Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn't it, Mrs. Dawes?'

'Well, sir, my aunt who died from eating tinned lobster used to work at a corset-shop. I ought to know.'

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly.

'Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me.'

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a chief justice, although that chief justice be a hopeless old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

'If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to **Kingsway** and ended at the back of what is now **the Aldwych Theatre.**'

'Oh, no, Mr. Backer!' exclaimed Lowes-Parlby.

His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out:

'The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case.'

It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the Wagtail, Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes, and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this Special Inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

* * *

In a few weeks' time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Chief Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true, and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours. But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his fiancée, and it was considered the most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

* * *

One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet – an amateur. He had never taken sick, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent, and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway, and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chambers to study other matters. But before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

'The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data.'

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present at the dinner at Lord Vermeer's, where a rather deplorable incident occurred. And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from **Lancashire**, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner-party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of **Bakkan**. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley,

a very tame Socialist **M.P.**, and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him. Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon. Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

'Talking of landmarks,' he said, 'we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub as to where Wych Street was.'

'I remember,' said Lord Vermeer. 'A perfectly absurd discussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was.'

'Where would you say it was, sir?' asked Lowes-Parlby.

'Why to be sure, it ran from the corner of **Chancery Lane** and ended at the second turning after **the Law Courts**, going west.'

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

'Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to **New Oxford Street** on the south side, just between it and **Lincoln's Inn Fields**.'

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting under the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

'Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little further east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand.'

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upwards, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out: 'Really? How wonderful – to have such comprehensive knowledge!'

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: 'Damned impudence!' Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

* * *

In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd – so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn't know! It was the little accumulation of pin-pricks all arising out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to – well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn't that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularity. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera-singer. She had been engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music. Adela was laughing, and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career… The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkies. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his ***inamorata***.

'Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?'

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his heart beat quickly. An uncontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve-centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis – well, he could always apologize. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

'Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear.' He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realized that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy-chair in the corner like a piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

'What the devil have you done?'

'Excuse me, sir. I'm afraid I don't understand. Is it Sandeman–?'

'Sandeman has gone.'

'Oh, I'm sorry.'

'Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!'

'I'm awfully sorry. I didn't realize–'

'Realize! Sit down, and don't assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me.'

'But I–'

'Listen to me. Do you know that the government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger-zone. If certain powers can usurp our authority – and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine – you know what I mean – before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends.'

'I really can't see, sir, how I should know all this.'

‘You can’t see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble – in my house!’

‘He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him.’

‘Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was no call to act in the way you did. And you – you think of going into politics!’

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

‘I’m very sorry.’

‘I don’t want your sorrow. I want something more practical.’

‘What’s that, sir?’

‘You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman’s, find him, and apologize. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can’t find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go.’

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at **Knightsbridge**. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologizing that was done should be done after a night’s reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial – a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologize. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some footling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment – the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have – a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; some one who understood and sympathized. A sudden vision came to him of Adela’s face grinning about the prospective visit of La Toccata, and again the low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be – just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all – a rag? Was life a rag – a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low ‘Damn!’ and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

> ‘*Dear Mr. Sandeman*, –
>
> I must apologize for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can’t think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me.
>
> ‘Yours cordially,
>
> *‘FRANCIS LOWES-PARLBY.’*

Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, ‘It’s all positively absurd!’ But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something

at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental, something that could only be expressed by one word-truth. If he had *really* loved Adela – if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right – why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't? 'Isn't there, after all,' said one of the little demons, 'something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep.'

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes some mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently risen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

* * *

Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent, but frugal, meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge had, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the law of evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

'I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of limited observation – the opinion of an outsider, you may say – so often it happens – the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man – a brilliant career – almost shattered. People make statements without–'

He put the nuts back on the dish, and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

'Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?'

The Lord Chief justice grunted.

'Wych Street! Of course I do.'

'Where would you say it was, my lord?'

'Why, here, of course.'

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

'It used to run from there to here.'

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went towards a breast pocket where he kept a note-book with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that – an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

'Do you remember it?' said the Lord Chief justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

'Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street.'

Sabine Baring-Gould
Aunt Joanna

In the Land's End district is the little church-town of Zennor. There is no village to speak of – a few scattered farms, and here and there a cluster of cottages. The district is bleak, the soil does not lie deep over granite that peers through the surface on exposed spots, where the furious gales from the ocean sweep the land. If trees ever existed there, they have been swept away by the blast, but the golden furze or gorse defies all winds, and clothes the moorland with a robe of splendour, and the heather flushes the slopes with crimson towards the decline of summer, and mantles them in soft, warm brown in winter, like the fur of an animal.

In Zennor is a little church, built of granite, rude and simple of construction, crouching low, to avoid the gales, but with a tower that has defied the winds and the lashing rains, because wholly devoid of sculptured detail, which would have afforded the blasts something to lay hold of and eat away. In Zennor parish is one of the finest **cromlechs** in **Cornwall**, a huge slab of unwrought stone like a table, poised on the points of standing upright blocks as rude as the mass they sustain.

Near this monument of a hoar and indeed unknown antiquity lived an old woman by herself, in a small cottage of one story in height, built of moor stones set in earth, and pointed only with lime. It was thatched with heather, and possessed but a single chimney that rose but little above the apex of the roof, and had two slates set on the top to protect the rising smoke from being blown down the chimney into the cottage when the wind was from the west or from the east. When, however, it drove from north or south, then the smoke must take care of itself. On such occasions it was wont to find its way out of the door, and little or none went up the chimney.

The only fuel burnt in this cottage was peat – not the solid black peat from deep, bogs, but turf of only a spade graft, taken from the surface, and composed of undissolved roots. Such fuel gives flame, which the other does not; but, on the other hand, it does not throw out the same amount of heat, nor does it last one half the time.

The woman who lived in the cottage was called by the people of the neighbourhood Aunt Joanna. What her family name was but few remembered, nor did it concern herself much. She had no relations at all, with the exception of a grand-niece, who was married to a small tradesman, a wheelwright near the church. But Joanna and her great-niece were not on speaking terms. The girl had mortally offended the old woman by going to a dance at **St. Ives**, against her express orders. It was at this dance that she had met the wheelwright, and this meeting, and the treatment the girl had met with from her aunt for having gone to it, had led to the marriage. For Aunt Joanna was very strict in her **Wesleyanism**, and bitterly hostile to all such carnal amusements as dancing and play-acting. Of the latter there was none in that wild west Cornish district, and no temptation ever afforded by a strolling company setting up its booth within reach of Zennor. But dancing, though denounced, still drew the more independent spirits together. Rose Penaluna had been with her great-aunt after her mother's death. She was a lively girl, and when she heard of a dance at St. Ives, and had been asked to go to it, although forbidden by Aunt Joanna, she stole from the cottage at night, and found her way to St. Ives.

Her conduct was reprehensible certainly. But that of Aunt Joanna was even more so, for when she discovered that the girl had left the house she barred her door, and refused to allow Rose to re-enter it. The poor girl had been obliged to take refuge the same night at the nearest farm and sleep in an outhouse, and next morning to go into St. Ives and entreat an acquaintance to take her in till she could enter into service. Into service she did not go, for when Abraham Hext, the carpenter, heard how she had been treated, he at once proposed, and in three weeks married her. Since then no communication had taken place between the old woman and her grand-niece. As Rose knew, Joanna was implacable in her resentments, and considered that she had been acting aright in what she had done.

The nearest farm to Aunt Joanna's cottage was occupied by the Hockins. One day Elizabeth, the farmer's wife, saw the old woman outside the cottage as she was herself returning from market; and, noticing how bent and feeble Joanna was, she halted, and talked to her, and gave her good advice.

'See you now, auntie, you'm gettin' old and crimmed wi' rheumatics. How can you get about? An' there's no knowin' but you might be took bad in the night. You ought to have some little lass wi' you to mind you.'

'I don't want nobody, thank the Lord.'

'Not just now, auntie, but suppose any chance ill-luck were to come on you. And then, in the bad weather, you'm not fit to go abroad after the turves, and you can't get all you want – tay and sugar and milk for yourself now. It would be handy to have a little maid by you.'

'Who should I have?' asked Joanna. 'Well, now, you couldn't do better than take little Mary, Rose Hext's eldest girl. She's a handy maid, and bright and pleasant to speak to.'

'No,' answered the old woman, 'I'll have none o' they Hexts, not I. The Lord is agin Rose and all her family, I know it. I'll have none of them.'

'But, auntie, you must be nigh on ninety.'

'I be ower that. But what o' that? Didn't **Sarah**, the wife of **Abraham**, live to an hundred and seven and twenty years, and that in spite of him worritin' of her wi' that owdacious maid of hem, Hagar? If it hadn't been for their goings on, of Abraham and **Hagar**, it's my belief that she'd ha' held on to a hundred and fifty-seven. I thank the Lord I've never had no man to worrit me. So why I shouldn't equal Sarah's life I don't see.'

Then she went indoors and shut the door.

After that a week elapsed without Mrs. Hockin seeing the old woman. She passed the cottage, but no Joanna was about. The door was not open, and usually it was. Elizabeth spoke about this to her husband. 'Jabez,' said she, 'I don't like the looks o' this; I've kept my eye open, and there be no Auntie Joanna hoppin' about. Whativer can be up? It's my opinion us ought to go and see.'

'Well, I've naught on my hands now,' said the farmer, 'so I reckon we will go.' The two walked together to the cottage. No smoke issued from the chimney, and the door was shut. Jabez knocked, but there came no answer; so he entered, followed by his wife.

There was in the cottage but the kitchen, with one bedroom at the side. The hearth was cold. 'There's some'ut up,' said Mrs. Hockin.

'I reckon it's the old lady be down,' replied her husband, and, throwing open the bedroom door, he said: 'Sure enough, and no mistake – there her be, dead as a dried pilchard.'

And in fact Auntie Joanna had died in the night, after having so confidently affirmed her conviction that she would live to the age of a hundred and twenty-seven.

'Whativer shall we do?' asked Mrs. Hockin. 'I reckon,' said her husband, 'us had better take an inventory of what is here, lest wicked rascals come in and steal anything and everything.'

'Folks bain't so bad as that, and a corpse in the house,' observed Mrs. Hockin. 'Don't be sure o' that – these be terrible wicked times,' said the husband. 'And I sez, sez I, no harm is done in seein' what the old creetur had got.'

'Well, surely,' acquiesced Elizabeth, 'there is no harm in that.' In the bedroom was an old oak chest, and this the farmer and his wife opened. To their surprise they found in it a silver teapot, and half a dozen silver spoons.

'Well, now,' exclaimed Elizabeth Hockin, 'fancy her havin' these – and me only **Britannia metal**.'

'I reckon she came of a good family,' said Jabez. 'Leastwise, I've heard as how she were once well off.'

'And look here!' exclaimed Elizabeth, 'there's fine and beautiful linen underneath – sheets and pillow-cases.'

‘But look here!’ cried Jabez, ‘blessed if the taypot bain’t chock-full o’ money! Whereiver did she get it from?’

‘Her’s been in the way of showing folk the Zennor Quoit, visitors from St. Ives and **Penzance**, and she’s had scores o’ shillings that way.’

‘Lord!’ exclaimed Jabez. ‘I wish she’d left it to me, and I could buy a cow; I want another cruel bad.’

‘Ay, we do, terrible,’ said Elizabeth. ‘But just look to her bed, what torn and wretched linen be on that – and here these fine bedclothes all in the chest.’

‘Who’ll get the silver taypot and spoons, and the money?’ inquired Jabez.

‘Her had no kin – none but Rose Hext, and her couldn’t abide her. Last words her said to me was that she’d ’have never naught to do wi’ the Hexts, they and all their belongings.’

‘That was her last words?’

‘The very last words her spoke to me – or to anyone.’

‘Then,’ said Jabez, ‘I’ll tell ye what, Elizabeth, it’s our moral dooty to abide by the wishes of Aunt Joanna. It never does to go agin what is might. And as hem expressed herself that strong, why us, as honest folks, must carry out her wishes, and see that none of all her savings go to them darned and dratted Hexts.’

‘But who be they to go to, then?’

‘Well – we’ll see. Fust us will have her removed, and provide that her be daycent buried. Them Hexts be in a poor way, and couldn’t afford the expense, and it do seem to me, Elizabeth, as it would be a liberal and a kindly act in us to take all the charges on ourselves. Us is the closest neighbours.’

‘Ay – and her have had milk of me these ten or twelve years, and I’ve never charged her a penny, thinking her couldn’t afford it. But her could, her were a-hoardin’ of hem money – and not paying me. That were not honest, and what I say is, that I have a right to some of her savin’s, to pay the milk bill – and it’s butter I’ve let her have now and then in a liberal way.’

‘Very well, Elizabeth. Fust of all, we’ll take the silver taypot and the spoons wi’ us, to get ’em out of harm’s way.’

‘And I’ll carry the linen sheets and pillow-cases. My word I – why didn’t she use ’em, instead of them rags?’

All Zennor declared that the Hockins were a most neighbourly and generous couple, when it was known that they took upon themselves to defray the funeral expenses.

Mrs. Hext came to the farm, and said that she was willing to do what she could, but Mrs. Hockin replied:

‘My good Rose, it’s no good. I seed your aunt when her was ailin’, and nigh on death, and her laid it on me solemn as could be that we was to bury her, and that she’d have nothin’ to do wi’ the Hexts at no price.’

Rose sighed, and went away.

Rose had not expected to receive anything from her aunt. She had never been allowed to look at the treasures in the oak chest. As far as she had been aware, Aunt Joanna had been extremely poor. But she remembered that the old woman had at one time befriended her, and she was ready to forgive the harsh treatment to which she had finally been subjected. In fact, she had repeatedly made overtures to her great-aunt to be reconciled, but these overtures had been always rejected. She was, accordingly, not surprised to learn from Mrs. Hockin that the old woman’s last words had been as reported.

But, although disowned and disinherited, Rose, her husband, and children dressed in black, and were chief mourners at the funeral. Now it had so happened that when it came to the laying out of Aunt Joanna, Mrs. Hockin had looked at the beautiful linen sheets she had found in the oak chest, with the object of furnishing the corpse with one as a winding-sheet. But – she said to herself – it would really be a shame to spoil a pair, and where else could she get such fine and beautiful old linen

as was this? So she put the sheets away and furnished for the purpose a clean but coarse and ragged sheet such as Aunt Joanna had in common use. That was good enough to moulder in the grave. It would be positively sinful, because wasteful, to give up to corruption and the worm such fine white linen as Aunt Joanna had hoarded. The funeral was conducted, otherwise, liberally. Aunt Joanna was given an elm, and not a mean deal board coffin, such as is provided for paupers; and a handsome **escutcheon** of white metal was put on the lid.

Moreover, plenty of gin was drunk, and cake and cheese eaten at the house, all at the expense of the Hockins. And the conversation among those who attended, and ate and drank, and wiped their eyes, was rather anent the generosity of the Hockins than of the virtues of the departed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hockin heard this, and their hearts swelled within them. Nothing so swells the heart as the consciousness of virtue being recognised. Jabez in an undertone informed a neighbour that he were'nt goin' to stick at the funeral expenses, not he; he'd have a neat stone erected above the grave with work on it, at twopence a letter. The name and the date of departure of Aunt Joanna, and her age, and two lines of a favourite hymn of his, all about earth being no dwelling-place, heaven being properly her home.

It was not often that Elizabeth Hockin cried, but she did this day; she wept tears of sympathy with the deceased, and happiness at the ovation accorded to herself and her husband. At length, as the short winter day closed in, the last of those who had attended the funeral, and had returned to the farm to recruit and regale after it, departed, and the Hockins were left to themselves.

'It were a beautiful day,' said Jabez. 'Ay,' responded Elizabeth, 'and what a sight o' people came here.'

'This here buryin' of Aunt Joanna have set us up tremendous in the estimation of the neighbours.'

'I'd like to know who else would ha' done it for a poor old creetur as is no relation; ay – and one as owed a purty long bill to me for milk and butter through ten or twelve years.'

'Well,' said Jabez, 'I've allus heard say that a good deed brings its own reward wi' it – and it's a fine proverb. I feels it in my insides.'

'P'raps it's the gin, Jabez.'

'No – it's virtue. It's warmer nor gin a long sight. Gin gives a smouldering spark, but a good conscience is a blaze of furze.'

The farm of the Hockins was small, and Hockin looked after his cattle himself. One maid was kept, but no man in the house. All were wont to retire early to bed; neither Hockin nor his wife had literary tastes, and were not disposed to consume much oil, so as to read at night.

During the night, at what time she did not know, Mrs. Hockin awoke with a start, and found that her husband was sitting up in bed listening. There was a moon that night, and no clouds in the sky. The room was full of silver light. Elizabeth Hockin heard a sound of feet in the kitchen, which was immediately under the bedroom of the couple.

'There's someone about," she whispered; "go down, Jabez.'

'I wonder, now, who it be. P'raps its Sally.'

'It can't be Sally – how can it, when she can't get out o' hem room wi'out passin' through ours?'

'Run down, Elizabeth, and see.'

'It's your place to go, Jabez.'

'But if it was a woman – and me in my night-shirt?'

'And, Jabez, if it was a man, a robber – and me in my night-shirt? It 'ud be shameful.'

'I reckon us had best go down together.'

'We'll do so – but I hope it's not–'

'What?'

Mrs. Hockin did not answer. She and her husband crept from bed, and, treading on tiptoe across the room, descended the stair.

There was no door at the bottom, but the staircase was boarded up at the side; it opened into the kitchen.

They descended very softly and cautiously, holding each other, and when they reached the bottom, peered timorously into the apartment that served many purposes – kitchen, sitting-room, and dining-place. The moonlight poured in through the broad, low window.

By it they saw a figure. There could be no mistaking it – it was that of Aunt Joanna, clothed in the tattered sheet that Elizabeth Hockin had allowed for her grave-clothes. The old woman had taken one of the fine linen sheets out of the cupboard in which it had been placed, and had spread it over the long table, and was smoothing it down with her bony hands.

The Hockins trembled, not with cold, though it was mid-winter, but with terror. They dared not advance, and they felt powerless to retreat.

Then they saw Aunt Joanna go to the cupboard, open it, and return with the silver spoons; she placed all six on the sheet, and with a lean finger counted them.

She turned her face towards those who were watching her proceedings, but it was in shadow, and they could not distinguish the features nor note the expression with which she regarded them.

Presently she went back to the cupboard, and returned with the silver teapot. She stood at one end of the table, and now the reflection of the moon on the linen sheet was cast upon her face, and they saw that she was moving her lips – but no sound issued from them.

She thrust her hand into the teapot and drew forth the coins, one by one, and rolled them along the table. The Hockins saw the glint of the metal, and the shadow cast by each piece of money as it rolled. The first coin lodged at the further left-hand corner and the second rested near it; and so on, the pieces were rolled, and ranged themselves in order, ten in a row. Then the next ten were run across the white cloth in the same manner, and dropped over on their sides below the first row; thus also the third ten. And all the time the dead woman was mouthing, as though counting, but still inaudibly.

The couple stood motionless observing proceedings, till suddenly a cloud passed before the face of the moon, so dense as to eclipse the light.

Then in a paroxysm of terror both turned and fled up the stairs, bolted their bedroom door, and jumped into bed.

There was no sleep for them that night. In the gloom when the moon was concealed, in the glare when it shone forth, it was the same, they could hear the light rolling of the coins along the table, and the click as they fell over. Was the supply inexhaustible? It was not so, but apparently the dead woman did not weary of counting the coins. When all had been ranged, she could be heard moving to the further end of the table, and there re-commencing the same proceeding of coin-rolling.

Not till near daybreak did this sound cease, and not till the maid, Sally, had begun to stir in the inner bedchamber did Hockin and his wife venture to rise. Neither would suffer the servant girl to descend till they had been down to see in what condition the kitchen was. They found that the table had been cleared, the coins were all back in the teapot, and that and the spoons were where they had themselves placed them. The sheet, moreover, was neatly folded, and replaced where it had been before.

The Hockins did not speak to one another of their experiences during the past night, so long as they were in the house, but when Jabez was in the field, Elizabeth went to him and said: “Husband, what about Aunt Joanna?”

‘I don’t know – maybe it were a dream.’

‘Curious us should ha’ dreamed alike.’

‘I don’t know that; ’twere the gin made us dream, and us both had gin, so us dreamed the same thing.’

“Twere more like real truth than dream,’ observed Elizabeth. ‘We’ll take it as dream,’ said Jabez. ‘Mebbe it won’t happen again.’ But precisely the same sounds were heard on the following night. The moon was obscured by thick clouds, and neither of the two had the courage to descend

to the kitchen. But they could hear the patter of feet, and then the roll and click of the coins. Again sleep was impossible.

'Whatever shall we do?' asked Elizabeth Hockin next morning of her husband. "Us can't go on like this wi' the dead woman about our house nightly. There's no tellin' she might take it into her head to come upstairs and pull the sheets off us. As we took hers, she may think it fair to carry off ours."

'I think,' said Jabez sorrowfully, 'we'll have to return 'em.'

'But how?'

After some consultation the couple resolved on conveying all the deceased woman's goods to the churchyard, by night, and placing them on her grave.

'I reckon,' said Hockin, 'we'll bide in the porch and watch what happens. If they be left there till mornin', why we may carry 'em back wi' an easy conscience. We've spent some pounds over her buryin'.'

'What have it come to?'

'Three pounds five and fourpence, as I make it out.'

'Well,' said Elizabeth, 'we must risk it.'

When night had fallen murk, the farmer and his wife crept from their house, carrying the linen sheets, the teapot, and the silver spoons. They did not start till late, for fear of encountering any villagers on the way, and not till after the maid, Sally, had gone to bed.

They fastened the farm door behind them. The night was dark and stormy, with scudding clouds, so dense as to make deep night, when they did not part and allow the moon to peer forth.

They walked timorously, and side by side, looking about them as they proceeded, and on reaching the churchyard gate they halted to pluck up courage before opening and venturing within. Jabez had furnished himself with a bottle of gin, to give courage to himself and his wife.

Together they heaped the articles that had belonged to Aunt Joanna upon the fresh grave, but as they did so the wind caught the linen and unfurled and flapped it, and they were forced to place stones upon it to hold it down. Then, quaking with fear, they retreated to the church porch, and Jabez, uncorking the bottle, first took a long pull himself, and then presented it to his wife.

And now down came a tearing rain, driven by a blast from the Atlantic, howling among the gravestones, and screaming in the battlements of the tower and its bell-chamber windows. The night was so dark, and the rain fell so heavily, that they could see nothing for full half an hour. But then the clouds were rent asunder, and the moon glared white and ghastly over the churchyard.

Elizabeth caught her husband by the arm and pointed. There was, however, no need for her to indicate that on which his eyes were fixed already.

Both saw a lean hand come up out of the grave, and lay hold of one of the fine linen sheets and drag at it. They saw it drag the sheet by one corner, and then it went down underground, and the sheet followed, as though sucked down in a vortex; fold on fold it descended, till the entire sheet had disappeared.

'Her have taken it for her windin' sheet,' whispered Elizabeth. 'Whativer will her do wi' the rest?'

'Have a drop o' gin; this be terrible tryin',' said Jabez in an undertone; and again the couple put their lips to the bottle, which came away considerably lighter after the draughts.

'Look!' gasped Elizabeth.

Again the lean hand with long fingers appeared above the soil, and this was seen groping about the grass till it laid hold of the teapot. Then it groped again, and gathered up the spoons, that flashed in the moonbeams. Next, up came the second hand, and a long arm that stretched along the grave till it reached the other sheets. At once, on being raised, these sheets were caught by the wind, and flapped and fluttered like half-hoisted sails. The hands retained them for a while till they bellied with the wind, and then let them go, and they were swept away by the blast across the churchyard, over the wall, and lodged in the carpenter's yard that adjoined, among his timber.

‘She have sent ’em to the Hexts,’ whispered Elizabeth. Next the hands began to trifle with the teapot, and to shake out some of the coins.

In a minute some silver pieces were flung with so true an aim that they fell clinking down on the floor of the porch.

How many coins, how much money was cast, the couple were in no mood to estimate. Then they saw the hands collect the pillow-cases, and proceed to roll up the teapot and silver spoons in them, and, that done, the white bundle was cast into the air, and caught by the wind and carried over the churchyard wall into the wheelwright’s yard.

At once a curtain of vapour rushed across the face of the moon, and again the graveyard was buried in darkness. Half an hour elapsed before the moon shone out again. Then the Hockins saw that nothing was stirring in the cemetery.

‘I reckon us may go now,’ said Jabez.

‘Let us gather up what she chucked to us,’ advised Elizabeth. So the couple felt about the floor, and collected a number of coins. What they were they could not tell till they reached their home, and had lighted a candle.

‘How much be it?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘Three pound five and fourpence, exact,’ answered Jabez.

James Matthew Barrie
The Inconsiderate Waiter

Frequently I have to ask myself in the street for the name of the man I bowed to just now, and then, before I can answer, the wind of the first corner blows him from my memory. I have a theory, however, that those puzzling faces, which pass before I can see who cut the coat, all belong to club waiters.

Until William forced his affairs upon me that was all I did know of the private life of waiters, though I have been in the club for twenty years. I was even unaware whether they slept downstairs or had their own homes; nor had I the interest to inquire of other members, nor they the knowledge to inform me. I hold that this sort of people should be fed and clothed and given airing and wives and children, and I subscribe yearly, I believe for these purposes; but to come into closer relation with waiters is bad form; they are club fittings, and William should have kept his distress to himself, or taken it away and patched it up like a rent in one of the chairs. His inconsiderateness has been a pair of spectacles to me for months.

It is not correct taste to know the name of a club waiter, so I must apologise for knowing William's, and still more for not forgetting it. If, again, to speak of a waiter is bad form, to speak bitterly is the comic degree of it. But William has disappointed me sorely. There were years when I would defer dining several minutes that he might wait on me. His pains to reserve the window-seat for me were perfectly satisfactory. I allowed him privileges, as to suggest dishes, and would give him information, as that someone had startled me in the reading-room by slamming a door. I have shown him how I cut my finger with a piece of string. Obviously he was gratified by these attentions, usually recommending a liqueur; and I fancy he must have understood my sufferings, for he often looked ill himself. Probably he was rheumatic, but I cannot say for certain, as I never thought of asking, and he had the sense to see that the knowledge would be offensive to me.

In the smoking-room we have a waiter so independent that once, when he brought me a yellow **chartreuse**, and I said I had ordered green, he replied, 'No, sir; you said yellow.' William could never have been guilty of such effrontery. In appearance, of course, he is mean, but I can no more describe him than a milkmaid could draw cows. I suppose we distinguish one waiter from another much as we pick our hat from the rack. We could have plotted a murder safely before William. He never presumed to have any opinions of his own. When such was my mood he remained silent, and if I announced that something diverting had happened to me he laughed before I told him what it was. He turned the twinkle in his eye off or on at my bidding as readily as if it was the gas. To my 'Sure to be wet to-morrow,' he would reply, 'Yes, sir;' and to Trelawney's 'It doesn't look like rain,' two minutes afterward, he would reply, 'No, sir.' It was one member who said Lightning Rod would win the **Derby** and another who said Lightning Rod had no chance, but it was William who agreed with both. He was like a **cheroot**, which may be smoked from either end. So used was I to him that, had he died or got another situation (or whatever it is such persons do when they disappear from the club), I should probably have told the head waiter to bring him back, as I disliked changes.

It would not become me to know precisely when I began to think William an ingrate, but I date his lapse from the evening when he brought me oysters. I detest oysters, and no one knew it better than William. He has agreed with me that he could not understand any gentleman's liking them. Between me and a certain member who smacks his lips twelve times to a dozen of them William knew I liked a screen to be placed until we had reached the soup, and yet he gave me the oysters and the other man my sardine. Both the other member and I quickly called for brandy and the head waiter. To do William justice, he shook, but never can I forget his audacious explanation: 'Beg pardon, sir, but I was thinking of something else.'

In these words William had flung off the mask, and now I knew him for what he was.

I must not be accused of bad form for looking at William on the following evening. What prompted me to do so was not personal interest in him, but a desire to see whether I dare let him wait on me again. So, recalling that a caster was off a chair yesterday, one is entitled to make sure that it is on to-day before sitting down. If the expression is not too strong, I may say that I was taken aback by William's manner. Even when crossing the room to take my orders he let his one hand play nervously with the other. I had to repeat 'Sardine on toast' twice, and instead of answering 'Yes, sir,' as if my selection of sardine on toast was a personal gratification to him, which is the manner one expects of a waiter, he glanced at the clock, then out at the window, and, starting, asked, 'Did you say sardine on toast, sir?'

It was the height of summer, when London smells like a chemist's shop, and he who has the dinner-table at the window needs no candles to show him his knife and fork. I lay back at intervals, now watching a starved-looking woman sleep on a door-step, and again complaining of the club bananas. By-and-by I saw a girl of the commonest kind, ill-clad and dirty, as all these Arabs are. Their parents should be compelled to feed and clothe them comfortably, or at least to keep them indoors, where they cannot offend our eyes. Such children are for pushing aside with one's umbrella; but this girl I noticed because she was gazing at the club windows. She had stood thus for perhaps ten minutes when I became aware that someone was leaning over me to look out at the window. I turned round. Conceive my indignation on seeing that the rude person was William.

'How dare you, William?' I said, sternly. He seemed not to hear me. Let me tell, in the measured words of one describing a past incident, what then took place. To get nearer the window he pressed heavily on my shoulder.

'William, you forget yourself!' I said, meaning – as I see now – that he had forgotten me.

I heard him gulp, but not to my reprimand. He was scanning the street. His hands chattered on my shoulder, and, pushing him from me, I saw that his mouth was agape.

'What are you looking for?' I asked.

He stared at me, and then, like one who had at last heard the echo of my question, seemed to be brought back to the club. He turned his face from me for an instant, and answered shakily:

'I beg your pardon, sir! I – I shouldn't have done it. Are the bananas too ripe, sir?'

He recommended the nuts, and awaited my verdict so anxiously while I ate one that I was about to speak graciously, when I again saw his eyes drag him to the window.

'William,' I said, my patience giving way at last, 'I dislike being waited on by a melancholy waiter.'

'Yes, sir,' he replied, trying to smile, and then broke out passionately, 'For God's sake, sir, tell me, have you seen a little girl looking in at the club windows?'

He had been a good waiter once, and his distracted visage was spoiling my dinner.

'There,' I said, pointing to the girl, and no doubt would have added that he must bring me coffee immediately, had he continued to listen. But already he was beckoning to the child. I have not the least interest in her (indeed, it had never struck me that waiters had private affairs, and I still think it a pity that they should have); but as I happened to be looking out at the window I could not avoid seeing what occurred. As soon as the girl saw William she ran into the street, regardless of vehicles, and nodded three times to him. Then she disappeared.

I have said that she was quite a common child, without attraction of any sort, and yet it was amazing the difference she made in William. He gasped relief, like one who had broken through the anxiety that checks breathing, and into his face there came a silly laugh of happiness. I had dined well, on the whole, so I said:

'I am glad to see you cheerful again, William.'

I meant that I approved his cheerfulness because it helped my digestion, but he must needs think I was sympathising with him.

‘Thank you, sir,’ he answered. ‘Oh, sir! when she nodded and I saw it was all right I could have gone down on my knees to God.’

I was as much horrified as if he had dropped a plate on my toes. Even William, disgracefully emotional as he was at the moment, flung out his arms to recall the shameful words.

‘Coffee, William!’ I said, sharply.

I sipped my coffee indignantly, for it was plain to me that William had something on his mind.

‘You are not vexed with me, sir?’ he had the hardihood to whisper.

‘It was a liberty,’ I said.

‘I know, sir; but I was beside myself.’

‘That was a liberty also.’

He hesitated, and then blurted out:

‘It is my wife, sir. She–’

I stopped him with my hand. William, whom I had favoured in so many ways, was a married man! I might have guessed as much years before had I ever reflected about waiters, for I knew vaguely that his class did this sort of thing. His confession was distasteful to me, and I said warningly:

‘Remember where you are, William.’

‘Yes, sir; but you see, she is so delicate–’

‘Delicate! I forbid your speaking to me on unpleasant topics.’

‘Yes, sir; begging your pardon.’

It was characteristic of William to beg my pardon and withdraw his wife, like some unsuccessful dish, as if its taste would not remain in the mouth. I shall be chided for questioning him further about his wife, but, though doubtless an unusual step, it was only bad form superficially, for my motive was irreproachable. I inquired for his wife, not because I was interested in her welfare, but in the hope of allaying my irritation. So I am entitled to invite the wayfarer who has bespattered me with mud to scrape it off.

I desired to be told by William that the girl’s signals meant his wife’s recovery to health. He should have seen that such was my wish and answered accordingly. But, with the brutal inconsiderateness of his class, he said:

‘She has had a good day; but the doctor, he – the doctor is afeard she is dying.’

Already I repented my questions. William and his wife seemed in league against me, when they might so easily have chosen some other member.

‘Pooh! the doctor,’ I said.

‘Yes, sir,’ he answered.

‘Have you been married long, William?’

‘Eight years, sir. Eight years ago she was – I – I mind her when… and now the doctor says–’

The fellow gaped at me. ‘More coffee, sir?’ he asked.

‘What is her ailment?’

‘She was always one of the delicate kind, but full of spirit, and – and you see, she has had a baby lately–’

‘William!’

‘And she – I – the doctor is afeard she’s not picking up.’

‘I feel sure she will pick up.’

‘Yes, sir?’

It must have been the wine I had drunk that made me tell him:

‘I was once married, William. My wife – it was just such a case as yours.’

‘She did not get better, sir?’

‘No.’

After a pause he said, ‘Thank you, sir,’ meaning for the sympathy that made me tell him that. But it must have been the wine.

‘That little girl comes here with a message from your wife?’

‘Yes; if she nods three times it means my wife is a little better.’

‘She nodded thrice to-day.’

‘But she is told to do that to relieve me, and maybe those nods don’t tell the truth.’

‘Is she your girl?’

‘No; we have none but the baby. She is a neighbour’s; she comes twice a day.’

‘It is heartless of her parents not to send her every hour.’

‘But she is six years old,’ he said, ‘and has a house and two sisters to look after in the daytime, and a dinner to cook. Gentlefolk don’t understand.’

‘I suppose you live in some low part, William.’

‘Off Drury Lane,’ he answered, flushing; ‘but – but it isn’t low. You see, we were never used to anything better, and I mind when I let her see the house before we were married, she – she a sort of cried because she was so proud of it. That was eight years ago, and now – she’s afeard she’ll die when I’m away at my work.’

‘Did she tell you that?’

‘Never; she always says she is feeling a little stronger.’

‘Then how can you know she is afraid of that?’

‘I don’t know how I know, sir; but when I am leaving the house in the morning I look at her from the door, and she looks at me, and then I – I know.’

‘A green chartreuse, William!’

I tried to forget William’s vulgar story in billiards, but he had spoiled my game. My opponent, to whom I can give twenty, ran out when I was sixty-seven, and I put aside my cue pettishly. That in itself was bad form, but what would they have thought had they known that a waiter’s impertinence caused it! I grew angrier with William as the night wore on, and next day I punished him by giving my orders through another waiter.

As I had my window-seat, I could not but see that the girl was late again. Somehow I dawdled over my coffee. I had an evening paper before me, but there was so little in it that my eyes found more of interest in the street. It did not matter to me whether William’s wife died, but when that girl had promised to come, why did she not come? These lower classes only give their word to break it. The coffee was undrinkable.

At last I saw her. William was at another window, pretending to do something with the curtains. I stood up, pressing closer to the window. The coffee had been so bad that I felt shaky. She nodded three times, and smiled.

‘She is a little better,’ William whispered to me, almost gaily.

‘Whom are you speaking of?’ I asked, coldly, and immediately retired to the billiard-room, where I played a capital game. The coffee was much better there than in the dining-room.

Several days passed, and I took care to show William that I had forgotten his maunderings. I chanced to see the little girl (though I never looked for her) every evening, and she always nodded three times, save once, when she shook her head, and then William’s face grew white as a napkin. I remember this incident because that night I could not get into a pocket. So badly did I play that the thought of it kept me awake in bed, and that, again, made me wonder how William’s wife was. Next day I went to the club early (which was not my custom) to see the new books. Being in the club at any rate, I looked into the dining-room to ask William if I had left my gloves there, and the sight of him reminded me of his wife; so I asked for her. He shook his head mournfully, and I went off in a rage.

So accustomed am I to the club that when I dine elsewhere I feel uncomfortable next morning, as if I had missed a dinner. William knew this; yet here he was, hounding me out of the club! That evening I dined (as the saying is) at a restaurant, where no sauce was served with the asparagus. Furthermore, as if that were not triumph enough for William, his doleful face came between me and every dish, and I seemed to see his wife dying to annoy me.

I dined next day at the club for self-preservation, taking, however, a table in the middle of the room, and engaging a waiter who had once nearly poisoned me by not interfering when I put two lumps of sugar into my coffee instead of one, which is my allowance. But no William came to me to acknowledge his humiliation, and by-and-by I became aware that he was not in the room. Suddenly the thought struck me that his wife must be dead, and I – it was the worst cooked and the worst served dinner I ever had in the club.

I tried the smoking-room. Usually the talk there is entertaining, but on that occasion it was so frivolous that I did not remain five minutes. In the card-room a member told me excitedly that a policeman had spoken rudely to him; and my strange comment was:

'After all, it is a small matter.'

In the library, where I had not been for years, I found two members asleep, and, to my surprise, William on a ladder dusting books.

'You have not heard, sir?' he said, in answer to my raised eyebrows. Descending the ladder, he whispered tragically: 'It was last evening, sir. I – I lost my head, and I – swore at a member.'

I stepped back from William, and glanced apprehensively at the two members. They still slept.

'I hardly knew,' William went on, 'what I was doing all day yesterday, for I had left my wife so weakly that–'

I stamped my foot.

'I beg your pardon for speaking of her,' he had the grace to say, 'but I couldn't help slipping up to the window often yesterday to look for Jenny, and when she did come, and I saw she was crying, it – it sort of confused me, and I didn't know right, sir, what I was doing. I hit against a member, Mr. Myddleton Finch, and he – he jumped and swore at me. Well, sir, I had just touched him after all, and I was so miserable, it a kind of stung me to be treated like – like that, and me a man as well as him; and I lost my senses, and – and I swore back.'

William's shamed head sank on his chest, but I even let pass his insolence in likening himself to a member of the club, so afraid was I of the sleepers waking and detecting me in talk with a waiter.

'For the love of God,' William cried, with coarse emotion, 'don't let them dismiss me!'

'Speak lower!' I said. 'Who sent you here?'

'I was turned out of the dining-room at once, and told to attend to the library until they had decided what to do with me. Oh, sir, I'll lose my place!'

He was blubbering, as if a change of waiters was a matter of importance.

'This is very bad, William,' I said. 'I fear I can do nothing for you.'

'Have mercy on a distracted man!' he entreated. 'I'll go on my knees to Mr. Myddleton Finch.'

How could I but despise a fellow who would be thus abject for a pound a week?

'I dare not tell her,' he continued, 'that I have lost my place. She would just fall back and die.'

'I forbade your speaking of your wife,' I said, sharply, 'unless you can speak pleasantly of her.'

'But she may be worse now, sir, and I cannot even see Jenny from here. The library windows look to the back.'

'If she dies,' I said, 'it will be a warning to you to marry a stronger woman next time.'

Now everyone knows that there is little real affection among the lower orders. As soon as they have lost one mate they take another. Yet William, forgetting our relative positions, drew himself up and raised his fist, and if I had not stepped back I swear he would have struck me.

The highly improper words William used I will omit, out of consideration for him. Even while he was apologising for them I retired to the smoking-room, where I found the cigarettes so badly rolled that they would not keep alight. After a little I remembered that I wanted to see Myddleton Finch about an improved saddle of which a friend of his has the patent. He was in the newsroom, and, having questioned him about the saddle, I said:

'By the way, what is this story about your swearing at one of the waiters?'

'You mean about his swearing at me,' Myddleton Finch replied, reddening.

‘I am glad that was it,’ I said; ‘for I could not believe you guilty of such bad form.’

‘If I did swear–’ he was beginning, but I went on:

‘The version which has reached me was that you swore at him, and he repeated the word. I heard he was to be dismissed and you reprimanded.’

‘Who told you that?’ asked Myddleton Finch, who is a timid man.

‘I forget; it is club talk,’ I replied, lightly. ‘But of course the committee will take your word. The waiter, whichever one he is, richly deserves his dismissal for insulting you without provocation.’

Then our talk returned to the saddle, but Myddleton Finch was abstracted, and presently he said:

‘Do you know, I fancy I was wrong in thinking that the waiter swore at me, and I’ll withdraw my charge to-morrow.’

Myddleton Finch then left me, and, sitting alone, I realised that I had been doing William a service. To some slight extent I may have intentionally helped him to retain his place in the club, and I now see the reason, which was that he alone knows precisely to what extent I like my **claret** heated.

For a mere second I remembered William’s remark that he should not be able to see the girl Jenny from the library windows. Then this recollection drove from my head that I had only dined in the sense that my dinner-bill was paid. Returning to the dining-room, I happened to take my chair at the window, and while I was eating a deviled kidney I saw in the street the girl whose nods had such an absurd effect on William.

The children of the poor are as thoughtless as their parents, and this Jenny did not sign to the windows in the hope that William might see her, though she could not see him. Her face, which was disgracefully dirty, bore doubt and dismay on it, but whether she brought good news it would not tell. Somehow I had expected her to signal when she saw me, and, though her message could not interest me, I was in the mood in which one is irritated at that not taking place which he is awaiting. Ultimately she seemed to be making up her mind to go away.

A boy was passing with the evening papers, and I hurried out to get one, rather thoughtlessly, for we have all the papers in the club. Unfortunately, I misunderstood the direction the boy had taken; but round the first corner (out of sight of the club windows) I saw the girl Jenny, and so asked her how William’s wife was.

‘Did he send you to me?’ she replied, impertinently taking me for a waiter. ‘My!’ she added, after a second scrutiny, ‘I b’lieve you’re one of them. His missis is a bit better, and I was to tell him as she took all the tapiocar.’

‘How could you tell him?’ I asked.

‘I was to do like this,’ she replied, and went through the supping of something out of a plate in dumb-show.

‘That would not show she ate all the tapioca,’ I said.

‘But I was to end like this,’ she answered, licking an imaginary plate with her tongue.

I gave her a shilling (to get rid of her), and returned to the club disgusted.

Later in the evening I had to go to the club library for a book, and while William was looking in vain for it (I had forgotten the title) I said to him:

‘By the way, William, Mr. Myddleton Finch is to tell the committee that he was mistaken in the charge he brought against you, so you will doubtless be restored to the dining-room to-morrow.’

The two members were still in their chairs, probably sleeping lightly; yet he had the effrontery to thank me.

‘Don’t thank me,’ I said, blushing at the imputation. ‘Remember your place, William!’

‘But Mr. Myddleton Finch knew I swore,’ he insisted.

‘A gentleman,’ I replied, stiffly, ‘cannot remember for twenty-four hours what a waiter has said to him.’

‘No, sir; but–’

To stop him I had to say: 'And, ah, William, your wife is a little better. She has eaten the tapioca – all of it.'

'How can you know, sir?'

'By an accident.'

'Jenny signed to the window?'

'No.'

'Then you saw her, and went out, and–'

'Nonsense!'

'Oh, sir, to do that for me! May God bl–'

'William!'

'Forgive me, sir; but – when I tell my missis, she will say it was thought of your own wife as made you do it.'

He wrung my hand. I dared not withdraw it, lest we should waken the sleepers.

William returned to the dining-room, and I had to show him that if he did not cease looking gratefully at me I must change my waiter. I also ordered him to stop telling me nightly how his wife was, but I continued to know, as I could not help seeing the girl Jenny from the window. Twice in a week I learned from this objectionable child that the ailing woman had again eaten all the tapioca. Then I became suspicious of William. I will tell why.

It began with a remark of Captain Upjohn's. We had been speaking of the inconvenience of not being able to get a hot dish served after 1 A.M., and he said:

'It is because these lazy waiters would strike. If the beggars had a love of their work they would not rush away from the club the moment one o'clock strikes. That glum fellow who often waits on you takes to his heels the moment he is clear of the club steps. He ran into me the other night at the top of the street, and was off without apologising.'

'You mean the foot of the street, Upjohn,' I said; for such is the way to Drury Lane.

'No; I mean the top. The man was running west.'

'East.'

'West.'

I smiled, which so annoyed him that he bet me two to one in sovereigns. The bet could have been decided most quickly by asking William a question, but I thought, foolishly doubtless, that it might hurt his feelings, so I watched him leave the club. The possibility of Upjohn's winning the bet had seemed remote to me. Conceive my surprise, therefore when William went westward.

Amazed, I pursued him along two streets without realising that I was doing so. Then curiosity put me into a **hansom**. We followed William, and it proved to be a three-shilling fare, for, running when he was in breath and walking when he was out of it, he took me to **West Kensington**.

I discharged my cab, and from across the street watched William's incomprehensible behaviour. He had stopped at a dingy row of workmen's houses, and knocked at the darkened window of one of them. Presently a light showed. So far as I could see, someone pulled up the blind and for ten minutes talked to William. I was uncertain whether they talked, for the window was not opened, and I felt that, had William spoken through the glass loud enough to be heard inside, I must have heard him too. Yet he nodded and beckoned. I was still bewildered when, by setting off the way he had come, he gave me the opportunity of going home.

Knowing from the talk of the club what the lower orders are, could I doubt that this was some discreditable love-affair of William's? His solicitude for his wife had been mere pretence; so far as it was genuine, it meant that he feared she might recover. He probably told her that he was detained nightly in the club till three.

I was miserable next day, and blamed the deviled kidneys for it. Whether William was unfaithful to his wife was nothing to me, but I had two plain reasons for insisting on his going straight home

from his club: the one that, as he had made me lose a bet, I must punish him; the other that he could wait upon me better if he went to bed betimes.

Yet I did not question him. There was something in his face that – Well, I seemed to see his dying wife in it.

I was so out of sorts that I could eat no dinner. I left the club. Happening to stand for some time at the foot of the street, I chanced to see the girl Jenny coming, and – no; let me tell the truth, though the whole club reads: I was waiting for her.

'How is William's wife to-day?' I asked.

'She told me to nod three times,' the little slattern replied; 'but she looked like nothing but a dead one till she got the brandy.'

'Hush, child!' I said, shocked. 'You don't know how the dead look.'

'Bless yer,' she answered, 'don't I just! Why, I've helped to lay 'em out. I'm going on seven.'

'Is William good to his wife?'

'Course he is. Ain't she his missis?'

'Why should that make him good to her?' I asked, cynically, out of my knowledge of the poor. But the girl, precocious in many ways, had never had any opportunities of studying the lower classes in the newspapers, fiction, and club talk. She shut one eye, and, looking up wonderingly, said:

'Ain't you green – just!'

'When does William reach home at night?'

"Tain't night; it's morning. When I wakes up at half dark and half light, and hears a door shutting, I know as it's either father going off to his work or Mr. Hicking come home from his.'

'Who is Mr. Hicking?'

'Him as we've been speaking on – William. We calls him mister, 'cause he's a toff. Father's just doing jobs in Covent Gardens, but Mr. Hicking, he's a waiter, and a clean shirt every day. The old woman would like father to be a waiter, but he hain't got the 'ristocratic look.'

'What old woman?'

'Go 'long! that's my mother. Is it true there's a waiter in the club just for to open the door?'

'Yes; but–'

'And another just for to lick the stamps? My!'

'William leaves the club at one o'clock?' I said, interrogatively.

She nodded. 'My mother,' she said, 'is one to talk, and she says Mr. Hicking as he should get away at twelve, 'cause his missis needs him more'n the gentlemen need him. The old woman do talk.'

'And what does William answer to that?'

'He says as the gentlemen can't be kept waiting for their cheese.'

'But William does not go straight home when he leaves the club?'

'That's the kid.'

'Kid!' I echoed, scarcely understanding, for, knowing how little the poor love their children, I had asked William no questions about the baby.

'Didn't you know his missis had a kid?'

'Yes; but that is no excuse for William's staying away from his sick wife,' I answered, sharply. A baby in such a home as William's, I reflected, must be trying; but still – besides, his class can sleep through any din.

'The kid ain't in our court,' the girl explained. 'He's in **W.**, he is, and I've never been out of W.C.; leastwise, not as I knows of.'

'This is W. I suppose you mean that the child is at West Kensington? Well, no doubt it was better for William's wife to get rid of the child–'

'Better!' interposed the girl. "Tain't better for her not to have the kid. Ain't her not having him what she's always thinking on when she looks like a dead one?'

'How could you know that?'

"Cause,' answered the girl, illustrating her words with a gesture, 'I watches her, and I sees her arms going this way, just like as she wanted to hug her kid.'

'Possibly you are right,' I said, frowning; 'but William had put the child out to nurse because it disturbed his night's rest. A man who has his work to do–'

'You are green!'

'Then why have the mother and child been separated?'

'Along of that there measles. Near all the young 'uns in our court has 'em bad.'

'Have you had them?'

'I said the young 'uns.'

'And William sent the baby to West Kensington to escape infection?'

'Took him, he did.'

'Against his wife's wishes?'

'Na-o!'

'You said she was dying for want of the child?'

'Wouldn't she rayther die than have the kid die?'

'Don't speak so heartlessly, child. Why does William not go straight home from the club? Does he go to West Kensington to see it?'

"Tain't a hit, it's an 'e. Course he do.'

'Then he should not. His wife has the first claim on him.'

'Ain't you green! It's his missis as wants him to go. Do you think she could sleep till she knowed how the kid was?'

'But he does not go into the house at West Kensington?'

'Is he soft? Course he don't go in, fear of taking the infection to the kid. They just holds the kid up at the window to him, so as he can have a good look. Then he comes home and tells his missis. He sits foot of the bed and tells.'

'And that takes place every night? He can't have much to tell.'

'He has just.'

'He can only say whether the child is well or ill.'

'My! He tells what a difference there is in the kid since he seed him last.'

'There can be no difference!'

'Go 'long! Ain't a kid always growing? Haven't Mr. Hicking to tell how the hair is getting darker, and heaps of things beside?'

'Such as what?'

'Like whether he larfed, and if he has her nose, and how as he knowed him. He tells her them things more 'n once.'

'And all this time he is sitting at the foot of the bed?'

"Cept when he holds her hand.'

'But when does he get to bed himself?'

'He don't get much. He tells her as he has a sleep at the club.'

'He cannot say that.'

'Hain't I heard him? But he do go to his bed a bit, and then they both lies quiet, her pretending she is sleeping so as he can sleep, and him 'feard to sleep case he shouldn't wake up to give her the bottle stuff.'

'What does the doctor say about her?'

'He's a good one, the doctor. Sometimes he says she would get better if she could see the kid through the window.'

'Nonsense!'

'And if she was took to the country.'

'Then why does not William take her?'

'My! you are green! And if she drank port wines.'

'Doesn't she?'

'No; but William, he tells her about the gentlemen drinking them.'

On the tenth day after my conversation with this unattractive child I was in my **brougham**, with the windows up, and I sat back, a paper before my face lest anyone should look in. Naturally, I was afraid of being seen in company of William's wife and Jenny, for men about town are uncharitable, and, despite the explanation I had ready, might have charged me with pitying William. As a matter of fact, William was sending his wife into Surrey to stay with an old nurse of mine, and I was driving her down because my horses needed an outing. Besides, I was going that way at any rate.

I had arranged that the girl Jenny, who was wearing an outrageous bonnet, should accompany us, because, knowing the greed of her class, I feared she might blackmail me at the club.

William joined us in the suburbs, bringing the baby with him, as I had foreseen they would all be occupied with it, and to save me the trouble of conversing with them. Mrs. Hicking I found too pale and fragile for a workingman's wife, and I formed a mean opinion of her intelligence from her pride in the baby, which was a very ordinary one. She created quite a vulgar scene when it was brought to her, though she had given me her word not to do so, what irritated me even more than her tears being her ill-bred apology that she 'had been 'feared baby wouldn't know her again.' I would have told her they didn't know any one for years had I not been afraid of the girl Jenny, who dandled the infant on her knees and talked to it as if it understood. She **kept me on tenter-hooks** by asking it offensive questions, such as, 'Oo know who give me that bonnet?' and answering them herself, 'It was the pretty gentleman there;' and several times I had to affect sleep because she announced, 'Kiddy wants to kiss the pretty gentleman.'

Irksome as all this necessarily was to a man of taste, I suffered even more when we reached our destination. As we drove through the village the girl Jenny uttered shrieks of delight at the sight of flowers growing up the cottage walls, and declared they were 'just like a music-'all without the drink license.' As my horses required a rest, I was forced to abandon my intention of dropping these persons at their lodgings and returning to town at once, and I could not go to the inn lest I should meet inquisitive acquaintances. Disagreeable circumstances, therefore, compelled me to take tea with a waiter's family – close to a window too, through which I could see the girl Jenny talking excitedly to the villagers, and telling them, I felt certain, that I had been good to William. I had a desire to go out and put myself right with those people.

William's long connection with the club should have given him some manners, but apparently his class cannot take them on, for, though he knew I regarded his thanks as an insult, he looked them when he was not speaking them, and hardly had he sat down, by my orders, than he remembered that I was a member of the club, and jumped up. Nothing is in worse form than whispering, yet again and again, when he thought I was not listening, he whispered to Mrs. Hicking, 'You don't feel faint?' or 'How are you now?' He was also in extravagant glee because she ate two cakes (it takes so little to put these people in good spirits), and when she said she felt like another being already the fellow's face charged me with the change. I could not but conclude, from the way Mrs. Hicking let the baby pound her, that she was stronger than she had pretended.

I remained longer than was necessary, because I had something to say to William which I knew he would misunderstand, and so I put off saying it. But when he announced that it was time for him to return to London, – at which his wife suddenly paled, so that he had to sign to her not to break down, – I delivered the message.

'William,' I said, 'the head waiter asked me to say that you could take a fortnight's holiday just now. Your wages will be paid as usual.'

Confound them! William had me by the hand, and his wife was in tears before I could reach the door.

'Is it your doing again, sir?' William cried.

‘William!’ I said, fiercely.

‘We owe everything to you,’ he insisted. ‘The port wine–’

‘Because I had no room for it in my cellar.’

‘The money for the nurse in London–’

‘Because I objected to being waited on by a man who got no sleep.’

‘These lodgings–’

‘Because I wanted to do something for my old nurse.’

‘And now, sir, a fortnight’s holiday!’

‘Good-bye, William!’ I said, in a fury.

But before I could get away Mrs. Hicking signed to William to leave the room, and then she kissed my hand. She said something to me. It was about my wife. Somehow I – What business had William to tell her about my wife?

They are all back in Drury Lane now, and William tells me that his wife sings at her work just as she did eight years ago. I have no interest in this, and try to check his talk of it; but such people have no sense of propriety, and he even speaks of the girl Jenny, who sent me lately a gaudy pair of worsted gloves worked by her own hand. The meanest advantage they took of my weakness, however, was in calling their baby after me. I have an uncomfortable suspicion, too, that William has given the other waiters his version of the affair; but I feel safe so long as it does not reach the committee.

Walter Besant
The Solid Gold Reef Company, Limited

Act I

‘You dear old boy,’ said the girl, ‘I am sure I wish it could be, with all my heart, if I have any heart.’

‘I don’t believe you have,’ replied the boy gloomily.

‘Well, but, Reg, consider; you’ve got no money.’

‘I’ve got five thousand pounds. If a man can’t make his way upon that he must be a poor stick.’

‘You would go abroad with it and dig, and take your wife with you – to wash and cook.’

‘We would do something with the money here. You should stay in London, Rosie.’

‘Yes. In a suburban villa, at Shepherd’s Bush, perhaps. No, Reg, when I marry, if ever I do – I am in no hurry – I will step out of this room into one exactly like it.’ The room was a splendid drawing-room in Palace Gardens, splendidly furnished. ‘I shall have my footmen and my carriage, and I shall–’

‘Rosie, give me the right to earn all these things for you!’ the young man cried impetuously.

‘You can only earn them for me by the time you have one foot in the grave. Hadn’t I better in the meantime marry some old gentleman with his one foot in the grave, so as to be ready for you against the time you come home? In two or three years the other foot, I dare say, would slide into the grave as well.’

‘You laugh at my trouble. You feel nothing.’

‘If the pater would part, but he won’t; he says he wants all his money for himself, and that I’ve got to marry well. Besides, Reg’ – here her face clouded and she lowered her voice – ‘there are times when he looks anxious. We didn’t always live in Palace Gardens. Suppose we should lose it all as quickly as we got it. Oh!’ she shivered and trembled. ‘No, I will never, never marry a poor man. Get rich, my dear boy, and you may aspire even to the valuable possession of this heartless hand.’

She held it out. He took it, pressed it, stooped and kissed her. Then he dropped her hand and walked quickly out of the room.

‘Poor Reggie!’ she murmured. ‘I wish – I wish – but what is the use of wishing?’

Act II

Two men – one young, the other about fifty – sat in the veranda of a small bungalow. It was after breakfast. They lay back in long bamboo chairs, each with a cigar. It looked as if they were resting. In reality they were talking business, and that very seriously.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the elder man, with something of an American accent, ‘I have somehow taken a fancy to this place. The situation is healthy.’

‘Well, I don’t know; I’ve had more than one touch of fever here.’

‘The climate is lovely –’

‘Except in the rains.’

‘The soil is fertile –’

‘I’ve dropped five thousand in it, and they haven’t come up again yet.’

‘They will. I have been round the estate, and I see money in it. Well, sir, here’s my offer: five thousand down, hard cash, as soon as the papers are signed.’

Reginald sat up. He was on the point of accepting the proposal, when a pony rode up to the house, and the rider, a native groom, jumped off and gave him a note. He opened it and read. It was from his nearest neighbour, two or three miles away:

> Don’t sell that man your estate. Gold has been found. The whole country is full of gold. Hold on. He’s an assayer. If he offers to buy, be quite sure that he has found gold on your land.
>
> *F.G.*

He put the note into his pocket, gave a verbal message to the boy, and turned to his guest, without betraying the least astonishment or emotion.

‘I beg your pardon. The note was from Bellamy, my next neighbour. Well? You were saying –’

‘Only that I have taken a fancy – perhaps a foolish fancy – to this place of yours, and I’ll give you, if you like, all that you have spent upon it.’

‘Well,’ he replied reflectively, but with a little twinkle in his eye, ‘that seems handsome. But the place isn’t really worth the half that I spent upon it. Anybody would tell you that. Come, let us be honest, whatever we are. I’ll tell you a better way. We will put the matter into the hands of Bellamy. He knows what a coffee plantation is worth. He shall name a price, and if we can agree upon that, we will make a deal of it.’

The other man changed colour. He wanted to settle the thing at once as between gentlemen. What need of third parties? But Reginald stood firm, and he presently rode away, quite sure that in a day or two this planter, too, would have heard the news.

A month later, the young coffee-planter stood on the deck of a steamer homeward bound. In his pocket-book was a plan of his auriferous estate; in a bag hanging round his neck was a small collection of yellow nuggets; in his boxes was a chosen assortment of quartz.

Act III

‘Well, sir,’ said the financier, ‘you’ve brought this thing to me. You want my advice. Well, my advice is, don’t fool away the only good thing that will ever happen to you. Luck such as this doesn’t come more than once in a lifetime.’

‘I have been offered ten thousand pounds for my estate.’

‘Oh! Have you! Ten thousand? That was very liberal – very liberal indeed. Ten thousand for a gold reef!’

‘But I thought as an old friend of my father you would, perhaps–’

‘Young man, don’t fool it away. He’s waiting for you, I suppose, round the corner, with a bottle of fizz, ready to close.’

‘He is.’

‘Well, go and drink his champagne. Always get whatever you can. And then tell him that you’ll see him –’

‘I certainly will, sir, if you advise it. And then?’

‘And then – leave it to me. And, young man, I think I heard, a year or two ago, something about you and my girl Rosie.’

‘There was something, sir. Not enough to trouble you about it.’

‘She told me. Rosie tells me all her love affairs.’

‘Is she – is she unmarried?’

‘Oh, yes! and for the moment I believe she is free. She has had one or two engagements, but, somehow, they have come to nothing. There was the French count, but that was knocked on the head very early in consequence of things discovered. And there was the Boom in Guano, but he fortunately smashed, much to Rosie’s joy, because she never liked him. The last was Lord Evergreen. He was a nice old chap when you could understand what he said, and Rosie would have liked the title very much, though his grandchildren opposed the thing. Well, sir, I suppose you couldn’t understand the trouble we took to keep that old man alive for his own wedding. Science did all it could, but ’twas of no use–’ The financier sighed. ‘The ways of Providence are inscrutable. He died, sir, the day before.’

‘That was very sad.’

‘A dashing of the cup from the lip, sir. My daughter would have been a countess. Well, young gentleman, about this estate of yours. I think I see a way – I think, I am not yet sure – that I do see a way. Go now. See this liberal gentleman, and drink his champagne. And come here in a week. Then, if I still see my way, you shall understand what it means to hold the position in the City which is mine.’

‘And – and – may I call upon Rosie?’

‘Not till this day week – not till I have made my way plain.’

Act IV

‘And so it means this. Oh, Rosie, you look lovelier than ever, and I’m as happy as a king. It means this. Your father is the greatest genius in the world. He buys my property for sixty thousand pounds – sixty thousand. That’s over two thousand a year for me, and he makes a company out of it with a hundred and fifty thousand capital. He says that, taking ten thousand out of it for expenses, there will be a profit of eighty thousand. And all that he gives to you – eighty thousand, that’s three thousand a year for you; and sixty thousand, that’s two more, my dearest Rosie. You remember what you said, that when you married you should step out of one room like this into another just as good?’

‘Oh, Reggie,’ she sank upon his bosom – ‘you know I never could love anybody but you. It’s true I was engaged to old Lord Evergreen, but that was only because he had one foot – you know – and when the other foot went in too, just a day too soon, I actually laughed. So the pater is going to make a company of it, is he? Well, I hope he won’t put any of his own money into it, I’m sure, because of late all the companies have turned out so badly.’

‘But, my child, the place is full of gold.’

‘Then why did he turn it into a company, my dear boy? And why didn’t he make you stick to it? But you know nothing of the City. Now, let us sit down and talk about what we shall do – don’t, you ridiculous boy!’

Act V

Another house just like the first. The bride stepped out of one palace into another. With their five or six thousand a year, the young couple could just manage to make both ends meet. The husband was devoted; the wife had everything that she could wish. Who could be happier than this pair in a nest so luxurious, their life so padded, their days so full of sunshine? It was a year after marriage. The wife, contrary to her usual custom, was the first at breakfast. A few letters were waiting for her – chiefly invitations. She opened and read them. Among them lay one addressed to her husband. Not looking at the address, she opened and read that as well:

Dear Reginald:

I venture to address you as an old friend of your own and school-fellow of your mother's. I am a widow with four children. My husband was the vicar of your old parish – you remember him and me. I was left with a little income of about two hundred a year. Twelve months ago I was persuaded in order to double my income – a thing which seemed certain from the prospectus – to invest everything in a new and rich gold mine. Everything. And the mine has never paid anything. The company – it is called the Solid Gold Reef Company, is in liquidation because, though there is really the gold there, it costs too much to get it. I have no relatives anywhere to help me. Unless I can get assistance my children and I must go at once – tomorrow – into the workhouse. Yes, we are paupers. I am ruined by the cruel lies of that prospectus, and the wickedness which deluded me, and I know not how many others, out of my money. I have been foolish, and am punished; but those people, who will punish them? Help me, if you can, my dear Reginald. Oh! For… *GOD'S*… sake, help my children and me.

Help your mother's friend, your own old friend.

'This,' said Rosie meditatively, 'is exactly the kind of thing to make Reggie uncomfortable. Why, it might make him unhappy all day. Better burn it.' She dropped the letter into the fire. 'He's an impulsive, emotional nature, and he doesn't understand the City. If people are so foolish – What a lot of fibs the poor old pater does tell, to be sure! He's a regular novelist – Oh! here you are, you lazy boy!'

'Kiss me, Rosie.' He looked as handsome as Apollo, and as cheerful. 'I wish all the world were as happy as you and me. Heigho! some poor devils, I'm afraid –'

'Tea or coffee, Reg?'

Ernest Bramah
The Coin of Dionysius

It was eight o'clock at night and raining, scarcely a time when a business so limited in its clientele as that of a coin dealer could hope to attract any customer, but a light was still showing in the small shop that bore over its window the name of Baxter, and in the even smaller office at the back the proprietor himself sat reading the latest ***Pall Mall***. His enterprise seemed to be justified, for presently the door bell gave its announcement, and throwing down his paper Mr. Baxter went forward.

As a matter of fact the dealer had been expecting someone and his manner as he passed into the shop was unmistakably suggestive of a caller of importance. But at the first glance towards his visitor the excess of deference melted out of his bearing, leaving the urbane, self-possessed shopman in the presence of the casual customer.

'Mr. Baxter, I think?' said the latter. He had laid aside his dripping umbrella and was unbuttoning overcoat and coat to reach an inner pocket. 'You hardly remember me, I suppose? Mr. Carlyle – two years ago – I took up a case for you–'

'To be sure, Mr. Carlyle, the private detective–'

'Inquiry agent,' corrected Mr. Carlyle precisely.

'Well,' smiled Mr. Baxter, 'for that matter I am a coin dealer and not an antiquarian or a numismatist. Is there anything in that way that I can do for you?'

'Yes,' replied his visitor; 'it is my turn to consult you.' He had taken a small wash-leather bag from the inner pocket and now turned something carefully out upon the counter. 'What can you tell me about that?'

The dealer gave the coin a moment's scrutiny.

'There is no question about this,' he replied. 'It is a Sicilian **tetradrachm** of Dionysius.'

'Yes, I know that – I have it on the label out of the cabinet. I can tell you further that it's supposed to be one that Lord Seastoke gave two hundred and fifty pounds for at the Brice sale in '94.'

'It seems to me that you can tell me more about it than I can tell you,' remarked Mr. Baxter. 'What is it that you really want to know?'

'I want to know,' replied Mr. Carlyle, 'whether it is genuine or not.'

'Has any doubt been cast upon it?'

'Certain circumstances raised a suspicion – that is all.'

The dealer took another look at the tetradrachm through his magnifying glass, holding it by the edge with the careful touch of an expert. Then he shook his head slowly in a confession of ignorance.

'Of course I could make a guess–'

'No, don't,' interrupted Mr. Carlyle hastily. 'An arrest hangs on it and nothing short of certainty is any good to me.'

'Is that so, Mr. Carlyle?' said Mr. Baxter, with increased interest.

'Well, to be quite candid, the thing is out of my line. Now if it was a rare Saxon penny or a doubtful noble I'd stake my reputation on my opinion, but I do very little in the classical series.'

Mr. Carlyle did not attempt to conceal his disappointment as he returned the coin to the bag and replaced the bag in the inner pocket.

'I had been relying on you,' he grumbled reproachfully. 'Where on earth am I to go now?'

'There is always the British Museum.'

'Ah, to be sure, thanks. But will anyone who can tell me be there now?'

'Now? No fear!' replied Mr. Baxter. 'Go round in the morning –'

'But I must know to-night,' explained the visitor, reduced to despair again. 'To-morrow will be too late for the purpose.'

Mr. Baxter did not hold out much encouragement in the circumstances.

'You can scarcely expect to find anyone at business now,' he remarked. 'I should have been gone these two hours myself only I happened to have an appointment with an American millionaire who fixed his own time.' Something indistinguishable from a wink slid off Mr. Baxter's right eye. 'Offmunson he's called, and a bright young pedigree-hunter has traced his descent from **Offa**, King of **Mercia**. So he – quite naturally – wants a set of Offas as a sort of collateral proof.'

'Very interesting,' murmured Mr. Carlyle, fidgeting with his watch. 'I should love an hour's chat with you about your millionaire customers – some other time. Just now – look here, Baxter, can't you give me a line of introduction to some dealer in this sort of thing who happens to live in town? You must know dozens of experts.'

'Why, bless my soul, Mr. Carlyle, I don't know a man of them away from his business,' said Mr. Baxter, staring. 'They may live in Park Lane or they may live in Petticoat Lane for all I know. Besides, there aren't so many experts as you seem to imagine. And the two best will very likely quarrel over it. You've had to do with 'expert witnesses,' I suppose?'

'I don't want a witness; there will be no need to give evidence. All I want is an absolutely authoritative pronouncement that I can act on. Is there no one who can really say whether the thing is genuine or not?'

Mr. Baxter's meaning silence became cynical in its implication as he continued to look at his visitor across the counter. Then he relaxed.

'Stay a bit; there is a man – an amateur – I remember hearing wonderful things about some time ago. They say he really does know.'

'There you are,' explained Mr. Carlyle, much relieved. 'There always is someone. Who is he?'

'Funny name,' replied Baxter. 'Something Wynn or Wynn something.' He craned his neck to catch sight of an important motor-car that was drawing to the kerb before his window. 'Wynn Carrados! You'll excuse me now, Mr. Carlyle, won't you? This looks like Mr. Offmunson.'

Mr. Carlyle hastily scribbled the name down on his cuff.

'Wynn Carrados, right. Where does he live?'

'Haven't the remotest idea,' replied Baxter, referring the arrangement of his tie to the judgment of the wall mirror. 'I have never seen the man myself. Now, Mr. Carlyle, I'm sorry I can't do any more for you. You won't mind, will you?'

Mr. Carlyle could not pretend to misunderstand. He enjoyed the distinction of holding open the door for the transatlantic representative of the line of Offa as he went out, and then made his way through the muddy streets back to his office. There was only one way of tracing a private individual at such short notice – through the pages of the directories, and the gentleman did not flatter himself by a very high estimate of his chances.

Fortune favoured him, however. He very soon discovered a Wynn Carrados living at **Richmond**, and, better still, further search failed to unearth another. There was, apparently, only one householder at all events of that name in the neighbourhood of London. He jotted down the address and set out for Richmond.

The house was some distance from the station, Mr. Carlyle learned. He took a taxicab and drove, dismissing the vehicle at the gate. He prided himself on his power of observation and the accuracy of his deductions which resulted from it – a detail of his business. 'It's nothing more than using one's eyes and putting two and two together,' he would modestly declare, when he wished to be deprecatory rather than impressive. By the time he had reached the front door of 'The Turrets' he had formed some opinion of the position and tastes of the people who lived there.

A man-servant admitted Mr. Carlyle and took his card – his private card, with the bare request for an interview that would not detain Mr. Carrados for ten minutes. Luck still favoured him; Mr. Carrados was at home and would see him at once. The servant, the hall through which they passed,

and the room into which he was shown, all contributed something to the deductions which the quietly observant gentleman, was half unconsciously recording.

'Mr. Carlyle,' announced the servant.

The room was a library or study. The only occupant, a man of about Carlyle's own age, had been using a typewriter up to the moment of his visitor's entrance. He now turned and stood up with an expression of formal courtesy.

'It's very good of you to see me at this hour,' apologised Mr. Carlyle.

The conventional expression of Mr. Carrados's face changed a little.

'Surely my man has got your name wrong?' he explained. 'Isn't it Louis Calling?'

Mr. Carlyle stopped short and his agreeable smile gave place to a sudden flash of anger or annoyance.

'No sir,' he replied stiffly. 'My name is on the card which you have before you.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Carrados, with perfect good-humour. 'I hadn't seen it. But I used to know a Calling some years ago – at St. Michael's.'

'St. Michael's!' Mr. Carlyle's features underwent another change, no less instant and sweeping than before. 'St. Michael's! Wynn Carrados? Good heavens! it isn't Max Wynn – old "Winning" Wynn'?

'A little older and a little fatter – yes,' replied Carrados. 'I have changed my name you see.'

'Extraordinary thing meeting like this,' said his visitor, dropping into a chair and staring hard at Mr. Carrados. 'I have changed more than my name. How did you recognize me?'

'The voice,' replied Carrados. 'It took me back to that little smoke-dried attic den of yours where we–'

'My God!' exclaimed Carlyle bitterly, 'don't remind me of what we were going to do in those days.' He looked round the well-furnished, handsome room and recalled the other signs of wealth that he had noticed. 'At all events, you seem fairly comfortable, Wynn.'

'I am alternately envied and pitied,' replied Carrados, with a placid tolerance of circumstance that seemed characteristic of him. 'Still, as you say, I am fairly comfortable.'

'Envied, I can understand. But why are you pitied?'

'Because I am blind,' was the tranquil reply.

'Blind!' exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, using his own eyes superlatively. 'Do you mean – literally blind?'

'Literally… I was riding along a bridle-path through a wood about a dozen years ago with a friend. He was in front. At one point a twig sprang back – you know how easily a thing like that happens. It just flicked my eye – nothing to think twice about.'

'And that blinded you?'

'Yes, ultimately. It's called amaurosis.'

'I can scarcely believe it. You seem so sure and self-reliant. Your eyes are full of expression – only a little quieter than they used to be. I believe you were typing when I came… Aren't you having me?'

'You miss the dog and the stick?' smiled Carrados. 'No; it's a fact.'

'What an awful affliction for you, Max. You were always such an impulsive, reckless sort of fellow – never quiet. You must miss such a fearful lot.'

'Has anyone else recognized you?' asked Carrados quietly.

'Ah, that was the voice, you said,' replied Carlyle.

'Yes; but other people heard the voice as well. Only I had no blundering, self-confident eyes to be hoodwinked.'

'That's a rum way of putting it,' said Carlyle. 'Are your ears never hoodwinked, may I ask?'

'Not now. Nor my fingers. Nor any of my other senses that have to look out for themselves.'

‘Well, well,’ murmured Mr. Carlyle, cut short in his sympathetic emotions. ‘I’m glad you take it so well. Of course, if you find it an advantage to be blind, old man–’ He stopped and reddened. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he concluded stiffly.

‘Not an advantage, perhaps,’ replied the other thoughtfully. ‘Still it has compensations that one might not think of. A new world to explore, new experiences, new powers awakening; strange new perceptions; life in the fourth dimension. But why do you beg my pardon, Louis?’

‘I am an ex-solicitor, struck off in connexion with the falsifying of a trust account, Mr. Carrados,’ replied Carlyle, rising.

‘Sit down, Louis,’ said Carrados suavely. His face, even his incredibly living eyes, beamed placid good-nature. ‘The chair on which you will sit, the roof above you, all the comfortable surroundings to which you have so amiably alluded, are the direct result of falsifying a trust account. But do I call you ‘Mr. Carlyle’ in consequence? Certainly not, Louis.’

‘I did not falsify the account,’ cried Carlyle hotly. He sat down however, and added more quietly: ‘But why do I tell you all this? I have never spoken of it before.’

‘Blindness invites confidence,’ replied Carrados. ‘We are out of the running – human rivalry ceases to exist. Besides, why shouldn’t you? In my case the account *was* falsified.’

‘Of course that’s all bunkum, Max’ commented Carlyle. ‘Still, I appreciate your motive.’

‘Practically everything I possess was left to me by an American cousin, on the condition that I took the name of Carrados. He made his fortune by an ingenious conspiracy of doctoring the crop reports and unloading favourably in consequence. And I need hardly remind you that the receiver is equally guilty with the thief.’

‘But twice as safe. I know something of that, Max… Have you any idea what my business is?’

‘You shall tell me,’ replied Carrados.

‘I run a private inquiry agency. When I lost my profession I had to do something for a living. This occurred. I dropped my name, changed my appearance and opened an office. I knew the legal side down to the ground and I got a retired Scotland Yard man to organize the outside work.’

‘Excellent!’ cried Carrados. ‘Do you unearth many murders?’

‘No,’ admitted Mr. Carlyle; ‘our business lies mostly on the conventional lines among divorce and defalcation.’

‘That’s a pity,’ remarked Carrados. ‘Do you know, Louis, I always had a secret ambition to be a detective myself. I have even thought lately that I might still be able to do something at it if the chance came my way. That makes you smile?’

‘Well, certainly, the idea–’

‘Yes, the idea of a blind detective – the blind tracking the alert–’

‘Of course, as you say, certain facilities are no doubt quickened,’ Mr. Carlyle hastened to add considerately, ‘but, seriously, with the exception of an artist, I don’t suppose there is any man who is more utterly dependent on his eyes.’

Whatever opinion Carrados might have held privately, his genial exterior did not betray a shadow of dissent. For a full minute he continued to smoke as though he derived an actual visual enjoyment from the blue sprays that travelled and dispersed across the room. He had already placed before his visitor a box containing cigars of a brand which that gentleman keenly appreciated but generally regarded as unattainable, and the matter-of-fact ease and certainty with which the blind man had brought the box and put it before him had sent a questioning flicker through Carlyle’s mind.

‘You used to be rather fond of art yourself, Louis,’ he remarked presently. ‘Give me your opinion of my latest purchase – the bronze lion on the cabinet there.’ Then, as Carlyle’s gaze went about the room, he added quickly: ‘No, not that cabinet – the one on your left.’

Carlyle shot a sharp glance at his host as he got up, but Carrados’s expression was merely benignly complacent. Then he strolled across to the figure.

‘Very nice,’ he admitted. ‘Late Flemish, isn’t it?’

'No, It is a copy of Vidal's "Roaring Lion."'

'Vidal?'

'A French artist.' The voice became indescribably flat. 'He, also, had the misfortune to be blind, by the way.'

'You old humbug, Max!' shrieked Carlyle, 'you've been thinking that out for the last five minutes.' Then the unfortunate man bit his lip and turned his back towards his host.

'Do you remember how we used to pile it up on that obtuse ass Sanders, and then roast him?' asked Carrados, ignoring the half-smothered exclamation with which the other man had recalled himself.

'Yes,' replied Carlyle quietly. 'This is very good,' he continued, addressing himself to the bronze again. 'How ever did he do it?'

'With his hands.'

'Naturally. But, I mean, how did he study his model?'

'Also with his hands. He called it 'seeing near."

'Even with a lion – handled it?'

'In such cases he required the services of a keeper, who brought the animal to bay while Vidal exercised his own particular gifts… You don't feel inclined to put me on the track of a mystery, Louis?'

Unable to regard this request as anything but one of old Max's unquenchable pleasantries, Mr. Carlyle was on the point of making a suitable reply when a sudden thought caused him to smile knowingly. Up to that point, he had, indeed, completely forgotten the object of his visit. Now that he remembered the doubtful Dionysius and Baxter's recommendation he immediately assumed that some mistake had been made. Either Max was not the Wynn Carrados he had been seeking or else the dealer had been misinformed; for although his host was wonderfully expert in the face of his misfortune, it was inconceivable that he could decide the genuineness of a coin without seeing it. The opportunity seemed a good one of getting even with Carrados by taking him at his word.

'Yes,' he accordingly replied, with crisp deliberation, as he re-crossed the room; 'yes, I will, Max. Here is the clue to what seems to be a rather remarkable fraud.' He put the tetradrachm into his host's hand. 'What do you make of it?'

For a few seconds Carrados handled the piece with the delicate manipulation of his finger-tips while Carlyle looked on with a self-appreciative grin. Then with equal gravity the blind man weighed the coin in the balance of his hand. Finally he touched it with his tongue.

'Well?' demanded the other.

'Of course I have not much to go on, and if I was more fully in your confidence I might come to another conclusion–'

'Yes, yes,' interposed Carlyle, with amused encouragement.

'Then I should advise you to arrest the parlourmaid, Nina Brun, communicate with the police authorities of **Padua** for particulars of the career of Helene Brunesi, and suggest to Lord Seastoke that he should return to London to see what further depredations have been made in his cabinet.'

Mr. Carlyle's groping hand sought and found a chair, on to which he dropped blankly. His eyes were unable to detach themselves for a single moment from the very ordinary spectacle of Mr. Carrados's mildly benevolent face, while the sterilized ghost of his now forgotten amusement still lingered about his features.

'Good heavens!' he managed to articulate, 'how do you know?'

'Isn't that what you wanted of me?' asked Carrados suavely.

'Don't humbug, Max,' said Carlyle severely. 'This is no joke.' An undefined mistrust of his own powers suddenly possessed him in the presence of this mystery. 'How do you come to know of Nina Brun and Lord Seastoke?'

‘You are a detective, Louis,’ replied Carrados. ‘How does one know these things? By using one’s eyes and putting two and two together.’

Carlyle groaned and flung out an arm petulantly.

‘Is it all bunkum, Max? Do you really see all the time – though that doesn’t go very far towards explaining it.’

‘Like Vidal, I see very well – at close quarters,’ replied Carrados, lightly running a forefinger along the inscription on the tetradrachm. ‘For longer range I keep another pair of eyes. Would you like to test them?’

Mr. Carlyle’s assent was not very gracious; it was, in fact, faintly sulky. He was suffering the annoyance of feeling distinctly unimpressive in his own department; but he was also curious.

‘The bell is just behind you, if you don’t mind,’ said his host. ‘Parkinson will appear. You might take note of him while he is in.’

The man who had admitted Mr. Carlyle proved to be Parkinson.

‘This gentleman is Mr. Carlyle, Parkinson,’ explained Carrados the moment the man entered. ‘You will remember him for the future?’

Parkinson’s apologetic eye swept the visitor from head to foot, but so lightly and swiftly that it conveyed to that gentleman the comparison of being very deftly dusted.

‘I will endeavour to do so, sir,’ replied Parkinson, turning again to his master.

‘I shall be at home to Mr. Carlyle whenever he calls. That is all.’

‘Very well, sir.’

‘Now, Louis,’ remarked Mr. Carrados briskly, when the door had closed again, ‘you have had a good opportunity of studying Parkinson. What is he like?’

‘In what way?’

‘I mean as a matter of description. I am a blind man – I haven’t seen my servant for twelve years – what idea can you give me of him? I asked you to notice.’

‘I know you did, but your Parkinson is the sort of man who has very little about him to describe. He is the embodiment of the ordinary. His height is about average–’

‘Five feet nine,’ murmured Carrados. ‘Slightly above the mean.’

‘Scarcely noticeably so. Clean-shaven. Medium brown hair. No particularly marked features. Dark eyes. Good teeth.’

‘False,’ interposed Carrados. ‘The teeth – not the statement.’

‘Possibly,’ admitted Mr. Carlyle. ‘I am not a dental expert and I had no opportunity of examining Mr. Parkinson’s mouth in detail. But what is the drift of all this?’

‘His clothes?’

‘Oh, just the ordinary evening dress of a valet. There is not much room for variety in that.’

‘You noticed, in fact, nothing special by which Parkinson could be identified?’

‘Well, he wore an unusually broad gold ring on the little finger of the left hand.’

‘But that is removable. And yet Parkinson has an ineradicable mole – a small one, I admit – on his chin. And you a human sleuth-hound. Oh, Louis!’

‘At all events,’ retorted Carlyle, writhing a little under this good-humoured satire, although it was easy enough to see in it Carrados’s affectionate intention – ‘at all events, I dare say I can give as good a description of Parkinson as he can give of me.’

‘That is what we are going to test. Ring the bell again.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Quite. I am trying my eyes against yours. If I can’t give you fifty out of a hundred I’ll renounce my private detectorial ambition forever.’

‘It isn’t quite the same,’ objected Carlyle, but he rang the bell.

‘Come in and close the door, Parkinson,’ said Carrados when the man appeared. ‘Don’t look at Mr. Carlyle again – in fact, you had better stand with your back towards him, he won’t mind. Now describe to me his appearance as you observed it.’

Parkinson tendered his respectful apologies to Mr. Carlyle for the liberty he was compelled to take, by the deferential quality of his voice.

‘Mr. Carlyle, sir, wears patent leather boots of about size seven and very little used. There are five buttons, but on the left boot one button – the third up – is missing, leaving loose threads and not the more usual metal fastener. Mr. Carlyle’s trousers, sir, are of a dark material, a dark grey line of about a quarter of an inch width on a darker ground. The bottoms are turned permanently up and are, just now, a little muddy, if I may say so.’

‘Very muddy,’ interposed Mr. Carlyle generously. ‘It is a wet night, Parkinson.’

‘Yes, sir; very unpleasant weather. If you will allow me, sir, I will brush you in the hall. The mud is dry now, I notice. Then, sir,’ continued Parkinson, reverting to the business in hand, ‘there are dark green cashmere hose. A curb-pattern key-chain passes into the left-hand trouser pocket.’

From the visitor’s nether garments the photographic-eyed Parkinson proceeded to higher ground, and with increasing wonder Mr. Carlyle listened to the faithful catalogue of his possessions. His fetter-and-link albert of gold and platinum was minutely described. His spotted blue ascot, with its gentlemanly pearl scarf pin, was set forth, and the fact that the buttonhole in the left lapel of his morning coat showed signs of use was duly noted. What Parkinson saw he recorded, but he made no deductions. A handkerchief carried in the cuff of the right sleeve was simply that to him and not an indication that Mr. Carlyle was, indeed, left-handed.

But a more delicate part of Parkinson’s undertaking remained. He approached it with a double cough.

‘As regards Mr. Carlyle’s personal appearance, sir–’

‘No, enough!’ cried the gentleman concerned hastily. ‘I am more than satisfied. You are a keen observer, Parkinson.’

‘I have trained myself to suit my master’s requirements, sir,’ replied the man. He looked towards Mr. Carrados, received a nod and withdrew.

Mr. Carlyle was the first to speak.

‘That man of yours would be worth five pounds a week to me, Max,’ he remarked thoughtfully. ‘But, of course–’

‘I don’t think that he would take it,’ replied Carrados, in a voice of equally detached speculation. ‘He suits me very well. But you have the chance of using his services – indirectly.’

‘You still mean that – seriously?’

‘I notice in you a chronic disinclination to take me seriously, Louis. It is really – to an Englishman – almost painful. Is there something inherently comic about me or the atmosphere of The Turrets?’

‘No, my friend,’ replied Mr. Carlyle, ‘but there is something essentially prosperous. That is what points to the improbable. Now what is it?’

‘It might be merely a whim, but it is more than that,’ replied Carrados. ‘It is, well, partly vanity, partly ennui, partly’ – certainly there was something more nearly tragic in his voice than comic now – ‘partly hope.’

Mr. Carlyle was too tactful to pursue the subject.

‘Those are three tolerable motives,’ he acquiesced. ‘I’ll do anything you want, Max, on one condition.’

‘Agreed. And it is?’

‘That you tell me how you knew so much of this affair.’ He tapped the silver coin which lay on the table near them. ‘I am not easily flabbergasted,’ he added.

‘You won’t believe that there is nothing to explain – that it was purely second-sight?’

'No,' replied Carlyle tersely: 'I won't.'

'You are quite right. And yet the thing is very simple.'

'They always are – when you know,' soliloquised the other. 'That's what makes them so confoundedly difficult when you don't.'

'Here is this one then. In Padua, which seems to be regaining its old reputation as the birthplace of spurious antiques, by the way, there lives an ingenious craftsman named Pietro Stelli. This simple soul, who possesses a talent not inferior to that of Cavino at his best, has for many years turned his hand to the not unprofitable occupation of forging rare Greek and Roman coins. As a collector and student of certain Greek colonials and a specialist in forgeries I have been familiar with Stelli's workmanship for years. Latterly he seems to have come under the influence of an international crook called – at the moment – Dompierre, who soon saw a way of utilizing Stelli's genius on a royal scale. Helene Brunesi, who in private life is – and really is, I believe – Madame Dompierre, readily lent her services to the enterprise.'

'Quite so,' nodded Mr. Carlyle, as his host paused.

'You see the whole sequence, of course?'

'Not exactly – not in detail,' confessed Mr. Carlyle.

'Dompierre's idea was to gain access to some of the most celebrated cabinets of Europe and substitute Stelli's fabrications for the genuine coins. The princely collection of rarities that he would thus amass might be difficult to dispose of safely, but I have no doubt that he had matured his plans. Helene, in the person of Nina Brun, an Anglicised French parlourmaid – a part which she fills to perfection – was to obtain wax impressions of the most valuable pieces and to make the exchange when the counterfeits reached her. In this way it was obviously hoped that the fraud would not come to light until long after the real coins had been sold, and I gather that she has already done her work successfully in general houses. Then, impressed by her excellent references and capable manner, my housekeeper engaged her, and for a few weeks she went about her duties here. It was fatal to this detail of the scheme, however, that I have the misfortune to be blind. I am told that Helene has so innocently angelic a face as to disarm suspicion, but I was incapable of being impressed and that good material was thrown away. But one morning my material fingers – which, of course, knew nothing of Helene's angelic face – discovered an unfamiliar touch about the surface of my favourite **Euclideas**, and, although there was doubtless nothing to be seen, my critical sense of smell reported that wax had been recently pressed against it. I began to make discreet inquiries and in the meantime my cabinets went to the local bank for safety. Helene countered by receiving a telegram from Angiers, calling her to the death-bed of her aged mother. The aged mother succumbed; duty compelled Helene to remain at the side of her stricken patriarchal father, and doubtless The Turrets was written off the syndicate's operations as a bad debt.'

'Very interesting,' admitted Mr. Carlyle; 'but at the risk of seeming obtuse' – his manner had become delicately chastened – 'I must say that I fail to trace the inevitable connexion between Nina Brun and this particular forgery – assuming that it is a forgery.'

'Set your mind at rest about that, Louis,' replied Carrados. 'It is a forgery, and it is a forgery that none but Pietro Stelli could have achieved. That is the essential connexion. Of course, there are accessories. A private detective coming urgently to see me with a notable tetradrachm in his pocket, which he announces to be the clue to a remarkable fraud – well, really, Louis, one scarcely needs to be blind to see through that.'

'And Lord Seastoke? I suppose you happened to discover that Nina Brun had gone there?'

'No, I cannot claim to have discovered that, or I should certainly have warned him at once when I found out – only recently – about the gang. As a matter of fact, the last information I had of Lord Seastoke was a line in yesterday's Morning Post to the effect that he was still at Cairo. But many of these pieces–' He brushed his finger almost lovingly across the vivid chariot race that embellished

the reverse of the coin, and broke off to remark: ‘You really ought to take up the subject, Louis. You have no idea how useful it might prove to you some day.’

‘I really think I must,’ replied Carlyle grimly. ‘Two hundred and fifty pounds the original of this cost, I believe.’

‘Cheap, too; it would make five hundred pounds in New York to-day. As I was saying, many are literally unique. This gem by Kimon is – here is his signature, you see; Peter is particularly good at lettering – and as I handled the genuine tetradrachm about two years ago, when Lord Seastoke exhibited it at a meeting of our society in Albemarle Street, there is nothing at all wonderful in my being able to fix the locale of your mystery. Indeed, I feel that I ought to apologize for it all being so simple.’

‘I think,’ remarked Mr. Carlyle, critically examining the loose threads on his left boot, ‘that the apology on that head would be more appropriate from me.’

Gilbert Keith Chesterton
The Queer Feet

If you meet a member of that select club, 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product – an 'exclusive' commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday afternoon. The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in **Belgravia**. It was a small hotel; and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance: the fact that practically only twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather; and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever; and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand; there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman's servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy; and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt

with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and the fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown's trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon; and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest **Popish priest**. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that that cleric kept it to himself; but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the righting of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in **Buckingham Palace**, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr. Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or anteroom in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one's own family. Moreover, the priest's appearance was second-rate and his clothes muddy; a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr. Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge – a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar which probably once occupied its place.

In this office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants' quarters, was the gentlemen's cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen's domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr. Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be known. I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing.

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on; his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was: only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was

no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel; and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions; and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down one-half of the corridor in order to walk very slow down the other half; or he was walking very slow at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid; he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first: it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No; that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not specially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else – something that he could not remember. He was maddened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloak room beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.

The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he should lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside; he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his

paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light; then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the old slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semicircular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress; tall, but with an air of not taking up much room; one felt that he could have slid along like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthy and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good humoured and confident; a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown's black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: 'I want my hat and coat, please; I find I have to go away at once.'

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter; meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: 'I haven't got any silver; you can keep this.' And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown's figure remained quite dark and still; but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration – important at rare crises – when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it.

'I think, sir,' he said civilly, 'that you have some silver in your pocket.'

The tall gentleman stared. 'Hang it,' he cried, 'if I choose to give you gold, why should you complain?'

'Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold,' said the priest mildly; 'that is, in large quantities.'

The stranger looked at him curiously. Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance. Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown's head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar.

'Stand still,' he said, in a hacking whisper. 'I don't want to threaten you, but–'

'I do want to threaten you,' said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, 'I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.'

'You're a rum sort of cloak-room clerk,' said the other.

'I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau,' said Brown, 'and I am ready to hear your confession.'

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair.

The first two courses of the dinner of The Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success. I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody. It was written in a sort of super-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen. There was a tradition in the club that the hors d'oeuvres should be various and manifold to the point of madness. They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club. There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending – a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come. The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it. Cabinet ministers on both sides were alluded to by their Christian names with a sort of bored benignity. The Radical Chancellor of **the Exchequer**, whom the whole **Tory party** was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised – as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr. Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore **Gladstone** collars; he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything – not even anything wrong. He was not fast; he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing; and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr. Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany – which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the wall like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first chink of knife and fork this army of retainers had vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr. Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed, irreverent, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was – how shall I put it? – A vivid shadow, a projection of his personality, which told that he was hovering near. The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the shapes which God had given to them. The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated fish knives and fish forks,

and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with. So it did, for all I know. This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence; and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark: 'They can't do this anywhere but here.'

'Nowhere,' said Mr. Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times. 'Nowhere, assuredly, except here. It was represented to me that at the Café Anglais–'

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts. 'It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Cafe Anglais. Nothing like it, sir,' he said, shaking his head ruthlessly, like a hanging judge. 'Nothing like it.'

'Overrated place,' said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months.

'Oh, I don't know,' said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, 'it's jolly good for some things. You can't beat it at–'

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead. His stoppage was as silent as his tread; but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed – if a chair ran away from us.

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor. A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably ending with money. A genuine democrat would have asked him, with comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing. But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely a dull, hot embarrassment. They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent. They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over. It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room.

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried **synod**, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of a presidential hammer, and said: 'Splendid work young Moocher's doing in **Burmah**. Now, no other nation in the world could have –'

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear: 'So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?'

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown; now it was a sickly yellow.

'You will pardon me, Mr. Audley,' he said, with asthmatic breathlessness. 'I have great apprehensions. Your fish-plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!'

'Well, I hope so,' said the chairman, with some warmth.

'You see him?' panted the excited hotel keeper; 'you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?'

'Know the waiter?' answered Mr. Audley indignantly. 'Certainly not!'

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony. 'I never send him,' he said. 'I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away.'

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants; none of the company could say anything except the man of wood – Colonel Pound – who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak. 'Do you mean,' he said, 'that somebody has stolen our silver fish service?'

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

'Are all your waiters here?' demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

'Yes; they're all here. I noticed it myself,' cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the inmost ring. 'Always count 'em as I come in; they look so queer standing up against the wall.'

'But surely one cannot exactly remember,' began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

'I remember exactly, I tell you,' cried the duke excitedly. 'There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen tonight, I'll swear; no more and no less.'

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise. 'You say – you say,' he stammered, 'that you see all my fifteen waiters?'

'As usual,' assented the duke. 'What is the matter with that!'

'Nothing,' said Lever, with a deepening accent, 'only you did not. For one of zem is dead upstairs.'

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room. It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them – the duke, I think – even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: 'Is there anything we can do?'

'He has had a priest,' said the Jew, not untouched.

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position. For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars. But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous; broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction. The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door. 'If there was a fifteenth man here, friends,' he said, 'that fifteenth fellow was a thief. Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything; then we'll talk. The twenty-four pearls of the club are worth recovering.'

Mr. Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything; but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion.

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver.

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the passages divided into two groups. Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor to the front room to demand news of any exit. Colonel Pound, with the chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor leading to the servants' quarters, as the more likely line of escape. As they did so they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow of it.

'Hallo, there!' called out the duke. 'Have you seen anyone pass?'

The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said: 'Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen.'

They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen quaintly shaped forks and knives.

‘You – you –’ began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the room behind him was burst, as if someone had passed violently through. ‘Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren’t they?’ remarked the clergyman, with cheerful composure.

‘Did – did you steal those things?’ stammered Mr. Audley, with staring eyes.

‘If I did,’ said the cleric pleasantly, ‘at least I am bringing them back again.’

‘But you didn’t,’ said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.

‘To make a clean breast of it, I didn’t,’ said the other, with some humour. And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool. ‘But you know who did,’ said the colonel.

‘I don’t know his real name,’ said the priest placidly, ‘but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented.’

‘Oh, I say – repented!’ cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. ‘Odd, isn’t it,’ he said, ‘that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are The Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men.’

‘Did you catch this man?’ asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread.’

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache.

At last he said quietly to the priest: ‘He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer.’

‘He was a clever fellow,’ answered the other, ‘but I am not quite sure of what other you mean.’

‘I mean you,’ said the colonel, with a short laugh. ‘I don’t want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that. But I’d give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him. I reckon you’re the most up-to-date devil of the present company.’

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier. ‘Well,’ he said, smiling, ‘I mustn’t tell you anything of the man’s identity, or his own story, of course; but there’s no particular reason why I shouldn’t tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself.’

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate. He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire.

‘You see, colonel,’ he said, ‘I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death. First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager; then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar. But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation; first the run and then the walk, and then the run again. I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once. One walk I knew; it was just like yours, colonel. It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient. I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was. What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I heard a clink of plates somewhere;

and the answer stood up as plain as **St. Peter**'s. It was the walk of a waiter – that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground, the coat tails and napkin flying. Then I thought for a minute and a half more. And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it.'

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker's mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness.

'A crime,' he said slowly, 'is like any other work of art. Don't look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable mark – I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in Hamlet, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. Well, this also,' he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, 'this also is the plain tragedy of a man in black. Yes,' he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, 'the whole of this tale turns on a black coat. In this, as in Hamlet, there are the **rococo** excrescences – yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact – some fact that is not itself mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men's thoughts away from it. This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman's evening dress is the same as a waiter's. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too.'

'Still,' said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, 'I am not sure that I understand.'

'Colonel,' said Father Brown, 'I tell you that this **archangel** of impudence who stole your forks walked up and down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors, and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don't ask me what he was like; you have seen him yourself six or seven times tonight. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the lightning style of a waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the terrace, did something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office and the waiters' quarters. By the time he had come under the eye of the office clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded insolence which they have all seen in their patrons. It was no new thing to them that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an animal at the Zoo; they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit of walking where one chooses. When he was magnificently weary of walking down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back past the office; in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered as by a blast of magic, and went hurrying forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an obsequious attendant. Why should the gentlemen look at a chance waiter? Why should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he played the coolest tricks. In the proprietor's private quarters he called out breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said genially that he would carry it himself, and he did; he carried it quickly and correctly through the thick of you, a waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the end of the fish course.

'His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row; but even then he contrived to lean against the wall just round the corner in such a way that for that important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the gentlemen thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away from the table, that waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a swift servant, and clear it himself. He put the plates

down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his breast pocket, giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till he came to the cloak room. There he had only to be a plutocrat again – a plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the cloak-room attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only – only I happened to be the cloak-room attendant.'

'What did you do to him?' cried the colonel, with unusual intensity. 'What did he tell you?'

'I beg your pardon,' said the priest immovably, 'that is where the story ends.'

'And the interesting story begins,' muttered Pound. 'I think I understand his professional trick. But I don't seem to have got hold of yours.'

'I must be going,' said Father Brown.

They walked together along the passage to the entrance hall, where they saw the fresh, freckled face of the Duke of Chester, who was bounding buoyantly along towards them.

'Come along, Pound,' he cried breathlessly. 'I've been looking for you everywhere. The dinner's going again in spanking style, and old Audley has got to make a speech in honour of the forks being saved. We want to start some new ceremony, don't you know, to commemorate the occasion. I say, you really got the goods back, what do you suggest?'

'Why,' said the colonel, eyeing him with a certain sardonic approval, 'I should suggest that henceforward we wear green coats, instead of black. One never knows what mistakes may arise when one looks so like a waiter.'

'Oh, hang it all!' said the young man, 'a gentleman never looks like a waiter.'

'Nor a waiter like a gentleman, I suppose,' said Colonel Pound, with the same lowering laughter on his face. 'Reverend sir, your friend must have been very smart to act the gentleman.'

Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand.

'Yes,' he said; 'it must be very hard work to be a gentleman; but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter.'

And saying 'Good evening,' he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures. The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny **omnibus**.

Wilkie Collins
The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed

Prologue to the First Story

Before I begin, by the aid of my wife's patient attention and ready pen, to relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take, it will not be amiss if I try to secure the reader's interest in the following pages by briefly explaining how I became possessed of the narrative matter which they contain.

Of myself I have nothing to say, but that I have followed the profession of a travelling portrait-painter for the last fifteen years. The pursuit of my calling has not only led me all through England, but has taken me twice to Scotland and once to Ireland. In moving from district to district, I am never guided beforehand by any settled plan. Sometimes the letters of recommendation which I get from persons who are satisfied with the work I have done for them determine the direction in which I travel. Sometimes I hear of a new neighbourhood in which there is no resident artist of ability, and remove thither on speculation. Sometimes my friends among the picture-dealers say a good word on my behalf to their rich customers, and so pave the way for me in the large towns. Sometimes my prosperous and famous brother artists, hearing of small commissions which it is not worth their while to accept, mention my name, and procure me introductions to pleasant country houses. Thus I get on, now in one way and now in another, not winning a reputation or making a fortune, but happier, perhaps, on the whole, than many men who have got both the one and the other. So, at least, I try to think now, though I started in my youth with as high an ambition as the best of them. Thank God, it is not my business here to speak of past times and their disappointments. A twinge of the old hopeless heartache comes over me sometimes still, when I think of my student days.

One peculiarity of my present way of life is, that it brings me into contact with all sorts of characters. I almost feel, by this time, as if I had painted every civilized variety of the human race. Upon the whole, my experience of the world, rough as it has been, has not taught me to think unkindly of my fellow-creatures. I have certainly received such treatment at the hands of some of my sitters as I could not describe without saddening and shocking any kind-hearted reader; but, taking one year and one place with another, I have cause to remember with gratitude and respect, sometimes even with friendship and affection, a very large proportion of the numerous persons who have employed me.

Some of the results of my experience are curious in a moral point of view. For example, I have found women almost uniformly less delicate in asking me about my terms, and less generous in remunerating me for my services, than men. On the other hand, men, within my knowledge, are decidedly vainer of their personal attractions, and more vexatiously anxious to have them done full justice to on canvas, than women. Taking both sexes together, I have found young people, for the most part, more gentle, more reasonable, and more considerate than old. And, summing up, in a general way, my experience of different ranks (which extends, let me premise, all the way down from peers to publicans), I have met with most of my formal and ungracious receptions among rich people of uncertain social standing; the highest classes and the lowest among my employers almost always contrive – in widely different ways, of course – to make me feel at home as soon as I enter their houses.

The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is not, as some persons may imagine, the difficulty of making my sitters keep their heads still while I paint them, but the difficulty of getting them to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner. People will assume an expression, will brush up their hair, will correct any little characteristic carelessness in their apparel – will, in short, when they want to have their likenesses

taken, look as if they were sitting for their pictures. If I paint them under these artificial circumstances, I fail, of course, to present them in their habitual aspect; and my portrait, as a necessary consequence, disappoints everybody, the sitter always included. When we wish to judge of a man's character by his handwriting, we want his customary scrawl dashed off with his common workaday pen, not his best small text traced laboriously with the finest procurable crow-quill point. So it is with portrait-painting, which is, after all, nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognisably presented to the view of others.

Experience, after repeated trials, has proved to me that the only way of getting sitters who persist in assuming a set look to resume their habitual expression is to lead them into talking about some subject in which they are greatly interested. If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious every-day peculiarities of the man or woman peep out, one after another, quite unawares. The long maundering stories about nothing, the wearisome recitals of petty grievances, the local anecdotes unrelieved by the faintest suspicion of anything like general interest, which I have been condemned to hear, as a consequence of thawing the ice off the features of formal sitters by the method just described, would fill hundreds of volumes and promote the repose of thousands of readers. On the other hand, if I have suffered under the tediousness of the many, I have not been without my compensating gains from the wisdom and experience of the few. To some of my sitters I have been indebted for information which has enlarged my mind, to some for advice which has lightened my heart, to some for narratives of strange adventure which riveted my attention at the time, which have served to interest and amuse my fireside circle for many years past, and which are now, I would fain hope, destined to make kind friends for me among a wider audience than any that I have yet addressed.

Singularly enough, almost all the best stories that I have heard from my sitters have been told by accident. I only remember two cases in which a story was volunteered to me; and, although I have often tried the experiment, I cannot call to mind even a single instance in which leading questions (as lawyers call them) on my part, addressed to a sitter, ever produced any result worth recording. Over and over again I have been disastrously successful in encouraging dull people to weary me. But the clever people who have something interesting to say seem, so far as I have observed them, to acknowledge no other stimulant than chance. For every story, excepting one, I have been indebted, in the first instance, to the capricious influence of the same chance. Something my sitter has seen about me, something I have remarked in my sitter, or in the room in which I take the likeness, or in the neighbourhood through which I pass on my way to work, has suggested the necessary association, or has started the right train of recollections, and then the story appeared to begin of its own accord. Occasionally the most casual notice, on my part, of some very unpromising object has smoothed the way for the relation of a long and interesting narrative. I first heard one of the most dramatic stories merely through being carelessly inquisitive to know the history of a stuffed poodle-dog.

It is thus not without reason that I lay some stress on the desirableness of prefacing the following narrative by a brief account of the curious manner in which I became possessed of it. As to my capacity for repeating the story correctly, I can answer for it that my memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is, after all, a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-past conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain before-hand, in meditating over its contents: first, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. Although I cannot take the lead in talking while I am engaged in painting, I can listen while others speak, and work all the better for it.

So much in the way of general preface to the pages for which I am about to ask the reader's attention. Let me now advance to particulars, and describe how I came to hear the story. I begin with

it because it is the story that I have oftenest 'rehearsed,' to borrow a phrase from the stage. Wherever I go, I am sooner or later sure to tell it. Only last night I was persuaded into repeating it once more by the inhabitants of the farm-house in which I am now staying.

Not many years ago, on returning from a short holiday visit to a friend settled in Paris, I found professional letters awaiting me at my agent's in London, which required my immediate presence in **Liverpool**. Without stopping to unpack, I proceeded by the first conveyance to my new destination; and, calling at the picture-dealer's shop where portrait-painting engagements were received for me, found to my great satisfaction that I had remunerative employment in prospect, in and about Liverpool, for at least two months to come. I was putting up my letters in high spirits, and was just leaving the picture-dealer's shop to look out for comfortable lodgings, when I was met at the door by the landlord of one of the largest hotels in Liverpool – an old acquaintance whom I had known as manager of a tavern in London in my student days.

'Mr. Kerby!' he exclaimed, in great astonishment. 'What an unexpected meeting! the last man in the world whom I expected to see, and yet the very man whose services I want to make use of!'

'What! more work for me?' said I. 'Are all the people in Liverpool going to have their portraits painted?'

'I only know of one,' replied the landlord, 'a gentleman staying at my hotel, who wants a chalk drawing done of him. I was on my way here to inquire for any artist whom our picture-dealing friend could recommend. How glad I am that I met you before I had committed myself to employing a stranger!'

'Is this likeness wanted at once?' I asked, thinking of the number of engagements that I had already got in my pocket.

'Immediately – to-day – this very hour, if possible,' said the landlord. 'Mr. Faulkner, the gentleman I am speaking of, was to have sailed yesterday for the Brazils from this place; but the wind shifted last night to the wrong quarter, and he came ashore again this morning. He may, of course, be detained here for some time; but he may also be called on board ship at half an hour's notice, if the wind shifts back again in the right direction. This uncertainty makes it a matter of importance that the likeness should be begun immediately. Undertake it if you possibly can, for Mr. Faulkner is a liberal gentleman, who is sure to give you your own terms.'

I reflected for a minute or two. The portrait was only wanted in chalk, and would not take long; besides, I might finish it in the evening, if my other engagements pressed hard upon me in the daytime. Why not leave my luggage at the picture-dealer's, put off looking for lodgings till night, and secure the new commission boldly by going back at once with the landlord to the hotel? I decided on following this course almost as soon as the idea occurred to me; put my chalks in my pocket, and a sheet of drawing-paper in the first of my portfolios that came to hand; and so presented myself before Mr. Faulkner, ready to take his likeness, literally at five minutes' notice.

I found him a very pleasant, intelligent man, young and handsome. He had been a great traveller, had visited all the wonders of the East, and was now about to explore the wilds of the vast South American continent. Thus much he told me good-humouredly and unconstrainedly while I was preparing my drawing materials.

As soon as I had put him in the right light and position, and had seated myself opposite to him, he changed the subject of conversation, and asked me, a little confusedly as I thought, if it was not a customary practice among portrait-painters to gloss over the faults in their sitters' faces, and to make as much as possible of any good points which their features might possess.

'Certainly,' I answered. 'You have described the whole art and mystery of successful portrait-painting in a few words.'

'May I beg, then,' said he, 'that you will depart from the usual practice in my case, and draw me with all my defects, exactly as I am? The fact is,' he went on, after a moment's pause, 'the likeness

you are now preparing to take is intended for my mother; my roving disposition makes me a great anxiety to her, and she parted from me this last time very sadly and unwillingly. I don't know how the idea came into my head, but it struck me this morning that I could not better employ the time while I was delayed here on shore than by getting my likeness done to send to her as a keepsake. She has no portrait of me since I was a child, and she is sure to value a drawing of me more than anything else I could send to her. I only trouble you with this explanation to prove that I am really sincere in my wish to be drawn unflatteringly, exactly as I am.'

Secretly respecting and admiring him for what he had just said, I promised that his directions should be implicitly followed, and began to work immediately. Before I had pursued my occupation for ten minutes, the conversation began to flag, and the usual obstacle to my success with a sitter gradually set itself up between us. Quite unconsciously, of course, Mr. Faulkner stiffened his neck, shut his mouth, and contracted his eyebrows – evidently under the impression that he was facilitating the process of taking his portrait by making his face as like a lifeless mask as possible. All traces of his natural animated expression were fast disappearing, and he was beginning to change into a heavy and rather melancholy-looking man.

This complete alteration was of no great consequence so long as I was only engaged in drawing the outline of his face and the general form of his features. I accordingly worked on doggedly for more than an hour; then left off to point my chalks again, and to give my sitter a few minutes' rest. Thus far the likeness had not suffered through Mr. Faulkner's unfortunate notion of the right way of sitting for his portrait; but the time of difficulty, as I well knew, was to come. It was impossible for me to think of putting any expression into the drawing unless I could contrive some means, when he resumed his chair, of making him look like himself again. 'I will talk to him about foreign parts,' thought I, 'and try if I can't make him forget that he is sitting for his picture in that way.'

While I was pointing my chalks, Mr. Faulkner was walking up and down the room. He chanced to see the portfolio I had brought with me leaning against the wall, and asked if there were any sketches in it. I told him there were a few which I had made during my recent stay in Paris. 'In Paris?' he repeated, with a look of interest; 'may I see them?'

I gave him the permission he asked as a matter of course. Sitting down, he took the portfolio on his knee, and began to look through it. He turned over the first five sketches rapidly enough; but when he came to the sixth I saw his face flush directly, and observed that he took the drawing out of the portfolio, carried it to the window, and remained silently absorbed in the contemplation of it for full five minutes. After that he turned round to me, and asked very anxiously if I had any objection to parting with that sketch.

It was the least interesting drawing of the collection – merely a view in one of the streets running by the backs of the houses in **the Palais Royal**. Some four or five of these houses were comprised in the view, which was of no particular use to me in any way, and which was too valueless, as a work of art, for me to think of selling it. I begged his acceptance of it at once. He thanked me quite warmly; and then, seeing that I looked a little surprised at the odd selection he had made from my sketches, laughingly asked me if I could guess why he had been so anxious to become possessed of the view which I had given him.

'Probably,' I answered, 'there is some remarkable historical association connected with that street at the back of the Palais Royal, of which I am ignorant.'

'No,' said Mr. Faulkner; 'at least none that *I* know of. The only association connected with the place in *my* mind is a purely personal association. Look at this house in your drawing – the house with the water-pipe running down it from top to bottom. I once passed a night there – a night I shall never forget to the day of my death. I have had some awkward travelling adventures in my time; but *that* adventure! Well, never mind, suppose we begin the sitting. I make but a bad return for your kindness in giving me the sketch by thus wasting your time in mere talk.'

‘Come! come!’ thought I, as he went back to the sitter’s chair, ‘I shall see your natural expression on your face if I can only get you to talk about that adventure.’ It was easy enough to lead him in the right direction. At the first hint from me, he returned to the subject of the house in the back street. Without, I hope, showing any undue curiosity, I contrived to let him see that I felt a deep interest in everything he now said. After two or three preliminary hesitations, he at last, to my great joy, fairly started on the narrative of his adventure. In the interest of his subject he soon completely forgot that he was sitting for his portrait, – the very expression that I wanted came over his face, – and my drawing proceeded toward completion, in the right direction, and to the best purpose. At every fresh touch I felt more and more certain that I was now getting the better of my grand difficulty; and I enjoyed the additional gratification of having my work lightened by the recital of a true story, which possessed, in my estimation, all the excitement of the most exciting romance.

This, as I recollect it, is how Mr. Faulkner told me his adventure.

The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed

Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to **Frascati's**; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. 'For Heaven's sake,' said I to my friend, 'let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise.' 'Very well,' said my friend, 'we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see.' In another minute we arrived at the door and entered the house, the back of which you have drawn in your sketch.

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