

SAFE CUSTODY

Dornford Yates

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SAFE CUSTODY

Dornford Yates

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE "BERRY" BOOKS

THE BROTHER OF DAPHNE
THE COURTS OF IDLENESS
BERRY AND CO.
JONAH AND CO.
ADÈLE AND CO.
AND BERRY CAME TOO
THE HOUSE THAT BERRY BUILT

THE "CHANDOS" BOOKS

BLIND CORNER
PERISHABLE GOODS
BLOOD ROYAL
FIRE BELOW
SHE FELL AMONG THIEVES
AN EYE FOR A TOOTH

OTHER VOLUMES

THE STOLEN MARCH
THIS PUBLICAN
ANTHONY LYVEDEN
VALERIE FRENCH

SAFE CUSTODY
STORM MUSIC
AND FIVE WERE FOOLISH
AS OTHER MEN ARE
MAIDEN STAKES
SHE PAINTED HER FACE
GALE WARNING
SHOAL WATER
PERIOD STUFF

SAFE CUSTODY

BY
DORNFORD YATES

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

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When my great-uncle, Nicolas Ferrers, died in the arms of a pedlar by the side of the Great North Road, he left a world that knew but little about him and cared still less.

My cousin, Hubert Constable, and I were his only relatives, but, though we were able to swear to the dead man's face, we had not seen him alive for more than six years.

We knew that he dwelled abroad and we knew his address—Hohenems Castle, Carinthia, Austria: we knew he had never married and that his word was law: we had been taught to believe that he could be pleased or displeased by what we did: but, though our parents were dead, he made so little of our kinship that had we been in trouble, it would not have entered our heads to let him know. Indeed, though he had been our guardian, he had become for us a kind of lesser deity, unseen, mysterious, venerable, that never uttered a precept but by his secretary's hand.

Then, out of the blue of a pleasant April morning, we each received a letter bidding us meet him in Scotland in three days' time. We were actually discussing this summons upon the telephone, when a telegram came to tell me that he had been fatally hurt and was lying at a little village on the edge of a Yorkshire dale.

The message was sent to me because, I suppose, I bear my great-uncle's name, but had whoever sent it known us by sight, he would have addressed it to Hubert, not so much

because he was the elder as because he is plainly the leader of whatever company he keeps.

Feeling something dazed, I told my cousin the news, and within the hour we had left by train for the village the police had named.

And there we were shown the dead man and were told the truth.

This was ordinary enough.

A tire had burst, and the car in which he was travelling had been overturned. The driver had been killed outright: our great-uncle had died on the spot: and his secretary, grievously hurt, had been carried to hospital.

At once we drove to the town at which the survivor lay, but though I think the man knew us, he gave no sign. His brother had been sent for, and once or twice he inquired if he had not come, but though, as I afterwards learned, he fought for his life, he died the next morning before his brother arrived.

That day, to our relief, our great-uncle's lawyer appeared, and we were more than thankful to let him take over the duties which we had begun to discharge. I then returned to London, to fetch us changes of linen and suitable clothes, while Hubert stayed in Yorkshire to give what assistance he could.

The inquest was held the next day, and the day after that Nicholas Ferrers was laid in a fair churchyard, but half an hour's walk from the spot where he lost his life. The driver, who was not in his service, was taken, I think, to the parish

from which he hailed: but the secretary, Harris, was buried by the side of his master and at our charge. After the inquest his brother had disappeared, so that we alone were the mourners that stood by his grave.

My great-uncle's Will was short.

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By this he divided his fortune between my cousin and me, directing that we should pay Harris six hundred pounds a year for so long as he lived. Hohenems was left to us jointly, with all that it held.

And that is the end of my prologue. Though its burden was startling enough to Hubert and me, to the lawyer it was very plainly of slight account: and that, perhaps, was natural, for plenty meet their death on the open road, and when a man dies another inherits his goods. Yet I will wager that had he foreseen the havoc which that burst tire would unloose, for which the stage was now set, that man of law and order would have gone sleepless of nights, while had he dreamed of the violence which we were to do, the hair would have risen upon his respectable head.

Hubert and I returned to London alone, and when the train had started, my cousin took out a paper and put it into my hand.

“This,” he said, “was with Uncle Nicolas’ Will. Under seal, of course. I’ve shown it to nobody else.”

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Dear Hubert,

You and your cousin John are now the owners of Hohenems. Directly or indirectly the neighbouring House of Haydn will press you to sell this estate, and, if you decline to sell it, to let it on lease. Do neither. They desire it not for itself, but for something the property holds. What this may be is their secret. Their anxiety argues that it is of great value, but, though I would have met them, their avarice will not allow them to come to terms. You may put your trust in Harris, who will tell you as much as I know.

*Your affectionate uncle,
Nicolas Ferrers.*

I looked from the letter to Hubert, as a man in a dream.

“Read it again,” he said. “There’s plenty of room for guesswork and I want to hear what you think.”

Again I read the letter, though the sentences danced before me, as well they might.

Suddenly I noticed the date.

“This is five years old,” I cried. “Perhaps since then . . .” I looked up swiftly. “Was this why he wanted to see us?”

“Good,” said Hubert. “That’s just what I asked myself. And now you’ve confirmed the fancy, I think we’re right. I don’t say he’d found the secret, but I think he was getting warm, and, if there was work to be done, he may have wanted our help.”

I returned to the letter, and Hubert lighted a pipe.

At length—

“Well, it’s up to us,” said I, “to start all over again. If only Harris had lived. . . .”

“It’s just as well he didn’t,” said Hubert.

His words surprised me so much that a match I had struck burned its way to my fingers before I had found my tongue.

As I flung it down with a cry—

“Just as well,” repeated Hubert, “so far as we are concerned.”

13

“What on earth do you mean?”

“I never liked Harris,” said Hubert. “And I don’t think Harris liked us. Why Uncle Nick employed him, I never knew. A case of Homer nodding, I rather think. I saw more of him than you, and he wasn’t a man I’d trust.”

“You mean?”

Hubert laid down his pipe.

“Harris knew the secret all right—or, at least, as much of the secret as Uncle Nick knew. And he knew, of course, that his master proposed to disclose it to us. Very well, then. Why didn’t Harris tell us before he died? *Because he didn’t mean us to know.* Either he hoped to survive us and use the

knowledge himself, or else he meant his brother to use it—that brother who came too late.

“Now I wouldn’t charge a dead man, if I wasn’t sure of my facts, but as soon as I’d opened this letter—you were in Town—I went to the hospital and saw the doctors and nurses in charge of the case.

“Harris lived seventeen hours, but he never lost consciousness once. The first thing he asked was whether Uncle Nick was alive or dead. They told him that he was alive, but badly hurt. A lie, of course, but they wanted to temper the wind. Well, Harris didn’t believe it. He was almost sure he was dead and he kept on hammering at them to tell him the truth. Then he demanded to see him, and when they said he couldn’t, he made such a scene that at last they threw in their hand and said he was dead.

“‘Killed on the spot?’ says Harris.

“They told him yes.

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“‘Good,’ says Harris. ‘Am I going to live or die?’

“I suppose he saw the answer clear in their eyes, for before they could lie again—

“‘Then wire for my brother,’ he said, and gave them the fellow’s address.

“Then he asked how long they gave him and started to fight for his life.

“I asked them if when we came, he was in a condition to talk.

“The nurses looked ill at ease.

“Then—

“‘I’m afraid he was pretending,’ said one. ‘After you’d gone he said he was nothing to you and you were nothing to him.’

“Well, there you are. He knew Uncle Nick couldn’t talk, because he was dead. And he wasn’t going to talk, because he meant to rob us of what was ours.

“But with it all, the fellow did himself down.

“Such was his will to live that his state deceived the doctors, and when he asked how long he’d got, they gave him thirty-six hours. The consequence was that he reckoned on living till noon at the very least, and he knew that his brother could get there by nine o’clock. So he never wrote anything down.

“Now mark how he died.

“At three in the morning he felt himself beginning to go. At once he asked for pencil and paper, raving and cursing like a madman because he had been ‘deceived.’ When the paper was brought he hadn’t the strength to write, and there seems no doubt that his frenzy hastened his end. More to soothe him than anything else, one of the women offered to write any message he wished his brother to have. He jumped at this and started in to dictate.

“‘Go to Hohenems,’ he said. ‘There—’

“And that was as far as he got. I believe his struggles were frightful, for though the brain was there, he couldn’t get out the words. I don’t feel very charitable towards him, but if in fact he’s done us, he’s paid a part of his debt.”

As soon as I could find my tongue—

“And what of his brother?” said I. “Did they tell him the truth?”

“Some of it,” said Hubert. “They gave him the paper, of course. It seems his manner was curious. He showed no sign of surprise, but he asked more than once if they’d no idea of the words which his brother had tried to say. He said they concerned some papers which had a particular bearing upon the family name.”

“He was in it,” said I thickly.

“Without a doubt,” said Hubert. “Harris had told him something, but not enough.”

I set my head in my hands and tried to think, and if my thoughts were bitter, I think I may be excused.

Dead Nicolas Ferrers had been most grossly betrayed and we, his heirs, had been deliberately spoiled. This by a man to whom we had always been civil, in whom our great-uncle reposed an absolute trust.

I found myself wondering what manner of man this had been that could on his deathbed, so far from repenting his sins, conceive and coolly commit so shabby a crime.

Go to Hohenems.

The words lit up my darkness as the sudden beam of a lighthouse a sullen sea.

We would indeed go to Hohenems—and wring from the place its secret, if it took us the rest of our lives. Its value was nothing: by our great-uncle's Will we had now enough and to spare: but Harris had robbed us, and now his helpless ghost should sweat and writhe to watch us inch by inch recover our rights.

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I sat up and looked at Hubert.

“And Harris the Second?” said I. “What will he do?”

“I rather imagine,” said Hubert, “he’ll do as he’s told.”

Go to Hohenems . . .

I started up from my seat.

“Damn it,” I cried, “the man may be halfway there.”

“I doubt it,” said Hubert. “He’d have to make some plans. But if he is going, I guess he won’t waste any time. D’you think we can get off to-morrow—to-morrow night?”

“I shan’t sleep if we don’t,” said I.

“No more shall I,” said Hubert. “And now let’s make a list of what we must get and do.”

That our list was comprehensive was due to Hubert alone, for I was too much excited to be of use. Indeed, whatever he said I wrote down like any clerk, and if he had stated that we must take with us a tank, I should have entered the item without a thought.

Not that our equipment was heavy: indeed, it included few things which someone about to travel would not have bought: but among these were three good torches and a pistol apiece.

Though I had a car, we decided to go out by train, for so we should travel faster and arrive less tired, while, as for a means of transport, once we had left the train, there must, we felt sure, belong to the castle some car which would serve our needs.

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Hubert then suggested that we should take with us his man, for we had, of course, no idea of the household which we should find: to this I was happy to agree, for I knew and liked the fellow and was sure he would pull his weight.

But the most important arrangement we had to make concerned our own reception at the castle which now was ours. It seemed unlikely that Hohenems knew as yet that its master was dead. Those in charge of the place must, therefore, be told forthwith, and, what was much more to the point, they had to be satisfied that Hubert and I had the right to stand in our great-uncle's shoes. This might be none too easy to bring about—except, of course, at the cost of a long delay, and our train was nearing London before we had settled the course which, of what wisdom we had, we thought we should shape.

If the servants were prudent, they would require something more than the word of two utter strangers before they allowed them to sit in their master's seat: and we could not help feeling that documents written in English would, as the saying goes, cut but little ice with a faithful Austrian staff. To be sure, we had the few keys which our great-uncle had upon him at the time of his death: but keys cannot speak for themselves and will turn as well for rogues as for honest men. When we saw the lawyer, however, upon the following day, he laughed our suggestions to scorn, declaring that changes like this were taking place every day and that orders in English would run in any country where people could read and write. With that, he telegraphed to Hohenems, stating the facts and saying that we should arrive in two days' time, and he then made an affidavit, to which was attached *The Times'* report of the inquest and a copy of my great-uncle's Will. This we were to take with us, and, since he would do no more, we had it translated into German, as also the Will. With these papers and our passports for warrant we had, then, to be content, but I think we both had more faith in Nicolas Ferrers' ring, which was now upon my finger and bore the family crest. While this did not prove that I was the heir-at-law—for, for all the servants knew, I might have killed their master and seized his ring—at least on the back of my wrist-watch there was the same device.

We did not leave London that evening, as we had hoped, for we found that we should do better to take the morning train, and I must confess that, for all my impatience to be gone, had we left Town that day we must have left undone a third of the things which we had arranged to do. As it was, I drove to the station without a care, to find my cousin before me and Stiven, his

man, with my labels already addressed.

Hubert Constable was twenty-six years of age, while I was but twenty-two. He was tall and fair, as his mother had been before him, and people turned to regard him as he went by. His manner was always pleasant, but very quiet, while the steady look in his eyes argued a resolution which, once he had summoned it, nothing would ever shake. Though those that knew him slightly found him more grave than gay, he had a high sense of humour, and his temper was remarkably even, although, when he had just cause, I have known him put out. He shared with me a love of the countryside, and if I knew more about cars, he was a very fine rider and had a way with a horse.

Stiven was at home in the country, for he was a farmer's son. He was young and strong and pleasant, did cheerfully all that was asked him and much beside. As I think was natural, he thought the world of Hubert, but, because he was a good servant, he served me just as swiftly and just as well. His honesty sat in his eyes, and he had a good, quick brain which he was not afraid to use.

All the world seemed to be travelling, and our train was so full that we could not discuss our adventure without being overheard. I, therefore, stared out of window and wished for the coast, for I could think of nothing but Hohenems and the secret which was so precious in so many eyes.

It was while we were crossing the Channel, leaning upon the ship's rail and making the most of the privacy of the breeze, that Hubert proposed to take Stiven into our confidence.

“You see,” he said, “it’s like this. It’s as well to be forewarned when you’re going into the blue. On the face of it, we’re going to visit the castle which now is ours—to take possession, as any legatee would. In fact we’ve another object, but, as long as we can, I suggest we should keep that quiet. Nobody knows that we even know there’s a secret, and I’ve taken good care to leave that letter behind. Very well. Now the House of Haydn—whoever or whatever that means—and Harris are out to steal our cake. We shall resist them, of course: but we shall resist them far better if, while they think we know nothing, in fact we all know very well what their motives are. I say ‘all,’ because I mean ‘all.’ So long as your enemy thinks that you know nothing, your eyes and ears may be extremely useful. And there’s nothing the matter with Stiven’s eyes and ears.”

“I’m perfectly happy,” said I. “I only hope he knows more German than I.”

20

“Ah,” said Hubert ruefully, “that’s where we come unstuck. Still, I don’t suppose foreign tongues are Harris’ strong point, and as soon as we’ve had a look round we must try and get hold of some fellow to teach us to talk.”

“That’ll take us years,” said I.

“Months,” said Hubert. “But what of that? We’re not going to find out this secret in seven days.”

With that he knocked out his pipe, and we went to lunch.

We left Paris that night in a comfortable sleeping-compartment, which, when its doors were shut, made as private a closet as ever was built in a house. Such was the roar of the train that

nobody listening without could have heard what was said, so when Stiven came for orders before he retired, my cousin bade him come in and told him the truth.

He heard Hubert out in silence. Then, without any comment, he asked what Harris was like.

“Harris,” said I, “is a man of about forty-five. He’s tall and thin and clean-shaven, with sandy hair, with a curious, sneering expression, and very big hands.”

“Might he be on this train, sir?”

“I hardly think so,” said Hubert. “Why d’you ask?”

21

“There was someone on the platform at Paris, sir, watching you very close. I couldn’t see him too well, but he wasn’t tall. I didn’t give it a thought: but now you’ve told me this, sir, he may have been on the job.”

“He may,” said Hubert. “I don’t think it very likely. Harris won’t work alone, of course. But I can hardly believe that he’d get off the mark so soon. And now you go and turn in. You’ll have to get up at the frontier to see the big baggage through. That’ll be about three in the morning. And when you do, you might look out for your friend. If you want us, you know where we are. But if you don’t, sleep well and get your breakfast and be here at eight o’clock.”

With that, we bade him good night, and Stiven withdrew.

His suspicion of the stranger at Paris was very much to my taste and spiced our journey for me as nothing else could have

done: but Hubert frowned on my excitement and began to deplore the fact that when we got out of the train we should know no more what to expect than the man in the moon.

This, of course, was true.

We knew that Hohenems existed and that Mittal was the name of the station at which we ought to alight—this, because it was printed at the head of the notepaper Nicolas Ferrers had used. And that was the sum of our knowledge. Of the size of the estate, its approach, its appearance and condition, how far it lay from Mittal, how many servants were there, of our great-uncle's orders and habits and way of life we had not the faintest idea. Upon all these matters, however, it seemed much more than likely that Harris was well-informed, so that if indeed he was moving, he would have us at a grave disadvantage until we could grow familiar with our inheritance.

22

“All the same,” said Hubert, “possession's nine points of the law—and often ten. He may know Hohenems backwards, but we've the right to turn the key in the door. But I hope he doesn't monkey with the servants: they're bound to be a bit restive at the thought of a new regime.”

Here the attendant arrived, to make our beds, and the last thing I remember that night was the rude, insistent rhythm of the wheels of the sleeping-car.

We were awakened at the frontier, where Customs Officers entered and opened one of our bags, but, though I half expected to see him, Stiven did not knock on the door until eight o'clock.

And then he had nothing to report.

It was past midday before we came to Salzburg. There we left our train and changed to that which should bring us to Mittal that evening by half past five.

I need hardly say that our eyes were now wide open and ready to mark anyone who was looking at us: but though the station was busy, nobody there aroused even my suspicion—and I was ready to believe every porter in Harris' pay.

In the course of the next four hours we ran through some lovely country, as rich and sweet and varied as ever I saw. Forests, like seas, swelled up the flanks of mountains and flowed about white and red castles, like those of the fairytales: green meadows, like those of England, were neighboured by oaks and poplars and threaded by placid streams, while the grey of the farms that kept them peered between limes and chestnuts to argue the simple existence of bygone days: valley and glade and falling water, high moor and smiling plain—there was nothing that was not attractive in all we saw: and I could not help feeling that if this was to be our portion we were indeed more lucky than I had dreamed.

23

Then at last we ran into Mittal—a little wisp of a village, whose only street was scarcely as long as our train.

As this slowed down, I noticed a man on the platform who had plainly come to Mittal to meet some passenger. He was dressed in a plain blue suit and was wearing a chauffeur's cap: what was more, he was plainly English, and his cheerful, birdlike air contrasted sharply with that of the burly porters

that stood at his heels.

“We’re home,” said Hubert, clapping me on the back. “I never hoped for such luck, but I’ll lay a fiver he’s here to meet you and me.”

And so he was.

As we left the corridor-carriage he met us at the foot of the steps.

“Mr. Ferrers, sir?” he inquired, with a hand to his hat.

“That’s right,” said I. “And this is Mr. Constable.”

“Pleased to see you, sir. My name’s Bugle. I’m the chauffeur at Hohenems.” He turned to the porters. “Here, you two. Get hold of the gentlemen’s stuff.”

I could have put my arms round his jolly neck.

We were over the jump which might have been so awkward—and that with no more effort than if the worthy Bugle had known us for twenty years. Apart from this, I liked the look of the man. He was a sprightly fellow and had, I judged, been a groom. He was broad and well-developed, though something short: his air was gay and he had an engaging smile, and though his features were rugged, I liked him no less for that. Whether the other servants were English or no, Bugle was English and Bugle was now our man.

As Stiven came up—

“This is my servant,” said Hubert. “Have you brought a closed car?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t, sir. The closed car’s away for repairs. But I thought perhaps you’d leave your big baggage here and then, when I’ve taken you home, I’ll come back with the van.”

“I suppose there’s a cloakroom.”

“I really don’t know, sir. The best way is not to claim it. They’ll keep it safe till someone produces the check.”

“So they will,” said Hubert.

So Stiven put the slip in his pocket and we made our way to the car.

“I suppose you know nothing,” said I, “beyond what the telegram said.”

“Not a word, sir,” said Bugle. “It come as a bit of a shock. But, of course, he was very old, sir: and whenever I took him to the station I always used to wonder if ever I’d see him again.”

Then he turned to hustle the porters, and we got into the car. This was of German make, very sturdily built and something the worse for wear, and it had the look of a car which is kept to be used when errands have to be done.

Though he used no German, Bugle was one of those men whose brisk and lively demeanour speaks for itself. The porters fell over themselves to do his will, and within two minutes all our smaller baggage had been bestowed, Stiven

was seated by Bugle and the latter had tipped the porters and let in the clutch.

“How far is Hohenems?” said Hubert.

“Twenty-two miles, sir,” said Bugle. “But it’s a handsome run.”

The moment we ran out of Mittal, we seemed to plunge into the country which we had so much admired. Of this the most striking feature was the fewness of habitations of any kind. The farms were lonely and their holdings must have been broad: here and there an inn or a cottage stood like some verderer’s lodge, and fourteen miles went by before we ran through a village, white-walled and clean and lit by the setting sun. Of great houses we saw none at all, but I afterwards found that the more important mansions stood almost always three or four miles from the road and, unless they were built upon some eminence, could not be seen. The traffic we met was unbelievably light, and for most of the way we seemed to have the roads to ourselves.

We had gone some eighteen miles and were storming up a steep hill in the heart of a wood, when we swung round a sudden bend to see a man lying prone in the midst of the way.

He was rudely dressed as a peasant and might have been crossing the road towards a ruinous cottage that stood back among the trees.

Bugle applied his brakes and brought the car at once to the side of the way: but Stiven was out before him and had run to the fallen man.

By the time that Hubert and I were out of the car Stiven and Bugle had turned him on to his face, but though the fellow was breathing, he made no sound. His body was slack, but I saw that his teeth were clenched and a smother of foam was blowing about his lips.

“Looks like a fit, sir,” said Bugle. “I expect that’s his cottage there. Shall we carry him in?”

“We can’t do less,” said Hubert.

He and I crossed to the cottage and knocked on the crazy door, but, since there was no answer, Hubert pushed this open and held it wide.

The place was dark, for the day was almost spent and the trees all about were preventing what light there was, but I made out a cheerless kitchen with all one wall a fireplace in which the ashes were cold.

Then I stood aside, and Stiven and Bugle carried their burden in.

As they laid the man down on the bricks with which the kitchen was floored—

“The flask,” said Hubert to me. “It’s in the dispatch-case.”

I hastened back to the car and found the flask. Then I ran back to the cottage, whose door had swung to. I pushed it open and entered. As I did so, something hit me on the back of my head and I crumpled and fell down senseless with the flask in my hand.

I afterwards found that more than an hour had gone by before I sat up.

The first thing that I remember was feeling uncommon cold, and I know that I groped for the rug which Bugle had spread at Mittal about our knees, supposing myself to be in the open car. Then my senses returned with a shock, and I knew I had been hit on the head and had lost my wits. Except that my head was aching and that I felt something dazed, I seemed to be none the worse, and when I put up my hand, I could find no blood.

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As I got to my feet, I found that my coat was open, and an instant later I knew that I had been robbed. All my pockets were empty, and the pistol I had carried was gone.

This sudden, sinister discovery put all else out of my mind, and I must have stood still a full minute, before I remembered that Hubert and Stiven and Bugle had yet to be found.

Without the moon was shining, and, thinking to lighten the room, I turned to the door: with the first step I took, however, I trod on a box of matches, and a moment later I had the light I desired.

Hubert was lying face upward three feet from where I stood. His coats were open and I made no doubt that he had been stripped, as I had, of all that he had. Stiven lay prone beyond him, with his head on the hearth. I saw no sign of Bugle, and the peasant was gone.

At first I thought that my companions were dead, but when I found they were breathing, I began to do what I could to bring

them round. I loosened their collars and tucked their coats under their heads: then I went out in search of water, for somewhere near at hand I could hear the song of a brook.

I more than half expected that Bugle would be lying outside, but he was not there and I saw no sign of the car. With my head in a whirl, I turned from the road and made my way to the brook which was running behind the cottage beneath the trees.

I had, of course, no vessel in which to carry the water I meant to bring; but I used my hat, as they do in the story-books, and I never would have believed it would serve my purpose so well.

28

Two minutes later my cousin was sitting up, and Stiven was stirring and blinking and putting a hand to his head.

I returned to Hubert.

“Can you think?” I cried. “Can you think? Can you understand?”

“Not very well,” says Hubert, feeling his coat. “I have an idea we’ve been done. That peasant . . .”

“That’s right,” said I. “That peasant was the decoy. The others were in this cottage, waiting to lay us out.”

“Harris?” said Hubert, holding his head in his hands.

“I’m rather afraid so. Of course, I may be wrong. They may have been common robbers, with no idea who we are. But if it is Harris——”

“Harris for a monkey,” said Hubert. “They’ve taken the car?”

I nodded.

Hubert sighed.

“And our papers and passports and everything that is ours. Where’s Bugle?”

“He isn’t here,” said I. “I imagine he’s out in the road.”

Stiven was up on his feet with his back to the wall.

“Bugle,” he cried. “That’s his name.”

“Sit down,” said Hubert. “You’ll be all right in a minute. You’ve been knocked out.”

“I know, sir,” said Stiven. “I couldn’t remember his name. *It was him that done it, sir.* He hit me under the jaw.”

We stared at the man in the half light, for I had set a stone to hold open the door.

29

“You’re dreaming,” said Hubert. “Bugle had come to meet us.”

“I know, sir. But he’s a boxer. Didn’t you notice his ears? I was bending over the peasant, and when I looked up, as you fell, he hit me under the jaw. I saw his smile as he did it, and then I went out.”

There was a moment’s silence.

Then—

“My God,” said Hubert quietly, “Bugle was Harris’ man.”

For a moment my brain zigzagged. Then, to my horror, I saw the depth of the pit into which we had fallen, which Harris indeed had dug.

Bugle and the car he was driving had no more to do with Hohenems than the train by which we had come. They had been provided by Harris—to do his will. And this had been done with a vengeance. Not only had we been ‘side-tracked,’ but Harris had obtained our credentials, and he and some other would pose as Hubert and I. Not a soul in Austria knew them or us by sight: with our names, our papers, our luggage, they would enter into our home, and, once they were there . . .

Hubert’s words of the night before came flaming into my mind.

‘Possession’s nine points of the law—and often ten.’

Once we had seen it, the thing was as clear as day: and since I afterwards learned the whole of the truth, I will not present our conjectures when I can set out the facts.

Stiven was right. We had been watched at Paris, and a wire had been sent to Harris who was already in Carinthia. Two wires were sent from Salzburg—one to Harris which said that we should reach Mittal at half past five, and another, signed ‘Ferrers,’ to Hohenems which said that we should arrive *by a later train*. As I have shown, we were met by Bugle—one of the gang, and were driven off to the cottage, where Harris himself and another were waiting to lay us out. Having taken all our belongings, they then proceeded to Ringen, the station next before Mittal, where the three of them presently boarded that later train by which the wire to Hohenems said that we should arrive. In response to that wire, my great-uncle’s car was at Mittal to meet the train: and, when they had claimed our big baggage, Harris and his friends were forthwith driven to Hohenems of which the Austrian chauffeur believed them to be the new lords.

No one, I think, can deny that the game had been skilfully played and handsomely won. Not only were they up in our seat, with all that was ours, but we were on our backs in the gutter—homeless, penniless, friendless, in the depths of a foreign land.

“Well, we can’t stay here,” said Hubert. “For one thing, I’m rather hungry, and, for another, I’ve taken a dislike to the place. How far was that inn we passed?”

“A good four miles,” said I, “if we find the way. But what about money?”

My cousin tapped his stomach.

“They missed my belt,” he said. “I’ve got it next to my skin. Fifty golden sovereigns should stand us in stead.”

I sometimes wonder how many wrongs go unrighted, because the injured man has an empty purse. But for Hubert’s old-fashioned precaution, so far from being able to take any sort of action against our foes, we must have begged our way through the Austrian countryside.

Indeed, our plight had seemed so shocking that my cousin’s news was the cordial I most required, and, such is the hold of the mind upon the body, I wholly forgot the cold and the pain in my head and was ready to dance with delight to think that Harris had left us ‘the sinews of war.’

So eager was I to be gone that I could hardly wait while Hubert and Stiven scoured the kitchen for any of our belongings that might have been dropped by the thieves, and when at last they emerged with nothing to show but one of my cousin’s pipes, I set the pace down the road at a steady four miles an hour.

And here I should say that Harris had left me my wrist-watch as well as my great-uncle’s ring. Had he dreamed of their importance, he would, of course, have taken them first of all, and, as is so often the way, this one mistake that he made was to cost him extremely dear.

We had walked some two miles when we came to a fork

in the road, and not one of us could remember which was the way we had come. After a little discussion we bore to the right, a decision which proved to be wrong, for we not only found no inn but presently came to a mighty head of water that fell so close to the road that none that had gone by that way could have failed to know it again. At once we turned to make our way back to the fork, but between our fatigue and the darkness—for heavy clouds had come to obscure the moon—we must have missed our way, for we could not find the scene of our error and after an hour had gone by were hopelessly lost. To add to our troubles, it started to pour with rain, and though we went heavily on in the hope of seeing some light which would spell shelter, even that relief was denied us, and if indeed we passed dwellings, these were either in darkness or kept from our eyes by trees. At last, about eleven o'clock, we made out some shape which was not natural a little way back from the road. This proved to be a great barn in which there was stacked a good deal of last year's hay. Here, without hesitation, we decided to pass the night, for, if we were hungry, at least the shelter was good and the hay would make us a more agreeable bed than we should have found at the inn we had set out to seek.

And so, no doubt, it did. But if we had thought to sleep well we were disappointed, for though, God knows, we were weary, we wanted food, and our lives had been so soft that our stomachs, like peevish children, were most importunate. In the end, however, from dozing, we fell asleep—so far as I was concerned, to be troubled by dreadful dreams which sprouted, of course, from the hotbed of our adversity.

The sun was up before Hubert touched my arm, and I sat

up stiff and hungry, but feeling greatly refreshed. Then I stumbled out of the barn, to find a lovely morning and the world about me as gay as the cloudless sky. The air was still and seemed as full of scents as a perfumer's shop, and the sparkle of the meadows in the sunshine and the long, clean-cut shadows of neighbouring trees made up as taking a foreground as ever I saw. On every side the delicate green of woodland stood up to touch the blue, and this was alive with the songs of innumerable birds, brave enough music to lift up any man's heart.

We made what toilet we could at a tumbling rill, and, feeling, all things considered, remarkably well, regained the road and set out to walk for our breakfast without more ado. By now we were fully determined to visit the first house we saw and would have marched up to a palace and stated our needs: but, such is the way of Fortune, before we had gone two miles we came to a good-looking inn, with limes growing in its forecourt and a doorway which would have admitted a coach and four.

We were too much relieved to see it to dwell on the fact that we had lain cold and hungry so short a distance away, and when we saw that its doors and shutters were open we could have thrown up our hats. Compared with this house, the tavern we had sought was a hovel, and from what we had seen of the district we had not supposed it could boast so inviting an inn.

As we entered the court—

“One word,” said Hubert, “before we take the tide. They won't understand our conversation: but, if we use the word, they'll get ‘Hohenems’ all right. So don't call the place

by name. Harris has laid us low. Well, let's stay there. If we want to get back on the blackguard, it's quite a good place to be."

With that, he told Stiven to wait, and he and I walked into the hall of the inn. I call it 'the hall' because it deserves that name, but, while it was flagged and ushered a handsome staircase of old, grey oak, it was also very plainly the public room of the house. There were chairs and tables about, and a mighty settle was gracing each side of the hearth, while the place ran the depth of the inn and two-thirds of its length.

There was no one there, but a doorway led us into a kitchen as fine as the hall, and there we found the people breaking their fast.

The host and his wife and two servants—a man and a maid—were seated about a low stool on which stood a rude, iron pot. Each had a spoon in his hand, and they dipped in order into the vessel, looking very solemn and speaking no word, as though they were observing some notable rite.

Though they saw us, they took no more notice than if they had been at their prayers, and nothing could have been plainer than that, while they might forgive our intrusion, they did not expect us to aggravate our mistake. We, therefore, withdrew in silence and took our seats in the hall, and after perhaps five minutes the host and his wife appeared. Though we could not understand what they said, they seemed to be full of goodwill, and when we spoke helplessly of breakfast, they haled us into the kitchen and showed us bread and butter and ham and eggs.

We made no attempt to hide our surprise and pleasure at their choice of a bill of fare, and for this they seemed to be waiting, for they laughed a great deal and kept pointing up at the ceiling—a gesture which we could not interpret, unless it were meant to suggest that they were inspired.

We then made them understand that we wished to be served in the forecourt, under the limes, and, summoning Stiven, gave him into their charge.

It follows that in a quarter of an hour we sat down to as fine a breakfast as any could wish, and I must confess I was never so thankful for food. What was more, the prospect of bathing and having our linen washed seemed not at all remote, for nothing could have exceeded the respect and kindly attention which we were shown.

We were halfway through our meal before I happened to notice that we were observed.

At an open window above us a man who was dressed in pyjamas was steadily regarding our feast. His folded arms were resting upon the sill, and his hair was rumpled as though he were just out of bed. His eye was merry, his countenance ruddy and cheerful, his head and shoulders those of a Hercules: though I judged him to be about thirty, he was inclined to be fat, and he had the air of a Touchstone, or perhaps I should say of one who believes in motley and finds it the only wear. I could hardly believe he was English, and yet I could hardly believe he was anything else.

Hubert saw me looking and followed my gaze.

“Oh, it can’t be true,” said the stranger, averting his eyes. “I ate too much of that pie.”

“No, you didn’t,” said Hubert.

“Well, I’m damned,” said the other, and fingered his chin. “And what are you doing here in this one-eyed Arcady, where only man is dull. Believe me, the shepherds have no pipes.”

36

Before we could answer—

“Never mind,” he said. “I’m not curious. Besides, you shall tell me anon. And now do go on eating: it does me good.” He raised a stentorian voice. “Amaryllis, my bath.” A shriek of delight from the kitchen answered his call. “I address them in English,” he continued, “because German is a barbarous tongue. I’ve explained that to them and they admit it, but their progress is lamentably slow. You must know, I was once a tutor. A tutor hired to teach English to the scion of an Austrian House. But three days ago I flung off the yoke of bondage and shook the dust of Haydn from off my feet. . . .” As I kicked Hubert under the table, I felt him kick me. “Which reminds me, you don’t happen to have a nail-file, have you? No, I thought not. I never met anyone who had. And now I must rise. I’m simply dying to meet you, but the flesh must be served.”

With that, he burst into song and disappeared, but his voice was big and pleasing, and I know that we sat in silence until he had done.

Then—

“A tutor,” breathed Hubert. “Lately at the House of Haydn and now at a loose end. If he would come in with us. . . . I mean, what would Harris give for such assistance? Harris can’t talk German—I’ll lay to that.”

This shining prospect seemed almost too good to be true: no wind, we felt, could set so dead in our favour, and we made up our minds that before we broached the matter we must see more of our friend. In any event he could help us to deal with our present plight and could tell us where we were and how we best could purchase the things we must have. This was a great relief. Indeed, for the first time since our misfortune we now felt able to give our minds to Harris and to how we should go to work to recover our rights.

37

Many, I suppose, would have posted back to London and told my great-uncle’s lawyer the whole of the truth: but, though he was kindness itself, he was less man than attorney, and the dry and dusty channels to which he would surely have turned would have put in peril the whole of our enterprise. Nothing could be more certain than that Harris was wasting no time: he knew that any moment he might be unmasked: and so he would labour like fury to find out Hohenems’ secret before his black race was run.

Again, we might have invoked the aid of the local law: but this would have meant that we should be asked for credentials we could not produce and that, when we had climbed that fence, we should have to sit still while our champions disputed with Harris, who would doubtless instruct some lawyer and put up the bluff of his life.

We, therefore, determined to take the law into our hands and act for ourselves, for, while in this way we should be wasting no time, we could go what lengths we pleased, because, though we did him violence, Harris could not afford to call in the police.

We then considered the position which we proposed to attack.

This was formidable.

In the first place, our enemy was in possession. In the second, he knew far more of Hohenems than either Hubert or I. In the third, he had stolen from us the very equipment we needed to bring him down.

38

It was this last consideration which troubled us most: indeed, it seemed that, except for our fifty pounds, we had only our wits and our hands upon which to rely. The name and address of the agent who was to have paid us such money as we required, were with the rest of our papers in Harris' hands: but in any event we had no passports to show him, and though we could write to London to stop our letters and cheques, unless we returned to England, we could do nothing more without arousing suspicions which must recoil upon us. At our first attempt to get money, inquiries were sure to be made, and, if Harris had altered our passports to suit himself, we should appear the impostors and might come under arrest.

"In fact," said Hubert, "we're not so much treading thin ice as wading in slime. Whatever we touch we shall foul, so we'd better touch as little as ever we can. We'll stop all letters and cheques, and leave it there. That'll embarrass Harris and won't

harm us. And if we begin to run short before we've got Harris down, you or I will have to go back to England to raise the wind."

"And clothes?" said I, wriggling. "We can't go on like this."

"We must get some shirts and socks at the nearest town. One suit's enough for an outcast. What worries me is transport. Hohenems is our loadstone, but we can't camp under its walls. The presence of strangers would be reported at once."

This was common sense. Before we could think of striking, we must reconnoitre the castle and generally spy out the land: and since surprise was far the best weapon we had, the base from which we were working must lie some distance away.

39

"Twenty miles off," said Hubert. "That's none too far in country as lonely as this. We shall have to stay at some inn, and that means that in twenty-four hours the villages round will know us by reputation if not by sight. So we must stay twenty miles from Hohenems: and I'm not going to bicycle forty miles every day."

The thought appalled me.

"I'd rather lose Hohenems," said I.

"You'd have no choice," said Hubert. "Fancy bickering with Harris after a twenty-mile spin."

"We must have a car," said I. "Beg, borrow or——"

And there I stopped dead. The well-worn tag had sired a sudden idea.

“Hubert,” I cried, “we must steal one—steal one of the Hohenems cars.”

My cousin started. Then he began to laugh.

“John,” he said, “you’ve said it—got it in one. Nothing on earth could be better. We shall be taking possession of something belonging to us, and Harris won’t dare to take action, because he’ll know very well the names of the thieves. In fact, he’ll have to give orders not to report the theft. This will amaze the servants—engender suspicions far deeper than any that we could provoke: and if we leave a note for the chauffeur . . .”

From one point of view my proposal was that of a fool. If we committed the theft, we should be casting away the element of surprise: and it was to preserve this weapon that we had desired a car. But though we perceived this absurdity almost at once, we decided that a car would be useful in so many ways that, if there was one for the taking, we should be foolish indeed to let go such a chance.

40

In our excitement we had almost forgotten the stranger whom we were soon to meet, when an admirable rendering of *The Roast Beef of Old England*, at once reminded us of his presence and suggested that his toilet was nearly done. This was a fact. Indeed, we presently found that, instead of ringing for breakfast, he always sang this song, and since he had taught her the air, the mistress of the inn, when she heard it, began to prepare his meal.

Five minutes later the stranger himself appeared, now comfortably clad in flannels and smoking a cigarette.

“Shakespeare,” he said, “was born on a morning like this. In fact, if you told me he wrote his songs in Carinthia I shouldn’t argue the point. If you’ve been here any time, you must know that days like this are the usual thing. I imagine that the Clerk of the Austrian Weather is a fallen angel: he simply orders the only weather he knows—that of Paradise. And now to business. My name is Andrew Palin. I’m thirty-four years old and I have no distinguishing marks.”

Hubert said who we were and we all shook hands.

“I hope,” said Palin, “you’ll fleet a few days at this house. It’s not expensive—I pay five shillings a day. In return for that, I lie soft, eat as much as I dare of most excellent food and am treated as a slightly eccentric god. In a word, life has no edge: and, of course, if you like fine country . . . You know I sometimes wonder if I haven’t been translated.”

“It sounds ideal,” said Hubert, “and I’m half inclined to think it would suit us down to the ground. But before we decide, we simply must know where we are.”

41

“That’s easy,” said the other calmly.

He took a map from his pocket and spread it upon the table from which the maid had taken our plates away. For a moment he peered. Then he took a pin from his tie and stuck it into the sheet.

“That’s where you’re standing,” he said. “And while you’re

digesting that blow, I'll trifle with my collation as best I can."

With that he turned to the table on which his breakfast was set and left us to study the map and the map to speak for itself.

Few, I think, would have shown us politeness so marked. Nine men out of ten would have taken up Hubert's statement or at least have asked whence we came or whither we wanted to go.

The map, which was on a big scale, was easy to read, and before a minute was out, as though a veil had been lifted, we saw our position plain.

We were fourteen miles from Mittal and thirty from Hohenems. The nearest town was Robin, some forty miles off. Hohenems lay east of Mittal, but we had been driven due west.

"Well, that's that," murmured Hubert. And then, "I'll swear we can trust this man. Shall we put him wise?"

"You do it," said I.

My cousin straightened his back.

"Would it amuse you," he said, "to hear our tale? I don't know whether you'll believe it, but I don't think you'll find it dull."

42

"Regale me," said Palin, "regale me. I will regale my body, and you shall regale my mind. And please begin at the beginning and don't leave anything out."

I must say he made a good listener, for though the tale was

long, he never once opened his mouth, except to eat, and after a while he seemed to forget his breakfast and sat with his eyes upon Hubert and a hand to his chin.

When the tale was told, he started up to his feet.

“Count me in,” he cried. “I’ve eaten enough of the lotus. Besides, when you’ve come by your rights, I can return to my isle. I can say what you want in German and I can tide you over financial shoals.”

“We’re not going to law,” said Hubert. “We’re going to take off our coats.”

“Glory be,” said Palin. “When do we start?”

“To-night,” said Hubert. “We’re rather tired of walking and so we propose to begin by stealing one of our cars.”

“A very natural impulse,” said Palin. “Would you like me to wear a mask?”

“Are you sure you mean this?” said I. “We’re only too happy to have you, but we may be buying trouble of an unpleasant kind.”

“Trouble be damned,” said Palin. “Of course you needn’t have me, but for me to decline to come in would be kicking against the pricks. That I want to come in is nothing: I’m clearly *meant* to come in.” He folded his arms and set his back to a tree.

“Two crowds are after your secret, besides yourselves. One’s Harris & Co., and the other’s the House of Haydn. Well, you know something of Harris: but what I don’t know of Haydn would go on a postage-stamp.”

“So be it,” said Hubert, and Palin nodded his head.

43

Looking back, I continually marvel at the way in which this alliance sprang into life, and I think it did much to teach me how very well disguised a blessing may be. That Haydn and Harris between them brought Palin and us together there can be no shadow of doubt, thus forming the combination which was to bring to ruin their hearts’ desire. As I shall show, without Palin we must have failed: but, thanks to Haydn, Palin was at a loose end, and, thanks to Harris, we walked to his very door.

“And now,” said Palin, “your corruption must be put off. You’ll be glad of the loan of my razor and other things.”

With that, he called the hostess and bade her prepare two bedrooms and see that water was heated for us to bathe, “for these young men,” he said gravely, “are scarcely less noble than I and must be accorded the highest comfort and honour your wit can devise.” Then he sent for Stiven and told him to go to his room and take for our use whatever he thought we should need.

Before we could thank him—

“And now for my story,” he said. “At least, not so much my story as how I come to be here. I’ll give you that incident with a thumb-nail sketch of Haydn. Your water ought to be hot by the time I’ve done.”

He took his seat on a table and lighted a cigarette.

“Nine months ago I came to this part of the world. To be precise, I came to Haydn—a vast estate, from which, of

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course, the family took its name. I was engaged as tutor to the Count of Haydn's only son. I found a peculiar household. The Count is a man of forty—harsh with those who will stand it, lax with those who won't. He gives the impression of having escaped from some zoo. In captivity he'd be quite happy and at his best: at large, he's purely offensive in every way. His younger brother, a priest, combines the duties of chaplain with those of the evil genius of Haydn. Even Dante never conceived so horrid a personality. Always behind the curtain or in the shadows, as seeing nothing and yet perceiving all things, he is his brother's familiar *and* keeper, and looks the part. 'He has a lean and hungry look: such men are dangerous.' Haydn is in the hollow of his hand. What he says, goes. And the Count is really his bully—the agent of his merciless will. Then we come to his nephew—a promising lad of fifteen. He lies, steals, smells, assaults the servants and abuses any animal which he is satisfied will not retaliate. If Gibbon may be believed, Pope John the Twenty-third as a stripling must have resembled him. He has, of course, never had a chance. A course of Borstal would do him a world of good. But for his father and uncle, I think he might be reclaimed. But it would be a sticky business. The Countess Olivia completes this remarkable list. She is the niece of the Count, and had she been born a man, she would have reigned in his stead. He succeeded his brother, whose only child she was. Her mother was English, and if she was like her daughter she must have been a sight for sore eyes. Lady Olivia is worthy of Reynolds' brush: and her ways are as handsome as she is herself. Though she could not succeed, she has a right to a portion of the estate. She has her apartments and garden, and since she is not like the others, spends much of her time alone. I can't pretend to describe her: I wish I could. She's the sort of person you seldom read about and never meet.

No one would call her gentle—she’s got a will like cast iron: but when I got influenza, she nursed me herself.

“Well, that’s the House of Haydn. A more appropriate name would be the House of Hate. There’s more hatred within those walls than you’d find in a reptile house. She lives there to spite her uncles, and of course they hate her like poison for exercising her rights. They also hate one another, and my late pupil hates the lot. And since he’s naturally hateful, they all hate him. You never saw such a show. How I stuck it so long I don’t know. I think I was fascinated by the spectacle. They paid me well—I was getting six hundred a year: and except for four hours a day I had my time to myself. They gave me the run of the stables, and I used to ride a good deal—often enough with Lady Olivia: I never saw anyone else get up on a horse. Young Augustus gave me no trouble: he mistrusted the look in my eye, and I had him where he belonged. At least, I believed I had . . .

45

“Three days ago I caught the darling red-handed concealing one of his father’s diamond pins. Well, that’s not too bad. But where? Inside the flap of the pocket of one of my coats. I’d roasted him that morning for failing to dust his ears, and this was his pretty way of getting back. I suddenly remembered that, since I’d been there two servants had been dismissed for stealing their master’s goods. The stuff had not been found on them, but in their spare clothes: each protested his innocence, but nobody believed them and the second was charged and convicted and sent to jail.

“Well, I took him straight to his father by the scruff of his dirty neck, I made my report and demanded that he should be flogged.

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“‘Flogged?’ says Father Herman, coming out from behind a screen.

“‘Flogged?’ says the Count, staring.

“‘Flogged,’ said I, ‘within an inch of his life.’

“‘You can’t flog a Haydn,’ says his reverence. ‘Besides, you forget yourself.’

“‘Quite so,’ says the Count. ‘You’re here to teach him English: not to criticise his behaviour towards his inferiors.’

“Well, we had some words. They told me several lies, and I told them as many truths. These annoyed them so much that, prompted by Father Herman, his lordship hinted that my relations with Lady Olivia were of a certain kind. I immediately knocked him down and since, though he hadn’t fired me, I felt that after that things couldn’t be quite the same, I bade the Countess goodbye and took my leave.

“And there we are. It was only when I was gone that I realized that I hadn’t breathed good, fresh air since I’d been in that house. But I frankly regret the lady. She was incomparable.”

“But why does she stay?” said I. “Surely to spite her uncles is a poor excuse.”

Palin shrugged his shoulders.

“Mistrust, I suppose. I gather she’s certain rights: and if she wasn’t there to enforce them . . . I must confess I don’t know how she stands it. All the time I was there she was only away

three weeks.”

“Perhaps,” said Hubert, “she was waiting for our great-uncle to die.”

Palin started. Then he struck the table so that it jumped again.

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“Of course that’s it,” he shouted. “She knew her uncles too well. If she wasn’t in at the death, she’d never get a smell of the treasure or whatever it is.”

There was a moment’s silence. Then—

“We can’t ask you to fight her,” said Hubert.

Palin frowned.

“If there’s dirty work brewing,” he said, “you can count her out. Lady Olivia would never stoop—not even to save her life.”

Here Stiven came to say that all was ready for us to bathe and change, and I made my way to a bedroom fit for a lord.

Here I should say that everything went to show that the inn had seen great days and that years ago the road which it kept was known and used by travellers of high degree, for the chambers were those of a mansion and two of these were panelled from ceiling to floor. Much of their furniture, too, was very fine, while the beds were monumental of the state and luxurious style which people of quality were once accustomed to require.

I was not yet dressed when a lorry pulled up at the inn, and two minutes later Stiven came running to say that its driver was bound for Robin and would carry us there if we wished. This was an opportunity not to be lost, and ten minutes later Hubert and I were seated in the cab with the driver, while Palin sprawled on the meal-bags of which the lorry was full.

If our progress was slow, the country by which we passed was very pleasant, and the roads were good in spite of the number of hills. When we had gone six miles we passed the domain of Haydn, but the house was not to be seen.

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At Robin we went to a Bank and changed our fifty pounds into Austrian notes. Then we telegraphed to London as we had arranged. Then Hubert went off to buy the things we required, while Palin and I set about the delicate business of finding and hiring a car. Had we been ready to take its driver, this might not have been so hard; but, while we were all agreed that we must have a car of sorts to help us to the theft we proposed, we disliked the idea of a witness of all we did. At last, however, we found a petty garage, the master of which was willing to let us have our way, and after a lot of haggling, we paid a small deposit and hired a ramshackle car. We could find no gunsmith's shop, but were able to purchase some ugly-looking truncheons which I cannot think the saddler, who had them, had ever expected to sell, and, after procuring two torches which shed a most wretched light, were glad to drive out of the place in which we might well meet Harris or one of the gang.

Though we were thankful for any means of transport, I cannot pretend that we were glad of that car, for the noise she made was frightening, her paces were very poor and I had to drive

her backwards up three of the hills. Long before we had reached the inn, our purpose to help ourselves to one of the Hohenems cars had hardened to a savage resolve, while the thought of Harris sailing over the country and floating up hill and down dale was not to be borne.

Here I must frankly confess that our plan was founded on fancies which we had let rip. For all we knew, there might be no car at the castle for us to steal: but this seemed most unlikely, and, if there was any car there, we could not believe that it could be so vile a production as that we had hired.

Now, if we were to hope for success, we must plainly view the castle before night fell, for though Palin knew it by name, he had no idea of its lie. Since dusk would come in about seven, we determined to leave our quarters at three o'clock, a decision which proved as wise as inconvenient, for, such were the whims of our hireling, before we were back at the inn, it was long past two.

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When we had eaten some luncheon, Palin told the host that we were about to set out to fetch our own car and that he was going with us to play interpreter: if we met with delays, he added, we might not be back before midnight or even dawn, “for cars are like mules,” he said, “and that one there seems to have a touch of gastritis and ought by rights to be in a nursing-home.”

At once the good man went bustling to bid his wife put up some food, while he himself filled a great bottle with home-brewed beer. Our mission, indeed, created great excitement, and we could not have been better sped if the worthy people had

known the facts of the case.

Then Stiven was told to get ready, and Hubert and I began to study the map, while Palin wrote out a letter for us to leave behind us when we had committed the theft.

Ten minutes later I once again started the car and we set out to seek our fortune, as though, indeed, we belonged to some fairytale.

Two dreadful hours had gone by before we came to cross roads from which, if the map was faithful, Hohenems lay but three miles; and half a mile on we came to a shady by-road which Palin was sure would lead us up to our goal. To confirm his opinion he pointed to the print of a tire, but a few hours old—a mark, I may say, that sent our hopes up with a run, for it was broad and clean-cut and had been made by a big and expensive tread.

A furlong down the lane we came on a little track which lost itself in the greenwood almost at once: and here with one consent we bestowed the car, for the last thing we wanted to do was to blunder upon the castle or to encounter someone who hailed from Hohenems.

So we took to our feet and hastened along the road, glad enough to be walking and more than glad to have done with the noise and vibration which we had so long endured.

For the last five miles we had been steadily rising and had more than once been afforded far-reaching views. Though the woods were continually hiding what lay ahead, we judged that mountains of some sort stood not far off, for we seemed to be among foot-hills, that is to say, the ushers of more important heights.

We must have gone nearly a mile, when we heard the sound of a car. This was coming towards us and travelling fast.

Without a word we all plunged into the bracken which hereabouts grew very thick, and two or three moments later an open car went by, with a chauffeur in livery driving and two men sitting behind. One of these was clad as a priest.

“Quite so,” said Palin, rising from the green flood. “Allow me to introduce the brothers Haydn, the world’s dirty-workers, returning from a business call. I wonder how they like Harris and I do hope he gave them tea.”

“I’d like to have been present,” said Hubert, thoughtfully. “Supposing Harris has accepted their offer to buy. I mean, it’d be a wise move. He knows that he can’t last long. And if he can’t find the secret—well, thieves have a knack of disposing of stolen goods.”

His words dismayed me.

Harris would be well advised to do as he said. He knew that his days were numbered. Supposing he signed an agreement to sell the place—undertaking to give possession in ten days’ time . . . That would give him ten days in which to find out the secret. If he succeeded, well and good. If he failed—well, there were the title-deeds. And unless he was exposed or ousted before the conveyance was done, Haydn would take possession, ‘a strong man armed.’

I glanced at Palin, to see his lip caught in his teeth.

“And here’s danger,” he said. “If Harris lets Haydn in, our cake’ll be dough. We can’t take direct action with them, because Haydn would call in the police. Their title, of course, would be bad: but to prove that would take twelve months.”

There was an uneasy silence. Then—

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“The race to the swift,” said Hubert. “We’d better get on.”

“Half a minute,” said Palin, regarding the road, “Did anyone notice their tires?”

“Yes, sir,” said Stiven. “But the print we saw at the corner was made by somebody else. A heavier car done that, sir.”

“Ah,” said Palin gratefully.

We hastened along in silence, and very soon the dull sound of falling water came to our ears: five minutes later the road bent round to the left, and here, for some ten or twelve paces, the ground on its right fell sheer, to make a break in the woodland through which it ran. This showed us a sudden valley, deep and broad and verdant, with a ribbon of foaming water to light its green. Though the floor of the valley was level, its sides were steep, and these were clothed with the foliage of myriad trees; beyond it rose one of the mountains which we had been sure we were nearing for some time past, its foot, like the valley, in shadow, its head and shoulders ablaze with the evening sun. But this was not all. Directly across the valley and less than a crow’s mile away, built like a nest on a ledge of the mountain-side, was the castle of Hohenems.

Edifice, site and surroundings made one of the finest pictures I ever saw. As a king in the midst of his guard, the house was embowered in the foliage it seemed to command. Its grey stone was mellowed with lichen, and the sun, which was low, was touching the tops of its towers: it did

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not look very large, but its shape was exquisite, for it had been built in a curve which swelled from the face of the mountain as a great bay-window swells from the face of a house. Its ramparts made a broad terrace on which to stroll, and the windows which gave to this were so important that I guessed at once that here were the principal rooms.

To the left of the castle stood a gate-house with two round towers: to this a drawbridge gave entrance, for a delicate fall of water was barring the way.

And that was as much as we could see.

How far the castle projected from the steep upon which it was built, we could not guess, for it stood directly before us and the leaves about it were shrouding the mountain-side: but the road would clearly bring us round to its western front and then we should see in a moment the depth of the pile.

Palin was speaking.

“Pure Wagner,” he said. “He could have done it justice, but I can’t think of anyone else. And just look at that colouring—gold and grey and green and the blue of the sky. No painter could capture the scene. It’s matter for tapestry.”

As he spoke, I knew he was right.

Hohenems resembled the castles which tapestries alone have preserved. I have no doubt that somewhere it lives in needlework, a lovely relic of a magnificent age.

I need hardly say that we had not been so rash as to show

ourselves on the road. A made bank, serving as parapet, gave us the cover we required, and, when we had gazed our fill, we passed on our way bent double till we came again to the trees.

The road now curled to and fro, to follow the shape of the mountain along which it ran like a shelf, and after perhaps ten minutes we came to an aged bridge. At once we saw that here was the head of the valley across which we had been gazing ten minutes before, for the bridge was linking two mountains—the one on which we had been walking to the one on which the castle was built. The gorge which it spanned had plainly been worn by the torrent it now confined: it was the roar of this water which we had heard, for the fall by the side of the castle was nothing near so heavy and was not sunk.

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This bridge was commanding Hohenems' western front, and from here we could see that the pile had been built on a plateau or natural step and that the gate-house gave to a fair courtyard, from which was rising the green of some well-grown trees. The buildings against the mountain were much lower than the rest of the house, but though we could only see the ridge of their roofs, we were sure they were the stables and coach-house and, therefore, of course, our objective when night had come in.

Now from where we were crouching we could not see through the gateway: we, therefore, crawled over the bridge and five minutes later we came to the last of the bends.

We were now two hundred yards from the castle wall and could look clean under the archway and into the yard, but we could see no movement and, though we were near enough to

have heard the slam of a door, the roar of the falling water mastered all other sound.

Leaving Stiven to watch the gateway, we withdrew out of sight of the castle, to settle what next we should do.

“We must cross that fall,” said Hubert, “as soon as ever we can. It won’t be too easy by day: but except by the drawbridge, no one could do it by night. Once we’re over, we shall be on the mountain-side above the stables, and it ought to be easy enough to get on to the roof.”

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“Rope,” said Palin. “Why didn’t we bring some rope? You’ll get up on the roof all right by means of the trees: but how are we going to get down on the other side?”

“I’m going to see,” said Hubert, “before it’s too dark.”

“Quite so,” said Palin. “And how do we cross the fall?”

“Same answer,” said Hubert, smiling.

Palin took off his hat and wiped his face.

“I dislike the prospect,” he said. “There must be a better way. For the moment it seems to have escaped me, but——”

“I know,” said Hubert. “So it has me. Meanwhile the light’s going . . .”

Without more ado we set off up the mountain as hard as we could, and after a quarter of an hour of most exhausting progress we stood high above the castle by the side of the fall.

Far below us lay the valley and beyond it, like some belvedere, the little strip of roadway from which we had first seen Hohenems: all around was forest, rising and falling as far as the eye could see, and through it flowed the valley, a broad stream of emerald pasture, with the ribbon of water in its midst. Here a spur would jut out and there the woods would withdraw to make a bay, but its course was not interrupted till the sky came down to meet it and the foothills had lost their height. Though the valley itself was in shadow, the forest was all aglow, for the sinking sun was gilding the tops of the trees.

When we had got our breath, we inspected the fall.

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This was some six feet across and, now that we were beside it, seemed quite impassable. Indeed, I made up my mind that we must climb up to its source, but when I looked up, I saw that that was hopeless, for two hundred feet above us the mountain rose into a cliff on which no trees were growing, which we could never have scaled. Hubert, however, was quick to find out a way.

The water fell down in three leaps as far as the bridge, and after that ran in its bed. Some forty feet below us, its second leap came to an end, and there a morsel of rock was projecting from the welter of foam. It was not in the midst of the water, but well to our side and it had the look of a hassock some twelve inches square. Upon this a man could stand upright, and thence, taking care, he could leap to the farther bank.

And so we did.

Whether the others minded, I do not know; but as I came up to

the rock, after Hubert had leaped, my stomach seemed strangely empty and my knees unpleasantly loose. I sprinkled some earth on the surface, as my cousin had done, for the spray had turned his handful to running mud: then I stepped upon it somehow, to feel it quaking beneath the force of the fall. This unexpected horror was better than any spur, and I could not have leaped more quickly if my foothold had been red-hot. And then I was on the wet earth, with an arm round the trunk of a fir-tree, dazed and shaken and trembling and feeling more thankful than ever I did before.

When we were all across, Hubert led the way down, and almost at once we made out the castle below us between the leaves of the trees. Since these were beeches, however, the foliage made a dense veil, and when we went lower the roofs and walls of the stables obscured our view. The latter stood something higher than we had thought, but when we were standing beside them, we found that more than one tree was stretching out massive branches over the slates.

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This made our ascent as easy as we had hoped, and three minutes later Hubert and I were crawling up to the ridge-pole, while Palin and Stiven were watching us from below.

That the light was failing was now to stand us in stead, for if we were to observe the courtyard, our heads must appear above the ridge of the roof: indeed, had it been broad daylight, we could not have risked being seen, for scores of windows were commanding the coign we sought.

The courtyard was broad and peaceful and might have neighboured the precincts of some cathedral church. Had we

not known it was perched upon the side of a mountain, such an idea would never have entered our heads, for it had the air of belonging to low-lying country, where streams flow lazily and the evenings are very still. Though we could, of course, hear the fall, its sound was now very soft, and the steady rustle seemed less to offend the silence than take its place.

To the right stood the gate-house, from which I was glad to see that the gates were gone, and directly before us was the entrance to the castle itself. This was very simple for such a place and was graced by only two steps, which were very low, but the door-case was very handsome and the door itself was massive and was studded with nails. To the left stood the servants' quarters, one storey high, and the kitchen lay in the angle between the castle proper and the wing which the quarters made. To this we could swear, for there a light was burning, and we saw the flash of the saucepans and a man dressed in white making pastry with infinite care. Four or five spreading chestnuts enriched the yard, and a fountain was playing in a basin full in its midst. Plainly enough this water came from the fall, which we afterwards found was tapped two hundred feet up. Water, indeed, from this source was led all over the castle, while the fall itself was used to furnish electric light.

For convenience' sake, I have set down all that we saw as well as I can, but at the moment we had no eyes for these things, for all our attention was seized by the sight of a car.

We could only see the bonnet, because of the pitch of the roof, but this there was no mistaking, for it was that of a Rolls. Its garage was plainly the coach-house which stood beneath where

we lay, and the car had been lately washed and now was being polished by a man who was fussing about her, leather in hand.

This sight of the handsome prize which we were to win not only delighted our hearts but made me quite sure that Fate was now fighting with us and as well directing our actions as smoothing our way: right or wrong, this was a valuable conviction, for from that time on I had more faith in myself and was less afraid to take a sudden decision because I firmly believed that it had been put into my head.

For perhaps two minutes we gloated over our luck: then a servant came out of the kitchen and raised his voice to the chauffeur still busy about his charge.

Because of the lisp of the water we could not hear what he said, but the chauffeur nodded in answer and the servant turned back to the house.

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“Calling him to supper,” breathed Hubert.

My cousin was right.

Almost at once the chauffeur passed out of our view—no doubt to enter the car, for an instant later we saw the bonnet go backwards and disappear.

The car had passed into the coach-house.

The chauffeur reappeared, plunged his hands into the basin and shaking the water from them, fought his way into his coat. Then he crossed the yard to the kitchen and we saw him no more.

Now the fellow had been too quick to have shut the coach-house doors: it follows that the Rolls was ready to anyone's hand, and since dusk had now come in, an attempt to carry her off could hardly have failed. There was light enough to see by, yet not enough to show up a thief, and though the servants were near, they were sitting at meat. And that, in a lighted room.

If only we could gain the courtyard, some twenty-five feet below . . .

For ten minutes we sought a way down, and sought in vain. While Hubert crawled as far as the kitchen, I made my way round to the gate-house—to no avail: and before we had met again above the garage, I had seen as clear as daylight the blunder which we had made.

Two of us four should have stayed beyond the water, ready to enter the courtyard and act on the information the others had won. But now our return was cut off, and if, as seemed certain, the only way we could enter was by the archway and bridge, we should have to go down to the valley, pass below the castle and then come up to the road. Even if we met no obstruction, the darkness would hinder our steps, and long before we were up, the chauffeur would have finished his supper and locked up the car.

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“Nothing doing?” said Hubert.

I shook my head.

“Then let's get down,” said my cousin, “and try the stable windows for what it's worth.”

By way of a beech-tree we scrambled back to the ground, and, hardly waiting to give Palin and Stiven our news, turned to the row of barred windows high up in the wall.

“You can count them out,” said Palin, inspecting his hands. “Those bars are good for another two hundred years. And you can’t get round to the gate-house because of that enchanting cascade. Not even a slug could do it. The water washes the wall.”

Hubert drew in his breath.

“We shall have to go round,” he said. “Down to the valley and round. We’ve torn up a chance in a million, but let that go.”

“Be reasonable,” said Palin. “Fortune may smile, but she devilish seldom grins, and if we have to work for our sugar, we can’t complain.”

This was true: and after a cigarette, we made our way round the castle and began to descend the mountain to the valley below.

Night was now upon us and because of the leaves above us the stars could give us no light. The darkness was, indeed, impenetrable, and although we had our two torches, one failed almost at once and the other’s beam was so feeble that we felt constrained to save it against the vital business of taking the car. It follows that the progress we made was painfully slow. The way was so steep that we could only descend by sliding from tree-trunk to tree-trunk as best we could, and since, when we let one go, we could never see the next to which we were hoping to cling, we fell again and again

and were shaken and bruised and battered beyond belief. Worst of all, we had no means of knowing whether we were not approaching the edge of some cliff and whether, when we let ourselves go, our descent was to be arrested before we fell over some brink. Hubert and I were leading and took by turns this very unpleasant plunge, and I never shall forget my relief when, after a desperate run, I fell into the lap of a meadow and felt the grass wet about me and saw the stars overhead.

This horrid descent had taken us half an hour and after resting a little to get our breath, we hastened over the meadows directly below the castle we could not see.

The night was superb, robing the majesty of our surroundings with a splendour which I cannot describe, while a delicate radiance in the east declared that the moon was rising and soon would be there to help us climb up to the road.

We were skirting the trees and had gone, I suppose, half way, when the sound of a definite movement came from the undergrowth. At once we stood still to listen: but since whoever had moved was doing the same, Palin and I left the meadow and entered the wood. I had taken three or four steps when some animal bolted almost from under my feet and, before I could think, I had started aside, missed my footing and fallen into some briars. Palin at once moved towards me, inquiring if I was hurt, but before I could answer he had tripped and fallen himself. It was now my turn to inquire.

“Yes,” said Palin, “I am. I’m frightened and hurt. I never did like the dark and I wish I was home. Never mind. Come and see what I’ve found—stumbled on.”

This was nothing less than the end of a flight of stone steps.

That these led up to the castle there could be no doubt, and we summoned Hubert and Stiven without delay.

Now while it seemed unlikely that the steps would help us to-night, it was easy enough to perceive that they might prove more than useful at some other time: and since the longer we waited before beginning our climb, the higher the moon would have risen to guide our feet, we determined to mount the steps and discover what kind of access they gave to the castle above.

We, therefore, arranged that Stiven and I should go up to see what we could, while Hubert and Palin went on to find a way over the water which we could conveniently take.

After our drubbing in the forest, mounting the steps seemed the easiest thing in the world, but though they rose in a zigzag, the flights were steep, and we were very soon toiling and had to rest more than once.

At last I turned for what seemed the fiftieth time to find a wall on my right, and when I looked up, I was standing against the castle and could see the battlements above me outlined against the sky.

Ten steps more brought us up to a postern gate.

The gate was of iron bars, and was fastened by a padlock and chain. These were too much for my strength, but the padlock was poorly made and would, I felt sure, succumb to the rudest of tools. The gate admitted to a passage which seemed to run straight ahead, but, though we both strained our

eyes, we could not pierce the darkness which reigned within.

We then surveyed the wall upon either side, to see a row of windows, the sills of which were in line with the lintel above the gate. The nearest was six feet away, but to stand beneath it we had, of course, to go down, and by descending we put it out of our reach.

“On my shoulders, sir,” breathed Stiven.

A moment later I had my hands on the sill . . .

The casement was open and I could look into the room.

I was staring before me, when Stiven’s hand gripped my leg, and, finding in this movement a warning, I stayed as still as a statue until he plucked at my trousers as though he would have me come down.

When I was standing beside him, he held me against the wall and, after waiting a moment, began to descend the steps like a shadow itself. As I followed, I lowered my eyes, and there on the step beside me a cigarette-end was glowing a rosy red.

“You saw the man?” said Hubert.

“Plain, sir,” said Stiven. “When the cigarette-end went by me, I turned my head, and there he was with a new cigarette in his mouth and leaning on the top of the wall. In one of the gaps, sir. I could see his face white in the moonlight. It’s as still as death up there, and if he’d been ten seconds earlier he must have heard us moving to get to the window-sill.”

“All’s well,” said Palin. “Was anyone in the room?”

“I couldn’t say,” said I. “The room itself was in darkness, but some light outside was shining under the door.”

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“That’s better than the postern,” said Palin. “I know those gates. They bar one end of a passage, and the other’s kept by a door about two feet thick. And now what about it? Do we enter the castle to-night? Or only go for the car?”

After some discussion we held to the plan we had made. That Harris would stick at nothing we had no doubt, and while he was armed, we had not a pistol between us with which we could hold him in check. Until we were armed, however far we might get, any one of the gang could hold the four of us up, and then our state would be worse than it had been the night before.

“To-morrow night,” said Hubert. “When Harris has gone to bed. We can watch the lights go out and then come down to the valley and walk upstairs.”

“If we get the car,” said Palin, “I can’t help feeling they’ll sleep pretty light for a while. I know I should. Never mind. Where were we before all this? Oh, I know. Down in the forest something stirred. It was only a b—bird. Was it?”

“It was some animal,” said I. “I don’t know what.”

Nor do I to this day. But whatever it was, it did us a very good turn, for, had we not heard its movement as we went by, we should never have dreamed of a means of access to the castle which stood us in very good stead.

Hubert and Palin had found a bridge over the stream, and ten minutes later we were climbing up to the road by the side of the fall.

Here the moonlight helped us, as we had hoped. Indeed, without it I do not believe that, had Death been climbing behind us, we could have reached the road. The soil was soft and crumbled beneath our feet: the trees stood apart too far for us to pass from one to the next: such handhold as we secured betrayed us again and again. Three several times we consulted whether or no to go back, but at last we gained our end and clambered on to the road.

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It was now very nearly midnight—for our climb had taken us more than two hours and a half—and, except for the light of the moon, the castle was dark.

We stole across the drawbridge and, passing under the archway, entered the broad courtyard. This was partly in shadow, but the moon was shining on the stables, the doors of which were fast shut.

To right and left stood loose-boxes, four on each side: between these stood two coach-houses: and between these two again stood a harness-room. A loft ran the length of the building, but was clearly approached from within, for no steps or ladder were anywhere to be seen. Four doors running down to the gate-house suggested a row of stalls.

Here I should say that there were no horses at all. So much we knew already, for the pleasant smell of stabling cannot be hid.

“Where’s the Rolls?” breathed Palin.

I pointed to the right-hand coach-house.

“I see,” he murmured. “No latches to the coach-house doors. That means you enter them both from the harness-room.”

“Locked, of course,” said Hubert.

“Indubitably,” said Palin. “Can anyone tell me why we came without any tools? I mean, what d’you think possessed us? If you go to play golf, you usually take your clubs.”

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“Can’t be helped,” said Hubert. “As a matter of form we may as well try the doors.”

One door only was unlocked, and that was the door of a loose-box that stood on the left. For what it was worth, we entered and shut the door. Then Hubert took the torch from his pocket and gave us some light . . .

For a moment we stood dumbfounded. Then Palin threw his hat in the air.

The loose-box had been converted into the carpenter’s shop.

That we did not deserve such fortune, I frankly confess, and as I surveyed the rows of gleaming tools, the saws and axes and chisels and everything that the most exacting housebreaker could have desired, I felt again that the stars in their courses were fighting against the live Harris as they had fought against the dead.

Then Palin went out of the loose-box and shut the door, while

we laid sacks on the sill and then, for an instant, switched on the electric light: he returned to say that not a gleam could be seen, so Stiven was posted in the courtyard, to watch the house, while the rest of us took off our coats and got to work.

Our plan was simple—to cut our way into the loft, and then, if no stairs should lead us into a coach-house, to cut our way out through the ceiling directly above the Rolls.

Stiven was to tap on the door, if the noise we made was louder than he thought safe, but he afterwards said that, because of the rustle of the water, had he not known we were working, he would not have noticed the sound.

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The floor of the loft was of oak, and forty minutes went by before we had cut an opening through which a man's body could pass. Then Hubert went up and I followed, to find, twenty feet to our right, a heavy trap-door. Happily this was not fast, and when we had lifted it up, we saw a coach-house below us and a ladder clamped to the wall.

We descended to find two cars—one was a light, open car and the other a sturdy van—and passing these we entered the harness-room. This was now the chauffeur's workshop, and the cases were full of spare parts and such tools as mechanics employ. I never have seen such good order: but, what was more to the point, on the leaves of an open diary were lying the keys of the Rolls.

An instant later we had entered the second coach-house and were standing beside our prize.

Full half an hour went by before we were ready to leave, for

Palin insisted that we must cover our tracks, “for so,” he said, “we shall turn this theft into a feat which will not only trouble Harris but will make the real John Ferrers a power in the servants’ eyes.”

Working as fast as we could, we did as he said.

We stained the edges of the floor boards which we had cut and, screwing them on to two battens, made them a proper trap-door: once they were back in their place, no one below would have dreamed that they had been moved. We swept up the dust we had made and wiped and restored to their places the tools we had used: and when the Rolls was out, Hubert rebarred the doors and made his way back through the loft to the carpenter’s shop.

Here I will set out the letter which we left lying on the diary for the chauffeur to find. It was, of course, written in German by Palin’s hand.

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To the chauffeur.

I have taken my car because I have need of it. On our way from England my cousin and I were robbed of all that we had by the man whom you believe to be John Ferrers, my great-uncle’s heir-at-law. He is nothing of the kind. He is the brother of Harris, my great-uncle’s secretary. When he knows that the Rolls is gone, he will know who has taken it and he will be afraid. Because of this he will not report the theft to the police. I shall return very soon with Mr. Constable.

“All ready?” breathed Hubert beside me, with his hand upon a spare wheel. “We’d better not start the engine until we’re over the bridge.”

I told him that the engine was running and bade him get on to the step.

An instant later we had passed under the archway and on to the road.

The hired car was as we had left her eight hours before.

By the time we had eaten and drunk it was half-past two, and after a little discussion, Hubert and Palin took their seats in the Rolls, while Stiven and I climbed into the second car. My cousin had suggested that we should precede the Rolls, but that would have meant laying stripes on four instead of on two, so he and Palin sailed off, while Stiven and I came pounding along behind. A moment later we saw the last of their lights.

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As we had half expected, our progress was worse than before, for the car seemed sick of travelling and her engine made ready to faint at the sight of a hill.

At half-past five we were still five miles from the inn, when, as though to insist that she had travelled enough, the brute, without any warning, refused to answer the wheel. So slowly had we been moving, that I was able to stop before we ran off

the road, but when I got down I found that a bolt of the steering had broken in two.

Stiven was less tired than I, for he had not been driving nor had he visited Robin the day before, so I sent him off to the inn to tell Hubert that I was stranded and ask him to bring the Rolls.

That an hour and a half must go by before help came was unhappily clear, and when I had watched my messenger pass out of sight I flung myself down on the grass by the side of the car.

Before I had lain there a minute I was asleep.

An hour had gone by when I felt a man's hands upon me, turning my body about.

Dead asleep as I had been, Harris had put such an edge to my instinct of self-preservation that I was up in a flash, dazed, but full of menace and ready to do any violence the circumstances seemed to require. This so much surprised the other that he made to take a step back and catching his spur in a tussock fell heavily into the ditch.

A peal of laughter greeted this ridiculous scene, and when I looked round I saw a girl on horseback in a habit of Lincoln Green. She was very fine to look at and was riding a handsome roan and holding a bay: but had she been clad in sackcloth and herding swine, because of what Palin had said, I should have known who she was. She was incomparable.

Her hair was dark, and her eyes were large and grey. Her skin

was very white and her colour was high: of her clean-cut features her mouth was especially lovely, and she had a look of being mistress wherever she went. Her air was more gracious than charming, yet natural as the day, and I remember thinking that had she been born an empress, a fanatic loyalty would have distinguished her reign. She was slight and sat very well; and though, as this tale will show, I saw her again and again, the picture she made in the cool of that fragrant morning, with the greenwood glancing behind her and the roan in its pride and splendour bearing her up, will always excel its fellows, beautiful though they are.

Lady Olivia Haydn steadied her voice.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “But it looked like an accident, and my groom was turning you over to see if you were alive.”

“I’m very grateful,” said I. “And I’m sorry I played the part of a Jack-in-the-Box.” As the groom came to take his horse, “Will you ask if he’s hurt?” I added.

She spoke to the man in German, and the fellow took off his hat and made her some pleasant answer with a smile on his face.

“No, he’s not hurt,” she said. “He’s had too many falls.” She hesitated. Then—“Can I do anything for you? Send you some help, or something? You see, I can speak your language and, to tell you the truth, you give the impression of having been in the wars. My name is Olivia Haydn.”

71

For a second I hesitated. Then I determined to do as my impulse bade.

“I’m John Ferrers,” I said. “John Ferrers of Hohenems.”

I saw her start, but she said no word but kept her eyes upon mine.

I decided to continue my report.

“The man who’s there now’s an impostor. On our way out from England, he lay for me and my cousin and stripped us of all we had. Then he fetched up at the castle and said he was me. None of the servants had seen us, so how could they know? He’d all our credentials and luggage, so he couldn’t go wrong.”

“Who is this man?” said my lady.

“My great-uncle’s secretary’s brother. Harris by name. Of course, he’s not working alone.”

There was a little silence. Then—

“And what,” said Lady Olivia, “are you proposing to do?”

“Turn him out,” said I. “Enter and eject him by force.”

My lady raised her eyebrows.

“Have you seen the castle?” she said.

I nodded.

“We went there last night,” I said, “and took the Rolls. We had to have something and this car’s like a bad dream.”

The girl stared for a moment. Then she began to laugh.

At length—

“This is most refreshing,” she said. “Who’s ‘we’?”

72

“My cousin,” I said. “He’s the joint heir with me. And my cousin’s man and Palin. He’s come in with us.”

“Andrew Palin?” she cried. “How did you fall in with him?”

I told her shortly enough.

When I had done—

“Remember me to him,” she said. “I can see he’s spoken of me, so I’ll leave it there. And now I must be going. I shall be very interested to know how you all get on.”

Before I had time to answer, the roan had leaped over the ditch, and an instant later the lady was lost to view.

This most abrupt departure prevented me from asking how I might see her again, and I have no doubt that that was why she left me, for, though she was plainly friendly, she came from the enemy’s camp. More. My news had confused the issues beyond belief. I was the man to be outwitted, and Haydn was already in touch with a man of straw.

If she needed time for reflection, be sure I did too, and I watched the groom ride after his flying mistress as a man in a dream.

Her beauty had been so startling and her air and her manners so fine that that I should feel something dazed was natural enough, but our meeting had been so strange and the step I had taken was so grave that, without thinking what I did, I began to walk up the road the way Stiven had gone, and when, a few minutes later, I saw the Rolls coming towards me, I only drew to one side and would have let her go by.

As she came to rest—

73

“He’s asleep,” said my cousin’s voice. “He’s walking, but he’s asleep.”

With an effort I collected my wits.

“Perhaps you’re right,” said I. “But if I am, I’ve had the deuce of a dream.”

74

Because its steering was useless, the hired car could not be towed, and, the day being Sunday, I had to visit three forges before I could find a smith to give me a bolt: by noon, however, we had her back at the inn and at half past five that evening I drove her into Robin and rendered her whence she came.

Though we felt that Time was against us, at Palin's instance we spent that night at the inn, for as yet we had no firearms, while Hubert, Stiven and I were in need of a good night's rest. By rights we three should have been scarce able to stand, but though I know I was thankful to be in a decent bed, we were by no means failing for want of sleep. But then we were all very fit and our account with Morpheus was not yet, so to speak, overdrawn. But had we known how slight a balance was left, we should not that night have slept as sound as we did.

We were up betimes the next morning and on the road before eight, for we meant to visit Salzburg—a journey, to and fro, of nearly three hundred miles.

That day proved once for all that we had done more than wisely in taking the Rolls, for we spent two hours at Salzburg, a well-found town, and yet were back in our quarters by half past six. So we had time to rest and dine in comfort before setting out for the castle at nine o'clock.

We now had an excellent torch and a pistol apiece, as well as some rope and some tools with which, if need be,

we could force any ordinary door. We were, therefore, as well equipped as we could have wished and I, for one, set out in the confidence that before the night was over, Harris the Second would curse the day he was born.

Here I should say that we had been careful to purchase such things as we should require for tending the Rolls. Had we but thought, we might have had these with the car, when we carried her off: still, we spent the money gladly, for we gloried in the car, as children, and Stiven bolted his supper to finish ‘rubbing her down.’ Such an outlook was proper. Her manners were faultless: her body—a cabriolet—was most beautifully built: and her pace and her silence were just what we had required. As for the people of the inn, no worshipful relic could have been more respected or better bestowed. But all that was ours was sacred in the sight of those honest souls. They never asked a question or made any sort of comment upon the hours we kept, yet gave our needs precedence over all other cares: when we told them that evening that urgent private business would keep us abroad all night, their one idea was to put us up suitable food, and from that time on they might have been our allies and stood to gain a fortune from our success.

At ten that night we stood once more at the viewpoint from which we had first seen Hohenems two days before.

Three windows which gave to the ramparts were full of light, but the rest of the house was in darkness, so far as we saw.

This was no more than we expected: but until the lights were put out, we did not propose to move. The night

being warm and gentle, some of the gang were sure to be on the ramparts, and though we hoped very much that they had not thought of watching the postern steps, so long as they lounged above them, we dared not essay to make our entrance that way.

Our plan was simple.

We proposed to enter the castle, find the principal servants and convince them that Hubert and I were the rightful heirs. That we could so satisfy them, we had little doubt, for Palin could state our case and the letter we had left for the chauffeur had paved our way. Once they believed that Harris was an impostor, if they were at all faithful, their anger would know no bounds and they would be only too eager to help us to bring him down.

Now we hoped to gain this advantage before Harris knew of our presence within his gates, for if he were to raise the alarm and discover us to the servants before we had discovered ourselves, we should appear in the light of so many thieves, and the instinct of the servants would be to stand by Harris and, carrying out his orders, to give no ear to our words. In such a case, we must either overpower Harris and the rest of the gang or contrive to hold them in check till the servants believed in our cause: but if we failed in these things we should have to beat a retreat, for, though we might effect a lodgment, with the staff against us we should be as good as in jail and must fall prisoners to Harris before very long.

Now that we had some rope, our descent to the valley would be easy and could be made where we pleased; but, except for the bend of the road to which we had come, we knew no point

from which we could watch the windows at present aglow, so Hubert and Stiven stayed there, while Palin and I walked on to see if lights were burning upon the courtyard side.

We had left the Rolls concealed on the grass-grown track. Her switch and her bonnet were locked, and I had the keys.

77

Palin and I went carefully, keeping a sharp look-out, but though we were sure that the courtyard was being guarded, we could hardly believe that the road of approach was patrolled. Nor was it, so far as I know: and we heard no sound but the roar of the falling water and once or twice the cry of an owl in the woods.

The night was so dark that when we had turned the last corner, the castle might have been gone, and when it began to take shape, we could see no detail at all, but only the towers of the gatehouse against the sky. No light was burning, and the mouth of the archway was black. To complete our reconnaissance, we held on our way until we were able to make out the castle walls, but to our surprise we could not distinguish the archway, try as we would. Not until we were standing but twenty paces away did we perceive what had happened to baffle our sight.

The drawbridge was up.

It had never occurred to us that the drawbridge could still be raised, for it had seemed a fixture when we had used it to enter and leave the courtyard: but this was because it was short and massively built, while the gear by which it was lifted was not to be seen.

After a long look we stole back the way we had come.

As we rounded the first of the bends—

“And I don’t blame them,” said Palin. “I’d have done the same thing myself. After all, what’s a drawbridge for? To discourage the gate-crasher. But I’m devilish glad we know it. If we’d been pressed and tried to emerge that way . . .”

78

As he spoke there was a movement before us, and then we heard Stiven’s voice.

Hubert had sent him to tell us the lights were gone.

Forty minutes later we were flat against the wall of the castle at the head of the postern steps.

We had mounted noiselessly, for our shoes were soled with rubber and made no sound: but it was an anxious moment, for the steps were commanded by the ramparts, and anyone watching there could have held the four of us up or shot the four of us down.

The moon had not yet risen, but our eyes had grown used to the dark, and if someone had leaned over the battlements, we should have seen his movement against the sky. Palin, therefore, stood sentry, whilst I got upon Stiven’s shoulders to come at the window-sill.

The window was open, as I had found it before, and the room beyond was in darkness, save for the strip of light which was showing beneath the door.

I drew myself on to the sill and thrust my head into the room, straining my ears for any sound of breathing, for it might well have been a bedroom whose occupant was asleep. Hearing no sound, I ventured to use my torch, to see an empty chamber, as bare as my hand.

This discovery did my heart good, for, apart from making our entry the easiest thing in the world, it showed that Harris accounted this side of the castle safe from attack.

Here I may say that I think it more than likely that none of the gang had noticed the postern steps: but, if they had, they had not thought of the windows but had contented themselves with knowing the postern barred.

79

The sill was three feet wide—the wall itself was nearly seven feet thick—and we had to make use of the rope, before Palin, the last to enter, could get his hands on the ledge: but at last we were all in the room, having made so little noise that had there been someone there sleeping, I do not believe he would have waked.

The door of the room was unlocked, so Hubert opened it gently and put out his head. A moment later we were standing in a long stone passage which seemed to run the length of the castle from east to west. On our left, as Palin had predicted, was the massive door reinforcing the postern gate. Its bolts, which were shot, were fully as thick as my wrist, and since they passed into the stone, to open that door from without would have troubled Jack Sheppard himself. Why the passage was illumined we could not think, but we afterwards found that, since it had no windows, the lights there were always burning

by day as by night.

Now from what we had seen when we lay on the coach-house roof, we knew that the servants' quarters lay to our right: so we closed the door behind us and started that way along the passage, moving in single file.

At the eastern end of the passage we came to a corkscrew stair, such as you may find in great churches, built in the wall: but here no lights were burning, and Hubert, who was leading, made bold to employ his torch. The stair was short and brought us up to a landing, or square, stone hall, from which we saw at a glance there were three ways out. One of these ways was the stair by which we had come: another, which was kept by a heavy iron-studded door, clearly gave to the ramparts: and the third, which was shut by a scarcely less massive door, offered to lead us whither we wished to go.

80

In a flash I perceived that my joy at effecting an entry had been premature, for that, though we were within the castle, we had really done no more than enter a kind of bailey which guarded this side of the house and, unless we could open this door, our venture would be in great danger of coming to naught.

I set an eye to the keyhole, but this was dark: and when I listened, instead, I could hear no sound: at a nod from Hubert I, therefore, laid hold of the handle, and, when I was ready to turn it, my cousin put out his torch. So much was depending on whether this door was fast that for me the world stopped rolling until I had found the truth. Then the door yielded gently, and I ventured to breathe again. As I drew it clear of the jamb, I saw that a light must be burning some distance away, for a

faint illumination was severing substance from shadow and disclosing the style of the quarters to which we had come. Except for the tick of some clock, I could hear no sound, so I set the door wider open and the four of us stole within.

The slightest survey showed that we were now in the wing of a gallery, while the light which was burning was in the gallery proper and, therefore, around the corner and out of our view. The place was sumptuous. The carpet was rich to the foot, the walls were panelled, the curtains before the windows were of heavy crimson brocade: great pictures hung upon the panels and handsome furniture was standing against the walls: six paces away, to our right, was yawning a lovely fireplace of chiselled stone.

Beyond the fireplace was a pair of tall double doors: these looked the length of the gallery and manifestly led to the kitchen and so to the servants' wing.

81

As I made to move towards them, Hubert laid a hand on my arm, and when I stopped, he set his mouth to my ear.

"I can't believe they're keeping no sort of watch. If they are, they'll be round the corner, close to the light. This gallery is the obvious place for a sentinel. I guess it runs the length of the castle and I'm sure it commands the courtyard." I nodded assent. "Follow me up to the corner, and wait till I've had a look round."

Now so thick was the carpet that, had we been shod with iron, our footfalls could not have been heard: but as we began to move forward, I knew how a thief must feel in the house he has

entered to rob. I was listening so feverishly that the pounding of my heart did much to embarrass my ears: although there was nothing to see, I was straining my eyes: every nerve in my body was taut, and my senses were ready to magnify out of all reason the slightest cause for suspicion that our presence had been observed.

As though to prove my condition, without any warning the clock whose tick I have mentioned began to chime, and though, I think, we all started, I must frankly confess that my hammering heart stood still. The chimes were those of Westminster and were stately and melodiously done, but I shall never forget how they rode upon the silence of the gallery, as inexorable and relentless as the master they served.

A quarter to twelve.

When Hubert had reached the corner, he held up his hand. Then he leaned out, to look down the gallery's length. For a moment he stood like a statue. Then he straightened his back and a hand went up to his mouth.

82

"What is it?" I whispered.

"Look for yourself," breathed my cousin, and took a step back.

Perhaps twelve paces away a man was sprawling asleep before the glow of a fire. A standard lamp was throwing its light on his face, and I saw at once that he was English and was wearing one of my suits. He was a fair-haired fellow, not very tall; he looked more careless than evil and not so rough as Bugle, though the hand I could see was uncared-for and had done a lot of hard work. Since I afterwards found that he was

known as 'Punter,' it will be convenient if from now I give him that name.

The sight of that man provoked me as nothing that I can remember had ever provoked me before, and if I am to tell the truth, it was not so much his occupation of Hohenems or his casual enjoyment of the luxury from which he had shut us out as his impudent wearing of my garments that sent the blood to my head.

After a long look, I drew back out of his view, and when Palin and Stiven had seen him, we stole a few paces back and began to consult.

Here was the sentry whom Hubert had said we should find. Should we ignore his presence and make for the double doors? Or should we seize the fellow before we did anything else?

Almost at once we decided to take the second course.

The doors were full in his view, and if he should wake whilst we were making our exit, before we could stop him he would have raised the alarm. The chance, moreover, of reducing the enemy's strength was much too good to let slip, while from my point of view to leave such a rogue unmolested seemed almost criminal.

83

We had rounded the corner and were stealing towards our man, when the fire before which he was sprawling fell in with a crash.

As I dropped beside a great sofa, the fellow awoke with a start and, scrambling to his feet, stood looking sharply about him

with a hand to his hip. Happily the light was dim: but for this, he must have seen us, for the shadows cast by the furniture were all the cover we had.

At last his suspicions sank down and he took out a cigarette. Finding in his pockets no matches, he sought a light from the embers now flaming upon the hearth, but he scorched his hands to no purpose and, after a curse or two, he started to walk down the gallery as though to look for a match.

This was, of course, our chance: and, long before he returned, I was beneath the sofa and Stiven was back in the wing, while Hubert and Palin were standing behind the great curtains by a window which was facing the hearth.

Because of the carpet I could not hear Punter's steps, but all of a sudden I saw his feet beside me, and an instant later he flung himself down on the sofa beneath which I lay. This to my great delight, for it showed that, sentry or no, he had not the faintest intention of trying to keep awake. Since his back was to Hubert and Palin, I decided that I was the one to make the first move and I made up my mind to give the fellow ten minutes before sliding out from beneath him and clapping my pistol to his throat.

84

I was forestalled.

Before five minutes had passed, I had the shock of my life, for without the slightest warning I saw another man's feet approaching the fire.

For a moment he stood there quietly, with his back to the hearth.

Then—

“A —— lot of use you are,” said Harris, sharply.

The convulsion above me suggested that Punter was as startled as I. I can only hope that he was, for for the fraction of an instant I had the absurd, but none the less shocking impression that Harris was speaking to me. Be that as it may, in one movement he leapt to his feet, stood, swaying slightly, for a moment, and then flopped back on the sofa as though to indulge his relief.

“My God,” he said weakly, “my God, you give me a start.”

Apart from his injured tone, the naivety of this statement was enough to make anyone laugh, and I know I had all I could do to control my mirth.

But Harris was out of humour.

“Give you a start, you wash-out? Supposing it hadn’t been me! What did I put you here for?”

“God knows,” was the bitter reply. “There’s thirty servants eatin’ their ugly heads off. Why shouldn’t the ——s sit up?”

“Because I don’t trust ’em,” snapped Harris.

“Since that car was pinched, they’ve kept their eyes on the ground. Those young squirts are getting at them.”

“An’ what price Holy? Hasn’t he stopped the rot?”

“How do I know?” said Harris. “I heard him jaw, but I can’t talk his —— language, and he’d double-cross his mother for a ha’p’orth o’ shrimps.”

“Every time,” said Punter. “I give you that. Holy’s a nasty business, but he’s not going to cut his throat. Directly I see him to-day, I knew that somebody’d split.”

“D’you think I didn’t?” snarled Harris.

“In course you did,” said Punter. “But why did he come if he wasn’t goin’ through with the deal?”

Harris made no answer, and Punter got again to his feet.

“It’s as clear as paint,” he continued. “Holy’s as hot as hell. Directly he hears the rumour, he sees his chance. ‘Pie for Holy,’ he says. He knows he’s on the wrong horse: but he can’t get his price about the right one, *so he’s goin’ to see that we win*. There’ll be an objection later, but Holy’ll have drawn his money before we’re disqualified. At least, that’s his idea.”

“Too good to be true,” said Harris.

“Don’t you believe it,” said Punter. “Holy was born a crook, but that’s as far as he goes. All he knows, he was born with: he hasn’t had no experience to make him wise. He can do his neighbours all right, an’ cook the chapel accounts. He’s good enough to swindle ’is country-bumpkin friends. An’ he’s done it so long, he thinks he’s a —— Napoleon when it comes to doin’ a deal.”

“We’ll know on Wednesday,” said Harris and lighted a

cigarette. “Till then I’m taking no chances. He knows we can’t talk German, an’ when he spoke to old Fishface, for all we know, he may have put the rope round our necks.”

“I heard him say ‘Oxford,’” said Punter. “He said he was goin’ to say that you was at Oxford with ’im, an’ I listened out for the word. You’re too damned suspicious, you are. You won’t believe it when somebody ’ands you a peach.”

“Depends who it is,” said Harris. “An’ there’s the rub. I don’t fancy fruit that Holy’s giving away.”

“But he don’t know he’s done it,” cried Punter. “He’s vouched for you to the servants—to help himself. An’ the poor —— boob can’t see that by doin’ that he’s put your foot on his neck.”

“If there’s jam I can see it,” said Harris, “without you pointing it out. But I’m not going to bank on Holy’s being a mug. I’ve seen his shape before now. Slippery’s not the word. I guess that after God made him, He washed His hands.”

“I don’t say he isn’t,” said Punter. “What I say is that he’s overreached ’imself.” He turned to spit into the fire. “Last night, I grant you, I went to bed in me clothes. I couldn’t eat my dinner for those —— giants of footmen movin’ around. But Holy’s put all that straight. Look at the drawbridge. Who told them to pull that up? We never give it a thought—never even knew it’d move. But at dusk this evenin’ they pulled it up on their own—to keep out the squirts.”

With his words the clock struck midnight, and I well remember how much astonished I was, for so much seemed to have happened since last I had heard it chime.

For a little the two stood silent, and for this I was thankful enough, for what I had heard had thrown me into a turmoil of rage and apprehension and vain regret.

To say that I groaned in spirit in no way describes my case.

Had we but come last night, the servants would have rallied to us and have cast the impostors out. The letter we left for the chauffeur had done its work: the breach had been made: the staff had been ready and waiting—and we had never walked in.

What was a thousand times worse, it was now too late. Haydn had seen to that. Father Herman—for he, of course, was ‘Holy’—had identified Harris as Ferrers to, probably, the steward himself. Indubitably, Punter was right. So far as the staff was concerned, Harris could bury his fears. When I reflected that it was I in my folly that had opened this door to Haydn—I that, obeying my impulse, had made Haydn free of the truth, my cup of mortification overflowed.

And here is the place to record that even in this bitter moment no suspicion of Lady Olivia so much as entered my head. I knew she had told her uncles my curious news: so I had meant her to do: but I knew she had never dreamed of the use to which her tale would be put.

I had believed—and so had Hubert and Palin—that when they learned that Harris was an impostor, they would break off negotiations out of hand. We had not expected their help: but it had not occurred to us that they would use our misfortune to further their beastly ends.

For that, of course, was their game.

Harris was willing to sell. That Hohenems was not his was beside the point. The true John Ferrers might not be willing to sell. But Harris was. More. Knowing him for an impostor, they had now a hold upon Harris such as they never could have upon John Ferrers himself. So Harris must be supported, confirmed in his seat—until the moment arrived to cast him out.

88

Perjury, blackmail, receiving stolen goods . . .

It occurred to me that Augustus was not the only Haydn that promised to compare with the Vicar whom, according to Gibbon, to remember was to condemn.

Yet even I could see what the fox had missed.

He himself had inducted Harris, declared him to be John Ferrers, established him Hohenems' lord. *What was that going to cost him?* What would be the price of the abdication of the king he had made?

So far as I could see, until the secret was won, our home was like to be the subject of a forced and bitter alliance between our two deadly foes, while we were held at arm's length by the law of the land, upon which, the moment we moved, the House of Haydn was perfectly certain to call.

This miserable expectation was almost immediately displaced by a frantic determination to play what cards we held without another instant's delay. It was in our power to take two valuable tricks. Harris himself was at our mercy, and the

servants were fast asleep. What we should do when Harris and Punter were our prisoners, I could not pretend to say. I could only see that here in our hands was a chance which never would come again. If only I could speak with Hubert, who was far better placed than I. Beneath this cursed sofa . . .

“Oh, I say,” said Punter, brightly, as though the idea had only just entered his head. “I say—What about a drink?”

89

“No, you don’t,” sneered Harris. “You’ve had your ration to-night.”

“Ration?” blared Punter. “This ain’t Barnardo’s Homes. I didn’t come in to——”

“You’re under orders,” spat Harris. “My orders. If I’m satisfied on Wednesday, you can have the keys and get as soused as you like.”

“Who wants to get soused?” blustered Punter. “In the las’ twelve hours I’ve had a Scotch and a half. An’ you talk about rations. Why——”

“Look here,” said Harris, using a frightful oath. “I’m running this —— show.”

His tone was so cold and sinister that I was not surprised that Punter made no reply. It was far more disconcerting than any explosion of wrath, and the silence which followed seemed to make it more monstrous, because it suggested that Harris had murdered speech.

At length—

“You’d better turn in,” he said quietly. “Bunch comes on at one, and I’ll see him up.”

Before he had finished speaking, I had slid from under the sofa, away from the hearth. To wait any longer seemed madness, and what possessed my companions I could not think.

As I rose from behind the sofa, pistol in hand—

“Not a sound or movement,” said my cousin. “We’ve got you cold.”

Had we fixed some cue for our entrance, I cannot believe that this could have been better made.

For an instant the two men stood spell-bound: and before that instant had passed, my pistol was touching Punter and Hubert was holding his against Harris’ chest.

90

As Palin passed behind them—

“Stiven,” said Hubert.

“Sir,” said Stiven, from the shadows.

“Cut a couple of lengths of cord and bind their wrists.”

Now both the rogues must have known that, though they were at our mercy, except in the last resort we did not propose to fire: yet they made no sort of endeavour to call our bluff, and neither moved a muscle, so far as I saw. This, I am sure, was because they guessed that we were not used to firearms and, since an

automatic pistol is a treacherous thing, were almost afraid to breathe lest Hubert or I by mistake should let one of the weapons go off. And here I may say, had we known, Punter, at least, had no sort of cause for alarm, for, though I never knew it till later, I had forgotten to put down my safety-catch.

We bound their wrists and gagged them with their own handkerchiefs, but while, if looks could have killed, we should have died not one but a thousand deaths, they made no active protest by word or deed. When this was done, we searched them, to find that both were armed, while Harris had in his pocket my great-uncle's bunch of keys. This we took, and their pistols: then we bound their ankles together and lugged them round the corner and into the wing. There Stiven was left to guard them, pistol in hand, while Hubert, Palin and I returned to the fire.

“And now,” breathed Hubert, “for Bunch—who ‘comes on at one.’”

From having been cast down, I was now so much elated that I could hardly stand still, for I now perceived that, so far from taking two tricks, we were well on the way to winning the rubber itself.

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“And when we’ve got him,” I whispered.

“We retire,” said Palin, “taking our sheaves with us. Stay, if you like: but I advise withdrawal. At the present moment the staff is on Harris’ side, and we must give them time to alter their point of view. When the household awakes to its duties, what will it find? It will find that its sometime *seigneur* has

disappeared—as well as one and possibly two of his mates. Disappeared unaccountably—mark that. If we get Bunch and the gang is only three strong, the lot will have disappeared. I hope that Bunch is the wallah you know as ‘Bugle.’ But even if Bugle remains, I can’t help feeling that he’ll be just a shade nonplussed. In fact, with the drawbridge still up and the postern straitly barred, he might be forgiven for wondering whether the devil could prove that he hadn’t left Hell within the last twenty-four hours. As for the servants . . . And in any event we’ll leave a letter for them.”

“Write it now,” said my cousin. “We’ll stand behind the curtains in case anyone should appear. If they see you sitting in the shadows, they’ll assume it’s Harris or Punter, sure as a gun.”

“Good,” said Palin, and took his seat at a table close to the hearth. “Just add a log, will you? I don’t think it would be presumption. After all, it is your fire.” I did as he said. “Oh, and if friend Bunch should arrive before I’ve done—a contingency, I may say, upon which, if he’s at all like the more prepossessing of our captives, I should hesitate to bet—don’t hold your hand too long. Don’t rush it, of course: but pity the poor decoy.”

With that, he picked up a pen and we made ourselves scarce. . . .

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When he had done there was still no sign of Bunch, so I came back to hear the letter and put my name at its foot.

Palin read it through quietly, while I kneeled down beside him

with my eyes on the shadows that masked the gallery's length.

To the steward.

Why was the drawbridge up? I said I should come again.

I am surprised that you should believe what that rascally priest of Haydn chooses to say. He was never at Oxford in his life and had never set eyes upon Harris till three days ago.

I have now removed that impostor.

See that you are ready to receive me when next I come.

John Ferrers.

“All things considered,” said Palin, “I think that should shake them up. As for you, you’ll become a sort of legend. When you make your official appearance, they’ll try and do sacrifice.”

“I think it’s brilliant,” said I.

Then I signed the letter and felt an impostor myself.

When Palin had covered and addressed it, he went to keep watch with Hubert for a quarter of an hour, while I stole down to the corner, to see that our prisoners were safe, and then returned to take my ease by the fire.

So we passed the time—two behind the curtains, and one

either visiting Stiven or sitting where Punter had sat: but though one o'clock went by, there was no sign of Bunch.

Very soon we began to suspect that he must share Punter's views on the question of keeping watch and that if we had not interfered, Harris would have had to go seek him and drag him out of his bed. This suspicion was gradually confirmed, but we waited till a quarter past two before, in some disappointment, we decided to give him up. Then we thrust our letter beneath the tall double doors and set about the business of bearing our captives away.

Before we did anything else, we bound their eyes, but I think this precaution was very nearly useless, for we could not disguise the fact that they were to pass downstairs, first within the castle and then without.

Their carriage was a nightmare, and I shall always believe that they tried to make themselves heavy, as I daresay I should have done. Yet we dared not let them walk, lest they should abuse this freedom and manage to break the silence which we were so anxious to keep. Had the drawbridge been down, we could have gone that way and spared ourselves such labour as I should like to forget, but, shocking as was the prospect, there was nothing for it but to take them the way we had come. By the time we had reached the chamber by the side of the postern door, my shoulders were aching so cruelly that I could have wept for the pain: but that was nothing to getting them out of the window and lugging them down the steps.

As soon as we reached the meadows, we set their ankles free, unbound their eyes and pulled the rogues on to their

feet: but when we bade them march, they would not obey, and when we laid hands upon them, they threw themselves down on the ground.

The time was now half past three, and since, after crossing the valley, we had to climb up to the road, we were not in the mood to put up with obstruction like that.

“Listen to me,” said Hubert. “You’re going to take this journey, whether you like it or no. If you don’t want to walk, you needn’t. But if you don’t walk, you’ll be dragged.”

With that, he told Stiven to cut two lengths of cord and set these, like halters, about the scoundrels’ necks, “but don’t make slip-knots,” he said. “We don’t want to hang them here.”

This was soon done, but before we could take the strain, they both thought better of their contumacy and scrambled up to their feet.

With the ropes about their necks, we led them across the valley, like captive slaves, and I think I could have pitied even Harris, but for the way he had used us four days before.

Our passage up the side of the mountain will hardly go into words, but I like to think that they suffered as much as we. Before we started, we took the gags from their mouths and bound their wrists before them instead of behind. Then we took the ropes from their necks and set them beneath their arms, “not,” said Palin, “that a halter doesn’t become you. You’ve never looked so attractive since you came out of jail. But you’ve got to go up a precipice, and we’ve no desire to leave your bodies behind.”

“Gawd ’elp,” said Punter, weakly.

“I doubt it,” said Palin, gravely, “but you can always hope. And now you’ve had your bite. Open your mouth again, and back goes the gag.”

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Had the way been as steep as it was by the side of the fall, we never could have dragged them up to the road: but after an hour and a half of most exhausting labour we had our way.

Twenty minutes later we were all six in the Rolls, and I was driving for the highway as fast as I dared.

As, tired and stained, we sailed through the lovely country, the world looked twice as handsome as when we had seen it last, and, if we spoke but little, our hearts were gay.

We had, I think, good reason to be content.

It is an old saying that *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark would be a very poor play: and I think it is clear that with the removal of Harris, the play which had been running at Hohenems was bound to come to an end. Even if Bugle and Bunch were not too much dumbfounded to bluster, the temper of the servants would argue the wisdom of leaving the place; while if they held on until Wednesday, Father Herman’s visit to the castle could scarcely be a success. In a word, without the false John Ferrers, the schemes of Harris and Haydn were certain to wither and die.

After a little discussion, we drove direct to the barn which had afforded us shelter that first, black night: there we lodged our

prisoners—more than lucky, to my mind, to lie in so pleasant a jail. Though he said no word, such was Harris' demeanour that we thought it better again to bind his feet: but Punter seeming contrite, we left his ankles free. Stiven remained to guard them, and Hubert gave him his orders before their face.

“Never let up for an instant till we come back. Don't stand any sort of rot. If they try any tricks, you're to shoot. If they don't want to stay here alive, they can stay here dead.”

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“Very good, sir,” said Stiven, gravely.

Here I should say that we had been sorely tempted to take the two back to the inn and, telling our host the truth, to thrust them into a cellar until we had determined their fate: but, all things considered, we felt that we had no right so to use so friendly a house, and we could not forget that, when all was said and done, the place was an inn and enjoyed a considerable custom at certain hours of the day.

We were glad of this decision, almost before it was cold.

As I drew up to the forecourt, the innkeeper came out, beaming, to say that he had a new guest. An English lady, who had come by car from Villach, had arrived late the night before. Her maid, he added, had just taken her breakfast upstairs.

His news was disconcerting. Till now the inn had been our lair, where we could talk with freedom and eat and sleep and come and go as we pleased: henceforth it would be a hotel where conventions must be honoured and decencies must be observed. And we had no time for such things. We might hold the winning cards, but the hand had yet to be played. Add to

this we were on our last legs. Any sort of distraction . . .

“An English woman?” said Palin. “Oh, give me strength. I don’t want to be lent any Tauchnitz. I’m on the job. Harris is down, and we’re coming into the straight: but there’s Bunch or Bugle or both and darling Holy, and—you know, I hate to say it, but I think we’d better breakfast upstairs.”

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“Every time,” said Hubert. “I shan’t be able to shave. I’ve got to take over from Stiven within the hour.”

“Take over from Stiven?” said Palin. “You’ll have to drive her to Robin, to get some methylated spirit. I’ll bet you a bucket of beer she makes her own tea.”

They left the Rolls, and I drove the car round to her quarters and put her away.

As I emerged from the coach-house—

“Good morning,” said Lady Olivia. “How did you get on?”

I was so much astonished that I could make her no answer, but only stare like a fool with a hand to my head.

She was standing in the mouth of a window some twelve feet above my head. Her beautiful head was bare, and a flowered-silk dressing-gown was drawn tight about her shoulders and up to her exquisite throat. Her eager lips were smiling, her magnificent eyes were aglow, and the freshness of her appearance was that of the dawn itself. I never saw so rich, yet natural a colouring. The dark of her hair, the white of her skin,

the scarlet of her mouth, the delicate rose of her cheeks remembered Solomon's pen. No words of mine can do her justice, but I know that, as I gazed, again it came into my mind that had she pretended to some throne, she would have inspired a loyalty against which nothing could stand.

An idea lit up my mind, as the beam of a torch.

"You're the English lady," I cried.

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"That's right. Olivia Hastings. That was my mother's name. Don't give me away, will you?"

I swallowed desperately.

"Of course I won't," I said. And then, feebly enough, "I—we never dreamed it was you."

"Why should you?" said my lady. "If you thought at all, you thought that I was at Haydn. And so I was. But I left there last night for Paris—and here I am."

"I—I don't understand," I stammered.

"It's very simple," she said. "I've turned my coat."

"Turned your coat?" I said, staring.

"Turned my coat," she repeated. "Possibly you may not know it, but Haydn's doing its damndest to do you down. I was prepared to fight you—I promise you that. But I'm not prepared to defraud you behind your back. And so I'm through with Haydn and all its works. And—and, if you like to have me, I'm

here to come in with you.”

There was now no reason for breaking our fast in private, and our meal was served, as usual, under the limes. Whilst it was being prepared we bathed and changed, but, though this should have refreshed us, we were all three so jaded that the flesh was past responding to any stimulant. As, I think, was natural, our spirits were very high, but we saw our good fortune darkly because we were half asleep.

Our breakfast was nearly done before Olivia Haydn came out of the inn.

As we got to our feet—

“Well, Andrew,” she said, “how are you? I’m glad to see you again.”

Palin bowed over her fingers. Then he let them go and straightened his back.

“To look upon you,” he said, “is to rise from the dead.”

My lady laughed. Then she turned to Hubert and me.

“Andrew Palin,” she said, “was born out of time. At the court of your Gloriana he would have gained full marks.”

She gave her hand to Hubert and nodded to me. Then she took the head of our table and laid her small hands on the board. As we sat down—

“Please go on eating,” she said. “I’ve got to talk, but I’ll be as short as I can.” She looked from my cousin to me.

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“Whether you two know it, I’ve no idea, but the House of Haydn is against you—Haydn has been against you for thirty-five years. We couldn’t get to grips with your great-uncle—perhaps because he knew my uncles better than I. But when at last he died, we proposed to re-enter the lists. The idea was to get possession—possession of Hohenems Castle, either by purchase or lease.

“Well, my uncles got off the mark extremely quick—much too quick for my liking, and I was immensely surprised when they came back on Saturday evening and said they’d got as far as they had.” She turned to me. “Then on Sunday morning I fell in with you.

“Well, when I got back to Haydn, I put my uncles wise. I confess I didn’t spare them, but then they hadn’t spared me the night before. ‘That’s what you get,’ I told them, ‘for rushing in.’ They believed my tale, of course. They couldn’t even pretend to do anything else, for they’d spent their time remarking what a coarse-grained, under-bred fellow the new John Ferrers was. And there, so far as I was concerned, the matter ended. They’d been made fools of by Harris, but, thanks to my meeting with you, I’d been able to stop them being fooled to the top of their bent. The appointment they’d made for Monday was never even discussed. You don’t keep appointments with impostors, which, if you had known they were impostors, you wouldn’t have made. At least, I don’t. Apparently my uncles do.

“They went, as arranged, to Hohenems yesterday afternoon. I never knew it, and they never meant me to

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know: I only found it out by the merest chance. But I did find it out, and I met them as they came in. I asked them three questions—why they had been to Hohenems, what they had done at Hohenems, and why they had tried to conceal their visit from me. I won't trouble you with their answers, all of which were palpably false. Even the lies they told didn't agree together, and when I charged them with using my information to blackmail a common thief into selling his stolen goods at a knock-out price, Uncle Herman was reduced to replying that he should pray for my soul.

“Well, there you are. Through no fault of my own, I'd betrayed you—for if once the property passed, you could say good-bye to your castle for seven years. There was only one thing to be done—try to repair the mischief as best I could. I told my maid to pack and ordered the car to be ready to catch the Paris train. I took this as far as Villach—I had to cover my tracks. And there I left it and hired a car to come here.

“Well, that explains why I came: but it doesn't explain why, now that I've put you wise, I don't get up and go. If you don't like your party's tactics, you can always withdraw: it isn't necessary to enter the opposite camp. But that, if you like to have me, is what I propose to do. I'll tell you why. Haydn wants Hohenems badly—but not for the view. Somewhere within those walls there's something more—more tangible. And after what's happened, I don't feel that I can sit still and watch my family profit, or stand any chance of profiting at your expense.”

There was a little silence. Then—

“I told you,” said Palin quietly, “I told you that Lady Olivia would never stoop.”

“I hadn’t seen you then,” I said quickly.

She made no answer, but took her hands from the table and got to her feet.

“My trunks,” she said, “are at Villach. If I don’t stay here, I’ll ask you to drive me there in time for the evening train. Talk my proposal over, and tell me the answer at lunch. I know the great objection—this isn’t a woman’s show.”

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With that, she turned to the inn.

Her words took us all by surprise, for we had not dreamed that she would require any assurance of the radiant pride and pleasure we must have betrayed: still Hubert and I were beside her before she had taken three steps. This to no purpose at all, for she dismissed our protests, as though she were engaged upon matters with which they had nothing to do.

“Tell me at lunch,” she said firmly.

As I fell back discomfited—

“We would like you to hear,” said my cousin, “what happened last night.”

My lady hesitated. Then she gave him a dazzling smile.

“I’m wild to hear,” she said. “You must tell me at lunch.”

Since that was her ruling, although we should have been glad to ask her advice, we thrust our fair confederate out of our minds and discussed how to round the advantage which we had won at the castle the night before. Though we were all worn out, it was perfectly plain that we could not rest on our oars, for, for one thing only, since we had no dungeon, Harris and Punter were as millstones about our necks.

And here let me beg that before anyone condemns the plans which we made that morning or brands as childish the riddles we failed to solve, he will remember that we could have gone to sleep standing and would not have trusted ourselves to brush a fly from a wall. We should not have been so heavy, but for the air of those parts. This is remarkably strong, and the healthy vapours of the forests will make the most vigilant sleepy before their time. But it found us easy victims, for the night's work had been no child's play, and the day before we had driven three hundred miles.

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We presently decided to telegraph in German to Hohenems, saying that I should arrive to-morrow morning and bidding the steward prepare the principal rooms: this would give us time to carry Harris and Punter a good way off—to some desolate spot in the Tyrol, from which, if they ever returned, they would return too late to put a spoke in our wheel.

These plans being hastily made, we took the Rolls forthwith and drove to the barn. There we found all in order and Stiven standing like a sentry, for fear of falling asleep if once he sat down. Indeed, his fears were well founded, for when we gave him some food and told him to eat, before he had taken two mouthfuls he was asleep in the hay. My cousin, who was to

relieve him, was just as tired, but so, for the matter of that, were Palin and I, yet take our rest we dared not, for now the iron was hot and, come what might, we must strike it before it grew cold.

Then Palin and I drove to Robin, to send off our telegram, and we did not do so badly, for we took the wheel by turns, and the one who was not driving slept like a log. It follows that when, some three hours later, we came again to the barn, we were not quite so jaded as when we had left, but Hubert, who had let Stiven lie, was ready to drop in his tracks.

It was now midday, so Stiven was roused and sent to bathe as he could at the neighbouring rill, for now he would have to play sentry until we had lunched. While he was gone, Hubert told us that Harris, though he had plied him, would take no food at his hand, but that Punter, who knew no such scruples, had eaten and drunk with relish for half an hour. The latter had even commended the food which Hubert produced—it was that which our host had made ready the night before—and, warming, I suppose, to the cheer, had ventured to offer his companion some rude philosophy. This, however, had been very ill received, and Harris had been so outspoken upon the imperfections of Punter's habit of mind that Hubert had had to threaten to put his gag back in his mouth.

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Then Stiven took up his duty and we returned to the inn. Though this stood but two miles away, long before we got there my cousin was fast asleep.

Lady Olivia knitted her beautiful brow.

“I’ve only one fault,” she said, “to find with your plan. If you spend the night deporting Harris and Punter, you won’t be fit to argue with Bugle and Bunch. And you may have to do that tomorrow—at nine o’clock. In any event, you’ll have to talk to the steward and play the *grand seigneur*, and in view of the fact that you’re more than half asleep now . . .” She broke off and shrugged her shoulders. “This is not an attempt to mother you. I’m merely pointing out facts which, if your eyes were less heavy, you wouldn’t have missed.”

There was a little silence. Then—

“She’s right,” said Palin. “If we got as far as the Tyrol, we’d never get back. We’re all at the end of our tether, and that’s the truth.”

“If we don’t deport them,” said I, “they’ve got to be watched.”

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Palin started and shot a glance at his wrist.

“Gomorrah calling,” he cried. “I’ve got to take over from Stiven in half an hour.” With an effort he got to his feet. “Wake me in twenty minutes. The flesh must be served.”

With an awful look, he shuffled into the inn.

“There you are,” said Lady Olivia.

The position was plainly awkward.

Hubert was still in the Rolls, sleeping upon its cushions as though he would never wake: Stiven was far from rested: after

his spell of duty, Palin would be ‘all in’: and though I could hold up my head, it was all I could do. Leave our prisoners we dared not, in case some peasant should find them and set them free: yet we could not spare the strength to deport them as we had arranged, because we might have to give battle the following day.

Lady Olivia was speaking.

“You’ll have to enlarge them this evening, some fifty miles off.”

“I believe we shall,” I said faintly. “It’s utter madness, but I don’t know what else we can do.”

“Why is it utter madness?”

“Harris is dangerous,” I said. “It’s like enlarging a wolf.”

My lady tilted her chair.

“You can hardly shoot him,” she said. “And if he’s out for trouble, it won’t make very much difference how far you take him away. Of course you must give yourself time to get into Hohenems before he contrives to get back.”

“I know,” said I. “The honest truth is that, now that we’ve got him, I don’t like letting him go. We’ve put ourselves out of court, or I’d go to the police. But how can we tell them the truth? And if there’s an interpreter there, we might very well be hoist with our own petard. His photograph’s on my passport—I’ll lay to that.”

“You can take him to Hohenems.”

“But not till to-morrow,” said I. “And how can we watch him all night? It could be done by reliefs, but, as you’ve pointed out, to-morrow morning, we shouldn’t be able to stand.”

“Then why watch him?” said Lady Olivia. “Truss him up and leave him and go to bed.”

I shook my head.

“It sounds all right,” said I. “But when we came the next morning, he wouldn’t be there. Punter might, but not Harris. He ought to be behind bars.”

The girl averted her eyes.

“Well, he’s made an impression,” she said. “I’ll give him that.”

Her words could have but one meaning, and I know I went red.

“Let’s hope it’s a false one,” said I. “Impressions sometimes are.” I got to my feet. “And now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to turn out the car.”

“Wait a minute,” said Lady Olivia. I stood where I was.

“We’ve never mentioned the point, but are you and your cousin willing that I should come in?”

“There’s only one answer to that,” said I.

“I must have it, please.”

I moistened my lips.

“We’re more than grateful,” I said. “We should be mad if we weren’t.” I hesitated there and raised my eyes to the sky. “But if you come in, you must promise to do as we say.”

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“*What?*”

The word flamed.

I looked down to find her standing, her grey eyes alight with anger, regarding me as though I were less than the dust.

I gave her back look for look.

“I can’t answer for my cousin,” I said, “but that’s the condition I impose. This is a man’s show—you said so yourself this morning—and if there’s trouble coming I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Now what she would have answered, I do not know. The words were upon her lips, but before she could speak them, across the woods and meadows, faint but unmistakable, came the sound of a pistol shot.

If I was tired, I forgot it before that ominous report, and I ran for the Rolls, as a man who runs for his life.

Shouting to Hubert, to wake him, I flung myself into my seat, and an instant later had backed the car out of the coach-house and swung her to the side of the yard. As I paused, to change into first, a slim figure whipped aboard and took the seat

beside me without a word.

“Get down, I beg you,” I cried.

By way of answer, Lady Olivia slammed the door at her side.

There was no time to argue, much less to stop: so I set my teeth, lifted the car from the forecourt and let her go.

As we flashed up the road—

“Try and wake my cousin,” I said.

I saw her glance over her shoulder, but the glass behind us was raised.

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As she made to get on to the step, I caught her arm.

“Not that,” I cried. “You might slip. I’m going too fast.”

I saw her bite her lip. Then she turned to kneel on the seat and put out her head. . . .

“Mr. Constable,” she cried. “*Mr. Constable!*”

We were five hundred yards from the barn, when a man broke out of a thicket some seventy paces ahead. As he darted on to the road, I saw it was Harris himself.

I drove the car full at him, but he must have guessed who it was, for before I could cover the distance, he had flung himself over the road. As I brought up the car all standing, he disappeared in a wood.

An instant later I was in hot pursuit.

Now, as luck would have it, when I had come in that morning, I had laid my pistol aside, proposing to take it before I should go on duty, but glad to be rid of the weapon until that time. Still, if I had no arms, at least my quarry had none, unless he had overcome Stiven and taken his.

He was, I suppose, some twenty-five paces ahead when I entered the wood, but I very soon lessened that distance, and when he took to some path I was not ten paces behind. Till now I had heard no sound but that which our steps had made, but now we had left the leaves and the undergrowth, I could hear my cousin coming to catch us up. For this I was very thankful, for the spurt which I had been making was beginning to lose its sting, and the weariness I had sent packing was coming back. There might have been some leak in my body through which my strength was rapidly ebbing away, and I very soon saw that, if I could overtake Harris, I could only hope to engage him till Hubert came up, for the man was powerfully built and, God knows, had had enough rest for the last six hours.

I increased my pace with an effort and brought the distance down, but I saw him glance over his shoulder as one who has something in hand: but I had nothing, and he was taking from me even that which I had. This determined me to overtake him somehow as soon as ever I could, for else he was bound to outrun me and pass out of view. But once my hands were upon him, he should not fight himself free before Hubert came up. And this I knew must be soon, for Hubert was fresh: what was still more to the point, the sound of his footfalls had ceased, which meant he was clear of the bushes

and was using the path.

Again Harris glanced behind him, and, since the path was falling, I made my spurt the moment he turned his head.

I shall always remember that place.

The wood went down to a meadow: between the trees I could see the brilliant sunshine flooding a gay greensward. To the right of the path a gentle spring of water was welling out of a pipe, to flow down a wooden gutter, which led, no doubt, to some trough: the gutter was stuck with ferns and overlaid with moss, and, because, I suppose, it was choked, a lively fringe of silver was hanging down all its length.

As I flung myself at Harris, the man swerved sharp to his left. I suppose he had heard my footfalls, but had the fellow had eyes in the back of his head, he could not have timed more truly the movement he made. I overran him, of course, for I could not pull myself up, and before I could turn he was upon me, for the ground was now in his favour, as it had been in mine.

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Had he fallen clean upon me, I think I must have been hurt, but, such was the force of his onslaught that, while he brought himself down, I fell just clear of his body and almost into the field. I was up as soon as he, but as I flung myself at him, my heart stood still with dismay, for the path behind him was empty and Hubert was not to be seen.

The battle now was hopeless, and why I continued to fight I hardly know. I had not the strength to shout, much less to detain the villain, if once he tried to be gone: but for what it was

worth, I sought to hang upon him, as a weary boxer that cannot hit his opponent, but seeks to avoid being hit.

The rest I remember but dimly.

I know he rained blows upon me and presently fought himself free, and then again we were grappling and swaying and stumbling and cursing, like men possessed. He beat me down to my knees, but I caught his ankles and brought him down to the ground. Before I could seize this advantage, the man was up on his feet, and as I rose up to meet him, I heard a shriek. This cry was my salvation, for he had his arm drawn back to deal me the *coup de grâce*, but, instead, he turned to the meadow and an instant later was racing over the sward.

I stumbled uncertainly after him, trying to shout, but my head was swimming and my knees and feet were unruly, and after a dozen paces the meadow seemed to tilt sideways and I fell down on my face.

Beneath the touch of cold water, I presently opened my eyes, to find Hubert kneeling beside me, and looking into my face.

“He’s gone,” said I, sitting up. “How long have I been asleep?”

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“About two minutes,” said Hubert. “How do you feel?”

“We’ve got the car,” I said. “We must get to Hohenems first. And when he rolls up, as he will, we’ll have him again.”

“That’s right,” said my cousin. “You must rest awhile, and I’ll

fix everything up.”

“Lady Olivia,” said I, “is to stay at the inn.” I struck the ground with my palm. “She simply must not move until we’ve got Harris again. He’s a dangerous swine, that man. And the hairs of her head are numbered—or ought to be in our sight. Where is she now?”

When he made no answer, I would have got to my feet, but two hands came to rest on my shoulders and held me down.

“Sit still,” said Lady Olivia. “I’m quite all right. Besides, you’ve done enough for the moment. In fact, if I were you, I should go to sleep. I’ll stay here within call. Mr. Constable can leave me his pistol, in case of accidents.”

The pressure on my shoulders increasing, I shut my eyes and lay down, feeling exceedingly foolish to think she had heard what I said. Indeed, I made up my mind that, after resting a moment I would take her back to the inn, but almost before I had formed this resolution, Nature had her way with me and I fell asleep.

Again the cool touch of water haled me out of my dreams, and I opened my eyes to see the girl sitting beside me with a handkerchief wet in her hand.

“I was sorry to wake you,” she said. “But the dew is falling, and I think you should make a move.”

I saw at once that it was sundown, and though I could hardly believe that I had slept for five hours, I felt more lazy than

tired, and my head, which had been aching hurt me no more. My face, however, was very stiff and tender from the battery I had received.

Not feeling fully awake and so fit to converse, I propped myself on my elbow and let my eyes wander around, and when at last I brought them back to the lady I saw to my relief that she was looking away. They rested naturally upon her, and I shall always believe that the sight of her did me good.

She was clad, of course, as at luncheon, in a simple dress of grey tweed, which suited her very well. Her head was bare and she was sitting sideways, in the careless pose of a child, with one hand planted on the turf and her slim legs making an angle against the green. She was looking down, and her beauty seemed more gentle than I had seen it before.

Presently she lifted her eyes.

“I should like to beg your pardon,” she said. “I thought you were afraid of Harris. And now I know that you were thinking of me.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said I. “Besides, for the matter of that, I’m afraid I was pretty blunt.”

She lifted her eyes from mine and stared at the sky.

“I’ll—I’ll do as you say—in reason.”

I felt suddenly very rich.

“That’s very handsome,” I said. “I—I wouldn’t have you

miss any fun: and I'll never do anything without telling you first. But, if it looks like a rough house—well, we can't have you getting hurt."

"And what about you? To tackle that man was madness. You couldn't stand up."

"That's a different matter," said I. "The quarrel with Harris is mine. Besides, I thought Hubert was coming."

"So he was," said Lady Olivia. "But he was still half asleep when he tripped and fell. That woke him up all right: but by the time he was up, you and Harris were out of earshot and he didn't know which way to go. Then we came to the path. He chanced it and turned to the right, while, just in case he was wrong, I turned to the left."

"And routed Harris," said I. "I heard your cry." I sat up there and started to pluck at the grass. "Lady Olivia, please don't think I'm not grateful, because I am. If you hadn't shrieked when you did, the brute would have laid me out. *But you must see the danger you ran.* If he'd dreamed that you were alone, he'd have knocked me out, and then you'd have been at his mercy—the mercy of a man like that."

"Then don't give me any reason to do it again."

"I have your promise," said I.

"In reason," said she. "'I'll do as you say in reason' was what I said. Take care of yourself, Mr. Ferrers, and you shall take care of me."

After a little—

“Very well,” I said obediently.

I stood up and put out my hands. She gave me hers and I drew her up to her feet.

As I picked up Hubert’s pistol—

“It was very sweet of you,” I said, “to watch whilst I slept.”

“I don’t think it’s sweet of a sentry to do his job.”

114

“It depends on the sentry,” said I.

With a little petulant gesture, she pushed back her thick, dark hair.

“Can’t you forget that I’m Olivia Haydn? Must I go in breeches and stop putting cream on my face?”

“It’s not that at all,” said I. “If Palin had sat and watched me for full five hours, don’t you think I’d thank him? I mean, it’s a rotten job. It wouldn’t be sweet of Palin, because he’s not sweet. But it would be very decent.”

She made no answer, and since my face was smarting, I stepped to the trough and dipped my head in the water which was trickling in from the gutter and stealing over its sides.

When I turned again, for a moment I could not see her. Then I perceived her sitting on a root of a beech-tree, with her fair legs crossed and one of her slippers in hand. As she put this

back on her foot, she made me think of some Dryad, completing her dainty toilet before she set out for a stroll.

“You know,” said I, “you seem to belong to this place.”

She looked up quickly.

“What makes you say that?” she said.

“I don’t know,” said I, “but you do. I think it’s something about you. The first time I saw you—on horseback, you seemed to belong to that place. I mean, you were right in the picture. I can see the spot now. There was an oak beyond you, and one of its branches was stretching over your head: and a little way back the road curled over a bridge. And then again this morning—when you were up at the window and I was down in the yard.”

“Did I belong to the window?”

115

“Yes,” said I. “When I brought the car in before luncheon, and you weren’t there, the window looked like a frame. I suppose all windows do really, but I never noticed it before. And now this place. I think you make things lovely wherever you go.”

Lady Olivia was stooping to pick a flower.

“We must go,” she said over her shoulder. “The Rolls has been waiting since six. And—and—” she stood up, gloriously flushed “—you can call me Olivia, and I’m going to call you John.”

To this day we cannot be sure how Harris escaped. The cords

which had bound him had both been roughly cut, and our discovery of a battered meat-tin, lying near where he had lain, suggested that this was the implement which he had used. The operation must have been lengthy and inconvenient, and how he had contrived to perform it without either Hubert or Stiven perceiving that he was at work, I cannot pretend to tell.

Much as, no doubt, he would have liked it, the man was too shrewd to risk his life for the pistol which Stiven held, though, if he could escape as he did, I believe he might have had it in Stiven's teeth.

The latter was standing by the prisoners, when some sound outside the barn had made him turn to the door. In a flash he had been sent sprawling, and Harris was past his body and had gained the meadow without. Twice Stiven had fired upon him, but each time had missed, and each of those misses was indeed as good as a mile, for before he could fire a third time, Harris had won the shelter of the trees for which he had made. Cursing himself for his folly in not withholding his fire, Stiven had then given chase and had got as far as the wood, when, happening to glance behind him, to his horror he had seen Punter running the opposite way.

This time he made no mistake, but had first overtaken Punter and then advised him to yield. This the latter had done without any fuss, but, while Stiven was clearly right to make sure of recapturing one, had he but followed Harris, the latter must have been taken where I had delayed his going by the side of the canalized rill.

Stiven's distress was piteous and when, as my cousin told me,

he made his report, he put his head in his hands and cried like a child. For all that, I shall always maintain that the fault was not his, and I think it more than likely that if I had been guarding the prisoners, I should have lost them both.

One fair turn Harris did us by making good his escape: and that was to give us the slumber we needed so much. My cousin very rightly decided that Punter was not worth watching, if Harris was free, so he and Stiven bundled him into the Rolls and set him down on a hilltop some twenty miles off. They then returned to the inn, where Palin was still asleep, and lay down to take their rest until six o'clock.

It follows that when we had dined, we were all of us greatly refreshed and ready and able to cope with whatever the night might bring forth.

That Harris would make for the castle we had no doubt, but he had not one penny upon him, and the distance he had to cover was thirty-one miles. Even if he knew where he was—and that seemed most unlikely—we judged that he could not get there before the following day. By midnight, however, we hoped to be in possession, whatever might be the reception with which we should meet: and once we were in possession, we should stand a very good chance of making him prisoner once more.

117

Indeed, as we swept through the evening, over the roads which we were beginning to know, the blow which had seemed so heavy sank to 'the luck of the battle' in which we were all engaged, and even Stiven, sighing beside me, began to hold up his head.

Olivia was sitting with Hubert and Palin behind, for she had flatly refused to stay at the inn. She had, however, promised that when we approached the castle, she would get out of the car and wait in the woods with Stiven until we came out to find her and bring her in.

Upon one thing we were determined: and that was to enter with a flourish, as became the lords of the house. Twice we had come by stealth, and twice was enough. This time we would drive into the courtyard, with the headlights blazing and the great horn sounding a summons to all the staff. If Bugle or Bunch were yet there, such ostentation was likely to discomfit the rogues, while the servants were certain to be most deeply impressed.

“The avenging angels,” said Palin, “complete with trump and a couple of pillars of fire: they’ll bring you the keys on a cushion, with halters about their necks.”

I think we all hoped he was right; but, speaking for myself, I would have exchanged the rosiest expectations for a blunt assurance that the drawbridge would not be raised.

But it was not. Hohenems Castle was in darkness, and the drawbridge was down.

As we swept into the courtyard, I sounded the horn, and the old walls seemed to tremble before its sound. Had there been ghosts to rise, I think they must have risen at the deafening clamour I raised, for a score of echoes fought for the monstrous note.

And that was all the answer we got.

Not a door, not a window was opened: no light was shown:
and, when the echoes had died, all we could hear was the
steady lisp of the water which was falling without our gates.

It took us near half an hour to break into our home.

The doors were too stout to be forced, except in the last resort, and the gallery's windows were heavily shuttered with oak: but in the end we entered the servants' quarters by way of a first-floor window which was not barred.

That this part of the building was deserted, we saw at once. Room after room was empty and had been vacated in haste: beds had been left unmade, chests of drawers were open, foul water stood in basins, liveries lay upon the floors. Everything was denoting a headlong flight, which must have been taken that morning, for the kitchen fire was out and the grate, which was gigantic, was now stone cold.

"*Mea culpa*," groaned Palin, and put his head in his hands. "That blasted letter's done this. I pitched it too strong. I made John Ferrers unearthly. His abduction of Harris was startling, and I ought to have left it there. But I didn't. *I referred to a conversation of which he could not have known.* That made him supernatural: and that is a thing that none of these fellows will stand for, faithful or no."

"They can't be far," said I. "We'll try the nearest village to-morrow, and you shall have the pleasure of charming them back."

With that, I undid the back door, which was only latched, and we went out to find my cousin, who had stayed to

watch the courtyard and was sitting on a step of the Rolls.

When I had told him our news—

“I’ll bet you a ducat,” said Hubert, “the steward comes up to-morrow to see what’s what. They obviously fled before our wire had arrived. And that was a pity, for the wire was a rational document, sent in a rational way. Still, as like as not, the steward received it in the village to which he has gone. And if he did, I’ll bet he’s here to-morrow at eight o’clock.”

“Please God,” said Palin, piously. “We can’t live here without servants. If you don’t believe me, go and consider the grate in the kitchenette.”

Then I went to fetch Olivia, for, though we had yet to search the rest of the castle, there seemed to be now no reason for her waiting without the walls. Once she was in, we must manage to pull up the drawbridge before we did anything else, for, with that raised and the postern exits barred, none could get into the castle, while, if there was someone within, he could not get out.

When I told Olivia my news, she began to laugh.

“Andrew Palin,” she said, “is an artist. But now and again he slaps on his colours too thick. No sign of Bunch or Bugle?”

“None at present,” said I. “But I want you to sit in the Rolls until we’ve made sure that they’re out.”

To my relief she consented to do as I said: and, as soon as she had taken her seat, and Stiven had been posted in the archway,

to watch the courtyard, we turned to the urgent business of raising the bridge.

The doorway into the gatehouse had long been sealed, and we saw at once that, to gain the access we sought, we must pass through the castle itself.

121

This we accordingly did.

The kitchen led us into a hall from which a short flight of broad steps brought us up to the tall double doors beneath which we had thrust our letter the night before. The gallery being in darkness, we sought for and found the switches to give us light, and though I later came to know it as the palm of my hand, I shall always remember the first time I saw that apartment brilliantly lit. I have never seen luxury and state so vie with one another to distinguish any room, and, as I surveyed its proportions and the splendour of carved oak and stone with which these were arrayed, I could not but wonder what was its history and what, could they have spoken, those walls might tell.

We hastened the length of the gallery, to enter an open hall from which a grand stone stairway led to the floor above. To our right stood the great front door. This was neither bolted nor chained—a curious omission which we made haste to repair. On either side of the stairway, heavily curtained archways argued an inner hall, and before us a squat, stone passage offered to lead us the way that we wished to go. After a dozen paces, the passage bent to the right, and a little later we came to a tower of the gatehouse, with a turret staircase running both up and down.

“Down,” said Palin. “The gear’s out of sight, so the windlass must be below.”

Here he was right, for ten or twelve steps brought us into the windlass room. Except that the ropes had been replaced by steel cables, I do not believe that the gear had ever been touched: yet no engineer could have improved upon it, and a child could have raised the drawbridge, so just were the stone counterweights.

Having closed the courtyard, we made at once for the postern, to see that that way was barred. As luck would have it we found we could lock up the room by which we had entered the castle the night before: still, this would not have stopped our entry, and we made up our minds to shutter the casement with oak the very next day. Then we glanced at the postern door—as a matter of form.

122

We all three exclaimed together.

Since we had last seen it, someone had sought to open the postern door.

One of the bolts had been drawn and left as it was. Whoever had done this had sought to draw the other, but had not been able to do so, because it was stiff.

“Now what does this mean?” said Hubert.

Palin fingered his chin.

“Bugle or Bunch,” he said, “looking for Harris and Punter and trying all the doors that were shut. Can’t you see Bunch sighing

for a hammer that he's too lazy to fetch?"

This interpretation seemed good. Still the door could not speak for itself, and, for all we knew, someone who knew the castle might have sought to escape by this way as soon as they heard the flourish with which we had filled the courtyard. So Hubert went for a hammer, while I found a morsel of wood and fashioned two or three wedges which, once they were driven, would stop the bolts being drawn.

We then returned to the other side of the castle and searched the three principal rooms: these all led out of the gallery, and their windows, which gave to the ramparts, were those which we had seen lighted the night before. The rooms, which were very handsome, were as empty as the gallery itself, and when we had ascertained that all three doors of the latter could be made fast, I went for Olivia and Stiven and bade them in.

123

As I ushered the lady into the gallery—

“Olivia,” said Palin, “you’re a beautiful prisoner at large. Put into prose, you can muck about on this floor as much as you like. We have to search this very desirable mansion, and before we set about it we’re going to lock you into this suite—partly because we don’t trust you, and partly because we don’t trust the terror by night. Stiven will light you a fire, and I think four spacious apartments should do you until we come back. Oh, and please don’t go out on the ramparts, because we can’t search them as long as it’s dark.”

“I see,” said Olivia, slowly. She took her seat upon the arm of

a chair. “Why don’t you take Stiven with you?”

“To save us trouble,” said Palin. “If he came with us, we should visit you every five minutes to see you were safe.”

Olivia took off her gloves and tossed them on to a table of black and gold. Then she pulled off her hat and pitched it after the gloves.

“I seem,” she said, “to be very inconvenient. And that’s a rôle it doesn’t amuse me to play. Locked in and watched—like Harris. I’m only surprised you don’t tie me up and gag me.”

“We’ve no string,” said Palin. “Besides, your mouth’s too small. And you know as well as I do——”

“I know I won’t be treated like this. I don’t expect you to ask me to go and look for Harris, or to do any dangerous work when there isn’t enough for four. But when there’s work for fifty, and that the sort of employment you’d give to a row of Boy Scouts . . .” She broke off and shrugged her shoulders. “You don’t know this castle, but Bunch and Bugle do. How, if they’re here, can three of you run them to earth? Why, you’ll lose yourselves as soon as you leave this floor.”

124

“We’ve thought of that,” said Hubert. “We’re going to search it by sections and try and close each section as soon as it’s searched. It’s heart-breaking work, but it’s simply got to be done.”

“I think you’re right,” said Olivia. “I don’t believe anyone’s here: but, if they are, they’ve got to be routed out before Harris returns. And I think your method is good—we must hope there

are keys to the doors. But how do you close a staircase?"

"We must try to watch it," said Hubert.

"Exactly," said Olivia, rising. "There are twenty-seven staircases at Haydn, and, though you'd hardly believe it, you'll find quite twenty here. Our fathers believed in stairs. The times were rough, and emergency exits—well, you couldn't have too many if you wanted to see old age. And now I should lock up this section and start on the next. You can post me at the head of the stairs which run out of the hall. If you must, you can give me the pistol I carried this afternoon."

I touched her arm.

"Will you promise to stay in the shadows?"

"Yes," she said, "I'll do that."

Two minutes later the gallery's doors were locked, Olivia was standing by a bookcase at the head of the principal stairs, and we were searching the bedrooms above the principal rooms.

Three of these four fine chambers were in a horrid disorder such as we might have expected the rogues to leave, and a trunk of Hubert's was missing, which went to suggest that Bugle and Bunch were gone. Here, for the first time, we were to learn for certain the strength of the gang, for four beds had been in service, though only three rooms had been used, two of the ruffians enjoying a double room.

125

So much was straightforward, but when we left the main landing our troubles began. Doors were locked and archways

were hung with curtains, stairs ran both up and down and lobbies led all ways at once: as for the passages, these might have belonged to some maze, and we were all astonished to find the castle so big. Though we did the best we could, it was plain that Olivia was right and that if there was anyone here that proposed to give us the slip, we should be lucky indeed if we ran him down.

Our way was presently blocked by a door on a curling stair which promised to lead to the passage in which was the postern door. I, therefore, left the others, to try and make my way round to its opposite side, and was nearing the principal staircase when I almost ran into Olivia, finger to lip.

“I was coming to find you,” she breathed. “There’s somebody here.”

Flat on the carpet, I peered through the stone balustrade, listening to the sound of somebody creeping below me towards the hall. He was using the utmost caution, but he was treading stone and his leather soles betrayed him each step he took.

Olivia was gone for the others, and I was alone.

By my side lay my pistol, before me the pierced stone screen, and I could not help thinking that the sheep that is urged to the shambles stood as good a chance of escape as the man who was approaching the cockpit which I surveyed.

126

Nearer and nearer he came, to pause directly below me, and so, just out of my sight. He was, I knew, parting the curtains which were masking one of the archways, to be sure that the

hall was vacant before he went on. Then I heard the rustle of skirts, and Father Herman of Haydn whipped to the great front door.

With one frantic glance about him, he fell to the nervous business of drawing the bolts, and I let him get as far as the chain before I spoke.

“Can I help you?”

The creature gave one start and then stood still as death, with his face to the door. And so he stayed, like some forbidding statue, until I had descended the stairs to stand by his side.

Slowly he turned to regard me with a cold, imperious stare, and I saw at once that here was no ordinary man. By rights he should have been trembling: but he had himself in hand and was more ready than I was to deal with what might befall.

For a moment he stared upon me. Then he laid his hands on my shoulders, raised his eyes to heaven and thanked his God.

I disengaged myself and ordered him back.

Crossing his hands upon his breast, as though he were laid out for burial, the fellow lowered his head.

“I address Mr. Ferrers,” he said. “And I am Herman Haydn, your neighbour and friend. For an hour I have fled before you—in blindness of heart. When I heard you arrive, I supposed it was those black villains that have taken your name in vain.”

“Oh, they’ve gone, have they?” said Hubert from the

head of the stairs.

“So I am informed,” said the priest, with a smile and a bow.

“Disquieting rumours reached Haydn this afternoon. The Hohenems servants, I heard, were leaving *en masse*. I at once took car, to see if I could not stop them. These country people know me and often enough will listen to what I say. I need hardly say I believed you to be in possession, for rumour said you had cast the impostors out. I met the steward in the roadway—he was the last to leave: but, though I went so far as to threaten, he would not hear what I said. He declared that the place was accursed and that nothing would induce him to return. It was only when he showed me your wire that I learned that you were not here, that the castle was now desolate, with not one soul in charge. I redoubled my entreaties—commands, but the man would not budge.

“‘Then give me the key,’ said I. ‘And I will do the duty of keeping my neighbour’s house.’

“At grave inconvenience, therefore, I made myself your bailiff, bidding my chauffeur return to-morrow morning to take me away.”

“Always thinking of others,” said Palin, stepping out of the shadows in which he had stood concealed.

At his voice the priest started, and, as he looked at Palin, an expression of the utmost malevolence settled upon his face.

Presently he turned to Hubert.

“Permit me,” he said, “to deplore your association with this

man. He has been weighed in the balances and found wanting.”

I can never describe the pain with which he seemed to say this, as though, had it been his affair, he would have forgiven Palin his transgressions, but because he was forced to interpret the laws of God, he had, alas, no choice but to reveal his iniquity. Indeed, his whole demeanour was that of one who does not, in fact, belong to this wicked world, but being here, is determined to play out his part and to march and mix with mankind, as though he were of their clay.

128

His hatchet-face, however, denied such piety.

He was very pale, and, since he was most dark and clean-shaven, his jowl seemed blue. His expression was continually changing with all he said, and his visage was full of the creases of smirks and sneers. His nose was thin and pointed, his mouth was cruel, while the crafty look in his eyes, which were black as sloes, would have condemned the most saintly countenance.

His voice was curiously smooth, and though he spoke very well, his English was stilted, as if he had learned it from books. And here I should say that where I have reported his speech, I have mostly corrected his grammar, the imperfections of which would look glaring in print, for, to do the man justice, in spite of a heavy accent, he spoke our tongue with a dignity which carried off the errors he made.

My cousin was speaking.

“We choose our own friends,” he said shortly. “And now, if you please, we’ll go into the gallery. There’s a good deal to be explained, and we’ve several questions to ask.”

With that, he unlocked the doors and stood to one side.

Father Herman inclined his head.

“I am at your disposal, Mr. Constable.”

129

“Precisely,” said Hubert, waiting. And then, “D’you mind going in?”

The priest hesitated. He was, of course, reluctant to leave the front door. He could hardly say so, but I fancy his instinct was insisting that he should find some excuse to stay where he was.

“For your information,” said Palin, “the drawbridge is up.”

Father Herman surveyed his tormentor with smouldering eyes. Then, as though to trample an insinuation too foul to be rebutted, he entered the gallery with the air of a cardinal.

Hubert signed to Palin to follow and spoke in my ear.

“Take her round by the postern passage and bring her into the wing. She can sit there within hearing, but out of sight.”

He pressed the key into my hand and entered the gallery.

As the doors closed behind Stiven, I turned to see Olivia at the head of the stairs.

“The father of lies,” she said quietly. “You know it’s a thousand pities you sounded that horn. If he hadn’t heard you coming, you might have caught him at work.”

“At work?”

“At work,” she repeated. “Never mind. You must search him before he goes.”

“Come,” said I, and told her what Hubert had said.

We hastened along the way which I fancy the priest had come and downstairs and past the postern and presently up to the wing.

As I set the key in the lock—

“Olivia,” I said, “he must not dream that you’re here. Whatever you hear him say, you must not——”

130

“More orders?” said Olivia, smiling.

“Yes,” said I. “Little girls must neither be seen nor heard.”

“You needn’t worry,” said she. “I never ask for trouble, and, if he knew I was here—well, then, to put it mildly, the buttons would come off the foils.”

“I fancy they’re off already.”

Olivia shook her head.

“Uncle Herman’s isn’t,” she said. “When it is—well, his name isn’t Haydn for nothing. He knows how to fight.”

As we entered the wing of the gallery, I heard my cousin’s voice.

“——requires some explanation. A stranger, alone, by night, in somebody else’s house . . . a house which, until to-day, has been in the hands of thieves . . . thieves with whom the stranger has been upon friendly terms . . .”

“Alas,” said Father Herman, “I was most grossly deceived.”

“Go on, beat your breast,” said Palin. “Be a sport.”

Olivia, beside me, began to shake with laughter.

“I am surprised,” said the priest stiffly, “that you should suffer this ribald so to insult your guest.”

“I’m afraid,” said Hubert, “I don’t consider you my guest. I never invited you here.”

“But I came for your sake. As your neighbour. I conceived it my duty to——”

“I know,” said Hubert. “I heard you say so just now. What good did you think you could do here?”

“I came to take care,” said the other. “Servants in haste are careless. If they had left embers unquenched, your castle might have been burned.”

131

“I see,” said my cousin slowly. “May I have the key the steward gave you?”

I guided Olivia to a deep ‘confessional’ chair. Then I entered the gallery proper and made my way up to the group, ten paces away.

A small Yale key was lying in Hubert's palm.

"The front-door key," said my cousin. "I find that strange. The steward would have barred the front door and left by the back." Father Herman shrugged his shoulders. "Are you perfectly sure that the steward gave you this key?"

"I have said so"—stiffly.

"And the rumours which came to Haydn, some forty miles off. They travelled damned quickly—those rumours. How d'you account for that?"

Father Herman laughed.

"Had you lived in these parts as long as I have, that would not be matter for surprise."

"Forty miles," said Hubert thoughtfully: "and never a town between. Never mind. Why did the steward insist that this place was accursed? I mean, he must have given some reason."

"He alleged," said the priest, "that last night, while the castle slept, the devil entered and carried off two of the men whom he believed to be his masters—your great-uncle's heirs." He bowed to Hubert and me, which showed he was aware of my presence, although he could not have heard me and had not looked round. "I should like to felicitate you. It was a remarkable feat. If the steward may be believed, the two you left were as scared as the servants themselves."

"Yet, when you heard our car, you believed that they had returned."

“I feared the worst,” said the priest. “Your telegram said that you would be here to-morrow—not to-night.”

“Quite so,” said my cousin. “The steward showed you our wire: but he didn’t mention the letter we left behind.”

“No,” said the other boldly. “I cannot tell why, but he made no mention of that.”

“Yet he gave you the key.”

The priest’s eyelids flickered. Father Herman was out of his depth.

My cousin continued musingly.

“He must have received the letter. We pushed it under those doors, and it isn’t there now. Besides, it was the letter that scared him—not the disappearance of Harris.”

Father Herman cleared his throat.

“They are sorely secretive, these people,” he said with a sigh. “Had he shown me the letter——”

“He should have,” said my cousin. “He should have—to be consistent. And that’s what I don’t understand. You see, in that letter we particularly warned him against you. Why, in the face of that warning, do you think he gave you the key?”

There was an electric silence.

The priest stood still as an image, except for his eyes. Beneath

the droop of their lids, I could see these shifting sharply from side to side.

Then—

“I will retire,” he said thickly, and turned to the door.

“You will—in due course,” said my cousin. “But not just yet. I want you to hear my theory of how you come to be here. Just try that seat, will you?”

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Father Herman hesitated. Then he lifted his eyes and raised his false hands to heaven, as though to hail some vision we could not see.

“My calling,” he said, “does not arm me against the darts of the wicked. I fear your ears have been poisoned by one that saw fit to bite the hand that fed him——”

“If you mean,” said Palin, “that I told them what you were fit for, you’re perfectly right.”

“You would dare!” cried the priest, glaring.

“Kindly sit down,” said I. “You heard what my cousin said.”

In a silence big with emotion Father Herman moved to the chair . . .

“This ‘rumour’ business,” said Hubert. “I suggest that you received no rumours, but downright, definite news—brought you by two of the impostors this afternoon. The servants left here this morning: but Bunch and Bugle remained—until the

telegram came. This they couldn't read: so they cleared out and drove to Haydn, to show it to you. You've never set eyes on the steward—since yesterday afternoon. Bunch and Bugle told you all that had happened: and Bunch and Bugle it was that gave you the key. Maybe you stole it from them. In any event, you got it—and came here, fully expecting to have the place to yourself. And then we came twelve hours too early and spoiled your game."

Now whether the priest was shaken I do not know, but I was quite confounded by my cousin's brilliant exposure of what I now saw to be the truth. And Palin later confessed that before such a masterly perception he had felt like a boy at school.

134

I was still staring at Hubert, when our prisoner got to his feet.

"I came in charity," he said, "and in charity I will depart. Do not think that I blame you. You have suffered enough to suspect your own father's son." He raised his black eyes to heaven. "I too, have suffered, my friends. I have been mocked and betrayed—led into the false position in which I stand."

"Then sit down," said Palin. "Besides, it's no good your going. The skunk-house is closed."

The priest started forward, pointing a shaking finger.

"That man," he cried, "is an outcaste. Dismissed from my brother's service for stealing goods. I warn you, unless——"

"Take back that lie," said I.

The fellow swung round, snarling.

“Go on,” said I. “Take it back—as a matter of form.”

Father Herman inclined his head.

“You are my host,” he said.

“Don’t you believe it,” said I. “But this is my house. And now beg that gentleman’s pardon and take back the words you said.”

With his eyes on the ground—

“My brother,” said the priest, “the tongue is an unruly member. You were dismissed for violence, and not for theft. I ask pardon for my mistake.”

“As a matter of fact,” said Palin, “I took my leave. I admit you didn’t press me to stay, but, to tell you the truth, I don’t like that word ‘dismissed’.”

With a manifest effort—

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“I withdraw it,” said the other, slowly.

“That’s better,” said my cousin. “And now let’s conclude this inquiry. This fellow Harris, whom you believed to be John Ferrers, my great-uncle’s heir—had you ever seen him before?”

“A thousand times no!” cried the priest excitedly. He lugged a crucifix from his cassock and held it up in the air. “By this most blessed symbol, I never set eyes upon the villain till three days

ago. That is the head of my offending. I was beguiled.”

“Then why,” said Hubert, “why did you tell my steward that you were at Oxford with Harris some years ago?”

The words might have been an incantation, such was the change they wrought.

His earnest demeanour fell from the priest as the garment a man lets fall. His face, transfigured with passion, began to work: he seemed to lose stature, crouching instead of standing and hunching his shoulders and bringing his chin to his chest: his fingers writhed upon the crucifix as though they would twist the silver into some other shape; and he breathed deep and noisily, the air whistling in his nostrils, because his mouth was tight shut.

It was, I think, his sudden realization that ever since his capture we had been playing with him that over-rode the instinct of self-control, while the bitter knowledge that by this lapse he had given himself away stung the man to a frenzy of mortification and rage. Be that as it may, the mask was off, and he knew it, and never with any of us did he seek to employ it again.

There was now no more to be said. The man stood confessed as hostile as Harris himself, and Hubert told Stiven to fetch a strap from the Rolls.

136

At this our prisoner started and moistened his lips.

“My cloth is sacred,” he hissed.

To this impudent declaration my cousin vouchsafed no reply, but Palin felt unable to let the occasion pass.

“The violence we do,” he said gravely, “we shall do in charity. I’m sure you’ll find that a very comfortable thought. As for the sanctity of your calling, I can’t help feeling that you might have thought of that before. Convicted of the most filthy treachery, your lips still wet with the slime of a hundred lies, you beg to remind us that you are a man of God.” He expired violently. “Of course, you know, you’re wasted in this rude world: you ought to make away with yourself: you’d have a peach of a show in Hell. Why they’d dub you Knight Commander of the Whited Sepulchre before your body was cold.”

That was as much as I heard, for I strolled back to Olivia—in truth, to take her instructions, for the man was her blood relation, and I felt that, since she was present, it was for her only to say how he should be used.

She was not where I had left her, and the gallery’s wing was empty, so far as I saw. In some uneasiness, I stepped to the door which gave to the square, stone hall . . .

She was standing with her hands behind her leaning against the wall. Her head was up, and her eyes were fast on the naked electric light. As I shut the door behind me, I saw how pale she was.

“Beware of me,” she said quietly. “He and I—we have the same blood in our veins.”

“Olivia, I beg you——”

“Put yourself in my place. Lie upon lie, interlarded with holy saws. My father’s brother, snuffling before four strangers. . . . And I could have borne all that. But, when he was caught, I heard him plead his calling—remind you that he was a priest, to save his skin.”

“Don’t call us strangers,” I said. “He’s stranger to you than we are. I simply cannot regard him as being your kin.”

“How would you feel in my place?”

“The case is different,” said I. “But as long as I had your friendship, I wouldn’t care.”

She took her hands from behind her, to hold them against her breast.

“I don’t mind your knowing, John. And Andrew will understand . . . But your cousin and Stiven—I don’t know how to face them, I’m so ashamed. I could bear the lies, but the man’s a coward—he’s said so: he’s stuck the white feather in his cap.”

She was halfway to tears, and I had no comfort to give. What was more, I could not wait. I had to get back.

I came and stood before her and took her small hands in mine.

“We’ll thrash this out later,” I said, “before you meet them again. But tell me, what shall we do? Are there any questions to ask him? And shall we keep him here or put him out on the road?”

With a manifest effort she brought her mind to the point.

“Search him,” she said, “and confine him. And mind you search him well. Take every scrap of paper upon him—for me to look through.”

As she spoke I saw the truth of the matter as clear as day.

138

“Olivia,” I cried.

For the first time she met my eyes.

“What is it?”

“He’s not a coward at all. We’ve done him wrong. *He pleaded his cloth because he didn’t want to be searched.*”

The smile that swept into her face I shall see as long as I live.

“Well done, John,” she said quietly, and put her hands to my lips . . .

If proof were needed of my theory, we had it almost at once.

I found Stiven strapping behind him the prisoner’s wrists: the fellow made no protest, but stood like a rock.

“And now,” said Hubert.

I lifted my voice.

“He urged that his cloth was sacred. I think that means that if he were searched, we might find something upon him he doesn’t

want us to see.”

“I’ve no doubt you’re right,” said my cousin. . . .

These words were the prologue to a truly shocking affair.

Father Herman said never a word, but he fought like a beast: and if his resistance was vain, it made an odious duty by far the most loathsome to which I have ever subscribed. Such was his violence, he very soon burst his bonds; and the four of us had to compel him, before we could have our way. My tussle with Harris had been unpleasant enough, and our handling of him and Punter was hardly a pleasant charge: but this encounter seemed to make me lose caste and to rank me with the common hangman of bygone days.

For all that, our search was fruitful.

139

The priest had upon him our passports, with Harris’ and Punter’s photographs stuck in the place of ours, our copy of my great-uncle’s Will and the affidavit of which I have spoken before. I imagine that of their negligence Bunch and Bugle had left these things behind. But he had something else upon him, to keep which inviolate I make no doubt that he would have sold his soul. This was a set of *tracing-paper plans of the castle, each floor on a separate sheet*. His watch and purse and breviary made up the ugly tale.

When the search was done, we released him, and Hubert bade him get to his feet.

“Under lock and key,” I said shortly. “What about a room in the passage that leads to the postern door?”

“What could be better?” said Palin. “Stiven and I’ll take him down. And while we’re gone, you might open one or two windows. You know. Just to change the air.” He turned to Stiven. “Down to the postern, by way of the entrance hall. If you lose your way, ask this gentleman. He’ll put you right.” He turned to Father Herman. “Kindly follow Mr. Constable’s servant. I’m going to walk behind you, and, unless you want to be damaged, I advise you to play no tricks.”

The priest said nothing. I fancy his bolt was shot. But that he did Palin’s bidding, you might have thought that he had not heard what he said. His face like some dreadful mask, the eyes of which are sightless, he turned to follow Stiven, and Palin fell in behind.

They had gone perhaps ten paces, when I saw the man stop in his tracks. As he did so, he seemed to stiffen, and I thought for an instant that he had been visited by some sudden, fatal disorder and was going the way of Ananias before my eyes. Then I saw that the fellow was staring—poking his head and staring, after the manner of some infamous bird of prey. I followed his gaze, to see, with a thrill of horror, the pretty documents which had attracted his eye. These were a small grey hat, brooched with a plume of diamonds, and a pair of little wash-leather gloves.

140

“Get on,” said Palin, fiercely.

He knew as well as did I that the damage was done.

141

Sitting at the dining-room table, Olivia reviewed our spoil.

“Is this all?” she demanded. “Had he no wallet? Or notebook? Nothing at all of that kind?”

“This is all we could find,” said Hubert. “Did you expect something else?”

Olivia nodded. Then she took a small strip of parchment out of a little patch-pocket at the waist of her dress.

“I had hoped for something like this.” She laid the strip on the table and smoothed it out. “Where do men keep precious things? Things that they mustn’t lose and that no one must see?”

My cousin shrugged his shoulders.

“At the Bank,” he said. “I know he wasn’t wearing a belt.”

“Was he wearing a garter? I’ve kept this in a garter for years.”

Ruefully we regarded one another.

“You shall know to-morrow,” said Palin. “We simply cannot return to the worry to-night.”

Olivia shuddered.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “But if you could bear to . . . to-morrow, it might be worth our while.”

“Consider it done,” said Hubert.

Olivia picked up the breviary, held it by its edges and shook it, so that its leaves swung free. But nothing fell from between them. Whatever she sought was not there.

142

She put down the book and picked up her parchment strip.

“My grandfather,” she said, “had a document—a little piece of parchment, just three times the size of this. It contained certain directions. Before he died, he cut it into three strips and gave one to each of his sons. It was rather a good idea, for, you see, he cut it vertically, so that for following the directions, one strip alone is no good. And I don’t know that two would be enough: but they’d obviously be better than one. This was my father’s strip, and each of my uncles has one of the other two.”

She passed the strip of parchment to Hubert, who held it for Palin and me.

The writing was faded, but clear enough to be read; and though the hand was German, I could see that each line was only a word or two long and that the words on the right were nearly all unfinished, because, of course, the knife had cut them in two.

“As the eldest son,” said Olivia, “my father had the first of the strips: as the youngest son, my uncle Herman probably had the third. If we had those two before us, I think we could get some way towards reconstructing the second.”

“No doubt about that,” said Palin, scrutinizing the strip. “If I could only have two, I’d choose the first and the third.”

“Where’s Stiven?” said Olivia, suddenly.

“Visiting patrol,” said Hubert. “His beat is from here to the postern and back again.”

The lady sat back in her chair.

“Listen,” she said. “In the library at Haydn we had, till a few years ago, a curious manuscript. It was a catalogue, such as a collector might make for his private use, of the objects of art which he acquired. It had not been made all at once, but when a piece was acquired it was entered up. In addition to the date of acquisition and a simple description of the piece, the collector had always entered the name of the—the artist, if he knew it: and if he had not bought it direct, then he put the name of the person from whom it had come. Now several things combined to lift this ordinary record out of the ruck. In the first place, the date of the last acquisition was 1502. Then, again, the catalogue was disguised: its pages were interleaved with those of a breviary—” she pointed to that of her uncle “—a priest’s book of his Office, like that. Finally, the breviary was that of Pope Alexander the Sixth.”

143

“The father of the Borgias,” exclaimed Palin.

“That’s right,” said Olivia. “A Spaniard. The catalogue was written in Spanish—his mother tongue. So that, unless he knew Spanish, anyone impious enough to open his Holiness’ breviary would not be one penny the wiser for what he saw.

“My great grandfather found the breviary in Florence and bought it for a nominal sum. Two years ago my uncles sold it to an American collector for fifteen thousand pounds. He was

very decent: he had it photographed for us and we have a copy apiece. All things considered, I don't think he paid too much.

“Now why did my great grandfather buy it? He'd no idea whose it was. And he couldn't read Spanish, though later he took care to learn. He bought it because of a letter, lying between the pages, which happened to catch his eye. It was written in Latin, and the address at the foot was *Your Castle of Hohenems*. 144

“Well, there were three of those letters. All of them short, and all addressed to the Pope. And all of them said that the writer had ‘received and bestowed the vestments according to your Holiness’ command.’ The writer’s name was Dalas, and there’s reason to think that he was the seneschal.

“I’ll spare you my great grandfather’s labour and pass to its fruits.

“The letters were respectively written in 1500, 1501 and 1502. They were dated, of course. And against each item of the catalogue one or other of the dates of those letters appears. This suggests that during those years the collection was transferred to Hohenems, one third at a time and that the letters were nothing less than receipts.

“That’s one point.

“The second is that on Alexander’s death in 1503, Hohenems was raided and its occupants fled.

“The third is that a man of the name of Dalas, who was then a wheelwright at Robin, sold to my great grandfather the piece of

parchment of which this strip is a third. Though he himself did not know it, he was clearly a descendant of the seneschal, for the parchment contained the directions for finding the strong-room in which the vestments lie.

“And the fourth point is that they are not vestments at all, but one hundred and twenty-seven sculptured jewels.”

So far as I can, I have set down her very words: but, reading them over, I see that the printed page can never make the impression which her simple statement produced. But that, I suppose, is natural—for very many reasons, but chiefly, I think, because her voice was so charming and all its inflections were so true.

“And that is the secret,” she concluded, “which your great-uncle had heard of and tried for so long to find. We kept the letters, of course, but I could have wept when they sold the breviary. I had my share of the proceeds, naturally. But think of the sensation, if ever we’d found the gems. I mean, to produce such a collection, with such a catalogue . . .”

145

For a space we all sat silent, as well we might.

For myself, I felt bewildered. The truth was overwhelming. I seemed to be rubbing shoulders—sitting down and drinking with History and with Romance. ‘Your Castle of Hohenems’ . . . A notorious Pope-to-be had ridden into our courtyard, sauntered upon our ramparts, listened to the rustle of the water beside our gates. His cardinal’s red had flamed upon the steps of our staircase: his jewelled finger had rested on our balustrade. Caesar and Lucrezia Borgia might well have

played as children—shouted and cried and kissed within our walls. The breviary interleaved . . . hiding a record like that of some pirate's hoard. Whose money, or blood, or tears had gone to the compiling of that list? How many thousand times had its author smiled upon it, while those that saw him believed him at his devotions, discussing the Word of God? The three receipts for 'vestments' . . . Who was this seneschal, Dalas, that even his Holiness trusted, yet dared not trust? Had the Pope in his service one honest man? And had he proposed to withdraw from Rome to Hohenems, when Death stepped in to bid him further afield?

Four hundred years ago. Four hundred years of rain and sun and wind, fretting or soothing Hohenems, raising the woods about her, fattening the valleys at her foot, while all the time the old Pope's secret lay snug, faithfully kept, yet undreamed of by those that lived beside it and grew old men and presently died in a service they never knew. The old saying came to my mind. 'He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.'

146

"How do we know," said Palin, "that the 'vestments' have not been removed? I'm not being brutal. I'm asking for information."

"They may have been," said Olivia. "But what evidence we have is the other way. In the first place, the hoard was secret. Nobody knew of the existence of these particular jewels. Secondly, if they were removed, they've one and all disappeared. There's not a jewel in any collection in Europe that answers the Pope's description of one of his gems."

“That’s good enough,” said Palin. “It’s inconceivable that not a single one has survived.”

“I think so, too,” said Olivia. “Then, again, the name of the castle doesn’t appear on the parchment of which this slip is a third. The wheelwright, in fact, believed it to refer to some convent. The ‘vestments,’ of course, suggested a religious house. All he knew was that the parchment was accounted precious and that it always had passed from father to son.”

“Poor fellow,” said I. “We ought to look up his descendants.”

“He died childless,” said Olivia. “If he hadn’t been old and a widower, he wouldn’t have let it go. Then, there’s one more thing. The seneschal may have been faithless, but I don’t somehow think he was. Alexander the Sixth decided that he could trust him, and Alexander the Sixth was a man of the world.”

“Oh, don’t be harsh,” said Palin. “‘Man of the world’ is so suggestive, and you shouldn’t speak ill of the dead.

147

After all, he only got himself made a cardinal before he was twenty-six, lived openly with his mistress as a Prince of the Church, begat the Borgias, committed every known excess with gusto for nearly fifty years and, as the Vicar of Christ, laid down his monstrous life as the result of inadvertently drinking the wine which he himself had prepared for somebody else.”

Olivia laughed.

“Our press agent,” she said. “When we get home, you shall unveil the discovery in the columns of *The Times*.”

“Nothing,” said Palin, “would give me greater delight. Gibbon let him down very light—I don’t know why. I shall repair the omission. If you remember, he had a pretty way of——”

“That’ll do,” said Olivia, firmly. “It’s too late for reminiscence and even for making plans.” She put the strip of parchment away and rose to her feet. “If I’d known there would be no servants, I should have brought my maid. But to tell you the truth, I didn’t expect to stay here.”

“I’ll drive you back,” said I.

She shook her head.

“You said there was a bedroom unused. If I may have that . . .”

I led the way at once, and searched the room and its bathroom once again. Then I lighted the fire which was laid and tried the bolt of the door.

“All correct?” said Olivia, smiling.

“I think so,” said I. “I hope the bed isn’t damp.”

148

“I’m sorry,” she said, “to have taken your only room.”

“We’re so proud to have you,” I said. “I’ll fetch your maid tomorrow and all your things. She shall sleep next to you, and one of the rooms downstairs shall be yours alone.”

“Thank you, John,” said Olivia, “but I must stay at the inn.”

“As you wish,” said I. “Your rooms here will always be ready

by day and night.”

She shook her head.

“I must sleep at the inn,” she said. “But I’ll spend the day here sometimes, if you’ll come over and get me and take me back.”

“You’re our managing director,” said I. “I shall come for you every morning at eight o’clock.”

I seemed to have slept for ten minutes when Palin was shaking my shoulder and crying “The balloon has gone up.”

From an embrasure in a tower of the gatehouse I proved the truth of his words.

On the farther side of the fall stood the second of the Hohenems cars. Bugle was sitting at its wheel, sounding its horn: and Bunch and Harris afoot were staring up at the drawbridge with furious eyes.

At once I saw what had happened.

Harris had made for Haydn, instead of Hohenems, relying on Haydn to bring him back to the castle or, if we were in possession, to abet a counter-attack. More shrewd than his subordinates, the instant he learned that ‘Holy’ was alone in the castle, he had perceived the danger of leaving him there at large and now was arrived hotfoot in the hope of checking the mischief which had been done.

“Great things, embrasures,” said Palin, at my shoulder. “I

wonder who thought of them first. They allow you to observe, unobserved, and to assault with impunity all that come within range. More. The embrasure is disconcerting. The enemy has no idea whether or no he is being coolly surveyed. The dark, expressionless slits take on a sinister air. Each of them may be hiding a dozen eyes. See? Harris is getting uneasy. He's taking it out on Bugle for sounding the horn. Unjustly, of course: but he's nervy. The embrasures have got on his nerves. See him looking from one to the other? With his eyes screwed up, searching? What did I say?"

His words were patently true. Though the three rogues consulted together, they now never once took their eyes from the gatehouse towers, and Bugle was presently ordered to take the car out of range.

What happened then was as good as a scene in some farce.

Harris plainly declared that, since the drawbridge was up, they would have to climb down to the valley and mount the postern steps, but the thought of such an excursion appeared to shock Bunch so much that at first he seemed uncertain that he had heard aright. He stared upon his companion as though he were out of his mind: then he regarded the depths with starting eyes: then he removed his hat and wiped the sweat from his brow. Of this dumb show Harris saw nothing, for he kept his gaze, like some tiger, upon the slits: but presently Bunch touched his arm and began to demur, indicating the brink beside him with a tremulous hand. When Harris looked round to find him pointing, he fairly cuffed him with rage, pointing himself to the embrasures, as though to insist that Bunch by his thoughtless gesture had given away his plan. At

this Bunch naturally protested, and the two had a stand-up row, in the course of which Bunch again pointed to the depths and was again chastised, while an instant later Harris forgot his resolution and indicated them himself. To this lapse Bunch drew his attention with a triumphant sneer, at which Harris, goaded to madness, snatched off the other's hat and hurled it over the cliff. Why this should have sobered Bunch I cannot conceive, but I can only suppose that he set great store by his headgear—in fact it was not his, but Hubert's—and now perceived with horror that he must indeed descend if he wished to wear it again. Be that as it may, his resentment at Harris' action seemed to be drowned in concern, for though he certainly complained, he did so over his shoulder and kept peering over the brink as if it were that of some canyon from which no human being had ever returned alive. And there Harris left him gibbering, to make his way to the car, unconscious of the roars of laughter which the two of them had provoked. Indeed, we had very good cause to be glad of the rush of the fall, for had we had to depend upon our efforts, I do not believe that we should have smothered our mirth.

“End of Scene One,” said Hubert, wiping his eyes. “I hope we shall be on in the next one, so come with me and I'll give you an idea of our parts.”

He led the way to the courtyard, leaving Stiven in an embrasure to keep an eye on the thieves. . . .

“It's like this,” said Hubert, setting his back to a chestnut and taking out cigarettes. “If they make for the postern and nothing happens to throw them out of their stride, we shall have the three of them cold. Harris believes that ‘Holy’ is here

alone. Thanks to that wire you sent, he believes that we shall arrive here at nine o'clock. It's now just six, so he has, he believes, three hours in which to enter the castle before we appear. Well, we'll let him come in by the window that gives to the postern steps. Into the room and the passage and upstairs *into our arms*. If we play our cards right, he oughtn't to stand an earthly, and all we shall then have to do is to select his dungeon and keep him watered and fed till the goods are found."

"But what a brain," said Palin. "My one and only idea would have been to exclude the darling. In fact, I was going to suggest that we shuttered that window at once. Now I'm inclined to open the postern door. That window-sill oughtn't to stop them, but Bunch and Bugle don't give an impression of guts."

"It won't stop Harris," said my cousin. "If he found the postern door open, I think he'd suspect a trap. What I am afraid of is 'Holy's' chauffeur arriving and tearing everything up. Why is Harris here? Primarily, to nobble 'Holy.' So the moment he sees 'Holy's' chauffeur he'll let the postern go and stick to the road of approach. Even if he's started for the postern, he'll turn right round and come back."

"In which case," said Palin, "the fat will be burnt to hell. They'll sit down and wait for 'Holy,' and 'Holy' will not appear. And when nine o'clock goes by, and *we* don't appear, Harris will know that we are this side of the drawbridge and 'Holy's' chauffeur will go for the local police."

"We can only hope," said Hubert, "that Harris will be out of earshot, by the time the chauffeur arrives." He

glanced at his watch. "I wish to God he'd start for the postern. Stiven is coming to tell us the moment he leaves the road."

"The watched pot never boils," said Palin. "Let us perform our ablutions, to fill in the time."

We made what toilet we could, proposing, when that was done, to see about preparing some breakfast without the aid of a fire, for if any smoke went up, Harris would guess in an instant that we were at home. To our delight, in the kitchen we found an electric stove and had started to heat some water to take to Olivia's room, when the lady appeared amongst us, looking so fresh and dainty that I, for one, felt the more ashamed of an appearance which soap and water had done little enough to correct.

We had just told her what had happened and how we hoped that Harris would play into our hands, when Stiven came running from the gatehouse to say that the rogues had actually taken the plunge and had started down the mountain, to reach the valley below.

"Good," said Hubert. "Now you go to the ramparts and watch them from there. On no account show yourself. They'll pass in and out of your sight, but do what you can to time them, for what I want to know is the progress they make. By the way, have they moved that car?"

"No, sir," said Stiven. "It's just as it was when you went."

"All right."

As Stiven left for the ramparts, Hubert turned to Palin and me.

“We must bring that car in,” he said. “It’s a risk, but we must take it. You saw where Bugle stopped it—bung in the middle of the road. If the chauffeur arrives, he won’t be able to pass, and ten to one he’ll start in sounding his horn. He’ll know who the car belongs to, and his idea will be to summon Bugle and make him put it out of the way. I’ll let down the drawbridge and, John, you must bring her in. Keep as far from the edge as you can. Andrew will watch from one of the gatehouse towers.”

“If I were you,” said Olivia, “I should leave the drawbridge down and let my uncle’s chauffeur come in. I mean, you must deal with him somehow: and if you can avoid violence—I don’t care, you know, but I think it would be as well.”

“I entirely agree,” said Hubert, “but short of producing his master, what can we do?”

“Conceal your presence,” said Olivia. “And that of Harris, as well. Put both your cars in the coach-house and shut the doors. And keep out of sight. When he drives in, I’ll appear and say that my uncle has gone and that he is to meet him at the cross roads this evening at six o’clock. His seeing me won’t matter, as my uncle knows that I’m here.”

For the first time that morning I remembered the unfortunate truth, and the sudden recollection shocked me into a groan.

“I’ll never forgive myself for forgetting your hat and gloves.”

“He speaks for us all,” said Palin.

“I forgot them myself,” said Olivia. “I never gave them a

thought. It's a pity, of course, because it means war to the knife. If they hadn't known I was here, my uncles would have sat still. As long as you didn't know the secret, it was very unlikely that you could do any harm. But now they'll know that I've told you, and—well, it's shortened your price."

There was a little silence.

154

Then—

"What will they do?" said Hubert.

Olivia raised her eyebrows.

"Put their money on Harris," she said. "He's ready to hand and he's just the fellow they need to pull you down. I warn you," she added, "Harris will be in demand. If you don't take him this morning, they'll take him this afternoon."

As I stood in the archway, waiting for the drawbridge to fall, I saw that unless we had servants, so far from finding the 'vestments,' we should have our work cut out to hold the castle itself. No less than three men were required to bring in that car without risk—the first to get her, the second to lower the drawbridge, and the third to advise the second that the road of approach was clear. Three men out of four and one girl. More. Hohenems might be impregnable, but we within had to live. We should have to obtain provisions and maintain the electric plant: meals must be cooked and served, rooms must be aired and ordered, and linen changed. Caretakers' work, if you please, but even on active service these things are done. And Hohenems was no dug-out: indeed, as I afterwards found, the

buildings enclosed or covered nearly four acres of soil. Even if we took Harris prisoner and so were relieved of the duty of keeping ward, our work would be terribly hampered by the absence of any staff. Moreover, we should have to play jailer—victual our captive and take him out for a walk. It occurred to me suddenly that Father Herman had yet to be watered and fed . . . and searched. . . .

“John.”

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I turned to see Olivia, dish-cloth in hand.

“Have you got your pistol this time?”

I tapped my coat-pocket.

“But I don’t think I’ll need it,” I said.

“Well, don’t hang about,” said Olivia. “If Harris looked up and saw you, he might feel cross.”

Here the drawbridge began to move, and a moment later I was over the water and running along the road. . . .

Had all our tasks been as easy as the taking of that car, this tale would have been a record of smooth success. Had Harris looked up, I doubt if he could have seen me, and he could not have heard the engine because he was moving between the two cascades, and though he was some way from either, their constant rush was sufficient to close his ears. Indeed, I was not gone two minutes, but was in the courtyard again before Hubert had made his way back from the windlass-room.

Without more ado we put the two cars in a coach-house, as Olivia had advised—as it proved, in the nick of time, for as I was closing the doors, Stiven came pelting from the ramparts to say that the chauffeur from Haydn was on the road of approach. He had come by way of the kitchen and, happily, warned Olivia as he went by, for Hubert and he had hardly time to enter the harness-room before the chauffeur appeared.

Olivia must have run like the wind, for as the man left his car, the front door was opened and she descended the steps. Thanks to her wit, he took his leave directly, and two minutes later we pulled the drawbridge up; but the incident served to ram home the poverty of our communications and how very short-handed we were, for had Stiven not left his post, Olivia would not have been ready and Hubert and I would fairly have met the chauffeur face to face, while, as for Palin, the first he knew of the matter was that the front door was open and Olivia was speaking German from the foot of the steps.

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We were now free to deal with Harris, of whom, of course, track had been lost, but though he was hid by the greenwood, from what Stiven said, we judged he was approaching the meadows and so might be expected within half an hour.

We, therefore, unlocked the door of the room by the postern gate and set its window open, as it had been before. Then Father Herman was taken and locked in the stalls which stood beside the archway, for so he could not warn Harris by making a fuss. And there, I fancy, he breakfasted better than we, for though Olivia had cooked us some buttered eggs, we had no time to enjoy them, but snatched a few mouthfuls, standing, on

our way to and fro.

Now if Harris entered the castle, he could, on gaining the passage, turn either left or right. Each course would bring him to a stairway set in the wall. The eastern stair led up to the small square hall I have mentioned before, and the western to a much larger lobby from which there were six exits, two only of which could be shut. We, therefore, decided to lock the two doors which led out of the smaller hall, so that if Harris went that way, he would find it a blind alley and have no option but to retrace his steps. In other words, we should force him to make for the larger hall, and there we should be awaiting him, pistol in hand.

This was all very well, so far as it went, but it seemed essential that someone should be on the ramparts, watching the postern steps. He could warn the others as soon as Harris approached the head of the flight and, what was still more important, once the rogues had entered the castle, he could cut off their retreat by firing across the window the moment a head reappeared.

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It was, therefore, arranged that I should do this duty, while Hubert, Palin and Stiven commanded the larger hall. As from the smaller, a door from this hall opened upon the ramparts: this door we set ajar, and posted Olivia without it, to act as connecting file. I was to signal to her by raising my hand, and she would deliver my message to Hubert standing within.

“But for God’s sake be careful,” said my cousin. “You ought to be able to see without being seen: but the rampart embrasures aren’t loop-holes like those in the gatehouse towers. And if one

of them sees your face, the game will be up. You must watch, of course, or it's no good you being there: but the instant you see any movement drop your head. From then on you must use your ears. I think you should hear them all right. But it can't be helped if you don't. Once they're there you mustn't show up any more."

I promised faithfully. Then the others left me and I crawled forward alone to the battlements. A moment later I was lying to the right of the postern, with my head fast against a merlon and one eye glued to the shadows which shrouded the descent from the postern some twenty steps down.

And here, no doubt, such as read will see our fatal mistake.

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I was facing the sun and peering into what was as good as a grotto, so thick were the veils of foliage hanging over the steps: *but the thieves were within the grotto*, looking out upon the battlements lit with the morning sun.

In our defence I may remember that except by night we had never set eyes on the place, and had had but slight means of judging the density of the wood.

Be that as it may, exactly at a quarter past seven a bullet went by my ear, to flatten itself on the wall some two or three paces from where Olivia stood, and, though I am glad to think I returned the fire, I knew in that moment that we had missed a tide which would rise no more.

Harris had seen and studied me, though I had never seen him: then, taking his time, he had done his best to kill me—a bold,

but politic stroke, for while his retreat was assured, no one but Bunch and Bugle had seen him fire and no one but they could prove that he had so much as set foot on the postern steps.

So we threw away the chance of a lifetime, for the bird was in the jaws of the net and, but for my appearance, must have been taken within a quarter of an hour. And then from now on the course of this tale would have been as smooth and easy as that of some sheltered river, stealing past water-meadows that yield to its slightest whim, instead of that of some rude and troubled water that fights its way through rugged, unkind country, the lie of which besets it, continually opposing its efforts to gain the sea.

Our discussion of this fiasco was dismal and empty enough, but when I suggested a sally, Palin's reply did much to open my eyes.

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“To go out and attack them would be to play into their hands. We shouldn't stand an earthly, because they could see us coming while we shouldn't know where they were. Do get this into your head. The moment Harris saw you, the whole position was changed. At that moment the thieves became the besiegers, and we became the besieged. And that position will continue until one side or the other throws in its hand. We are now besieged in Hohenems. The investment won't be complete for, say, twenty-four hours, but this time to-morrow there'll be a tree down across the road of approach. That will be very awkward, because it will mean that we cannot employ a car to fetch us supplies. To fell a fir-tree is nothing. But, once it's down, how long will it take to remove it? And mark you this. Every man who goes near it will take his life in his hand. And

that is where Harris will have us. He won't need a chain of sentries around this place. One patrol is enough to keep us in— *because we can't see that patrol*. It may be down in the valley: it may be beside the drive: it may be behind the coach-house. . . . But as Harris is shooting at sight, to bump into that patrol is a risk which we cannot take."

I well remember the silence which followed his words.

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We were standing in the larger hall, and the open door to the ramparts seemed to offer a prospect of half the world.

Olivia was by the doorway, shading her eyes and gazing down the valley which seemed to be all green silver because of the dew: with his eyes upon Palin's face, my cousin was standing, vigilant, at the head of the little stair: and Palin was standing between them, looking at me and frowning upon the truth he had told. Stiven was below, in the passage, watching the door of the room which gave to the postern steps.

"Well, we'd better get a move on," said Hubert. "We've got quite a lot to do."

"One moment," said I. "Will Harris come back for that car?"

"I think so," said Palin. "He'll know in his heart that it's gone, but a car would be so useful that he's bound to come back to make sure."

"Then let's put it back and lay for him."

"Too risky," said Hubert, shortly. "Bugle would take the car, while Bunch and Harris were covering all he did. That would mean a pitched battle: and we cannot fight a pitched battle with Harris armed. We shouldn't have a look in."

“I agree,” said Palin. “Some people might say I was afraid. I prefer to say that I value my abdominal wall. There’s not much in it, really. And so to business. Father Herman has to be searched, and our things to be fetched from the inn: but, what is far more important, we’ve got to get hold of some servants before that tree goes down. We neither need nor want the whole of the staff. Half a dozen trusties would do us proud. But those we must have. That we could exist here without them, I don’t deny. But it wouldn’t be very amusing, and we couldn’t do anything else. I mean, this place is some villa. I’ll wager I’ve covered four miles since I got up. Oh, and what about food?”

“We must find the steward,” said Hubert. “John must take the Rolls and drive to the inn, and you must take the small car and run the steward to ground. Stiven and I will deal with Father Herman and hold the fort.”

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“And I,” said Olivia, “must go. You won’t want to make two journeys, so John can drive me away.”

Her words took us all aback. That she would now leave the castle had never entered my head.

Before I had found my tongue—

“Are you proposing,” said Palin, “to stay alone at that inn?”

“I have my maid,” said Olivia.

Palin expired.

“I saw your uncle’s face when he noticed your hat and gloves.

His expression was not reassuring. It was that of a malignant adder bereft of its young.”

“He’d never dare touch me,” said Olivia.

“Very likely not,” said Palin. “But Harris would.”

“Don’t be absurd,” said Olivia. “I’m not worth powder and shot.”

Palin shrugged his shoulders.

“Have you ever heard of a hostage? Supposing you have your way and go back to the inn. And supposing on Friday morning Bugle appears at the gatehouse *with one of your gloves . . .*”

There was a pregnant silence, which I found quick with alarm. The picture which Palin had presented was making my blood run cold.

Then—

“You imagine vain things,” said Olivia.

“I call it ‘foreseeing the obvious.’ Never mind. Suppose the ‘vain thing’ should come off. What on earth could we do but surrender? Damn it, with you in their hands, we should have to jump at their terms.”

Olivia stood very still, with a hand to her head.

“I’ll go to Salzburg,” she said.

“That might do,” said Palin, rubbing his nose. “All the same . . . I quite see your point, Olivia. But—well, Harris and your uncle together will make a pretty hot pair. And when I say ‘hot,’ I mean ‘smoking.’ If they got wind that you were outside these walls . . .”

“We shan’t sleep if you are,” said I, and meant what I said.

Olivia looked at me sharply.

“And what of my name?” she said. She turned to Palin. “I suppose that’s what you mean when you say that you ‘see my point.’ I don’t blame the others so much, although I can hardly believe that England’s as lax as all that. But you know Austria. I broke a good many rules when I shared your inn: but at least I hid my name, and it was a public hotel. But to stay with you here in this castle, for possibly, two or three months. . . . You must be mad. I’m not very proud of my uncles, but Haydn’s a pretty big name. Yet if I did this, no peasant in all Carinthia would take off his hat as I passed. Instead, they’d spit on the ground. If I went to a farm and asked for a cup of cold water, the farmer would try to kiss me, and if his wife was there, she’d order me off the place.”

There was an uncomfortable silence.

At length—

“We must shutter that window,” said Hubert. “We’d better do it at once.”

I think that day was the hardest I ever spent, for my mind was very much troubled, while my brain and my body were taxed as never before. What had to be done had to be done so quickly that I had to decide how to do it whilst I was actually engaged, and since I left the castle at half past eight and only once returned for a quarter of an hour, I had next to no chance of consulting with Hubert or Palin, still less of calling upon them if I were in need. All the time Harris loomed in the background, a cloud considerably bigger than any man's hand, taking the shape of a dangerous beast at large and making the vicinage of the castle the very lair of danger, for Olivia sat by my side on the journeys I made.

Indeed, as that morning I sailed down the road of approach, I saw more clearly than ever that after that night we must not attempt that way. The road was so narrow and curling that already I felt uneasy at every bend, and I started to rack my brain for some way of doing without it, yet not without its use.

As though she could read my thoughts—

“You can't push trees down,” said Olivia. “The first thing Harris must do is to borrow an axe. And he won't do that till this evening—remember, he's short of a car.”

“And after this evening?” said I. “After this evening we shall be short of a car. What's the good of a Rolls, if you can't take it out? Don't you think we'd be mad to let ourselves be shut in that castle, cut off from the world?”

“If ever you had to, you could always get out on foot.”

“And walk to Robin—a matter of twenty-five miles? I think we should be well advised to keep the Rolls hidden somewhere outside the danger zone.”

Olivia made no answer, and one minute later I saw the main road ahead. . . .

I slowed up and waited for Palin, who was driving the second car.

As he drew alongside—

“D’you need your map?” said I.

“No,” said he, handing it over. “There’s a village five miles to the right and another three miles to the left. The servants are at one or the other—probably both. If I can, I shall bring the steward back in the car: but he may want to see you first, so be as quick as you can.”

With that, we went our ways—he to the nearest village, and Olivia and I to the cross roads *en route* for the inn.

As she spread the map on her knees—

“Tell me,” she said, “what it is that you want to know.”

“Find Hohenems and then the cross roads,” said I. “We shall pass them almost at once.”

As we went by—

“I have them,” she said.

“Imagine you are standing at the cross roads. How close can you drive to the castle without using the road we’ve just left?”

She studied the map in silence.

At length—

“To within two miles,” she said. “Perhaps a mile and a half. There’s a road just behind the mountain on which the castle stands.”

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“Good,” said I. “How far is that point from the cross roads? By road, I mean.”

“About ten miles.”

I nodded my head.

“I must go there to-day and look round. If we can cross the mountain, we’ve got what we want. Harris can watch the postern and block the drive, while we come and go, if we have to, by way of the coach-house roof. There ought to be a farm thereabouts where we can garage the Rolls.”

“Here’s generalship,” said Olivia. “And I can stay at the farm.”

“No, you don’t,” said I. “If you’re not inside the castle, you must be right out of range. Salzburg’s too near for my liking. I think you should be out of the country.”

Olivia sighed.

“There are times when you’re rather trying. I gave you my word, and I’ll keep it. I’ll do as you say in reason. But this is out of reason, and I shall stay where I please.”

“Then I shall stay with you,” said I. “The ‘vestments’ can wait.”

“Stay with me?”

As once before, the words flamed.

“That’s right,” said I, shortly. “And go wherever you go—until you promise to leave the danger zone. I told you Harris was dangerous, and so he is. I didn’t say ‘dangerous to you,’ but that’s what I meant. I’ve had that definite feeling for twenty-four hours. I had it first yesterday morning, when you were up at the window and I was down in the yard. Over your shoulder I seemed to see Harris’ face. And I won’t disregard that instinct. Even if you went to London, I shouldn’t sleep sound until I saw you again.”

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“You flatter me,” said Olivia. “But I’m not made of egg-shell china. People who cross me, don’t often cross me twice.”

“There’s a phrase,” said I: “a saying. It comes in the Bible somewhere—I think, the Psalms. ‘The power of the dog.’ To tell you the truth, I can’t get that out of my head. ‘Deliver my soul from the sword——’”

And there I stopped abruptly, for I had forgotten the context, but now that I had begun, the whole came back to my mind.

I am not quick by nature. To be quite honest, I am most deadly

slow. Others can read my emotions more swiftly than I. I have to be told things right out—to stumble upon hard facts, if I am to know they are there. So it was in that instant of time. The quotation told me the truth. I had stumbled upon the fact that I loved Olivia. . . . Had loved her from the moment I saw her three days before.

‘Deliver my soul from the sword: *my darling* from the power of the dog.’

The fierce light of this revelation and all that it meant, the perception of my blindness of heart and the blunt betrayal which my tongue was about to commit—these things together made me feel rather dazed.

“Go on,” said Olivia, quietly.

I swallowed desperately.

“It’s out of the Psalms,” I said. “‘Deliver my soul from the sword: my neighbour from the power of the dog.’”

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And it—it worries me. It may be foolish, but I can’t get it out of my head.”

To my relief, she made no answer, and five or six miles went by, before she opened her mouth.

“Will Salzburg do?”

“I suppose so,” I said, wretchedly, staring upon the white road. “The honest truth is this. If you are not in the castle, I shall be worried to death. I don’t know how I shall stand it. I want you under my eye.”

“But, John, be reasonable. How *can* I stay at Hohenems? Don’t you think I want to be there? D’you think *I* shall sleep at Salzburg—while you and Hubert and Andrew are fighting to find the ‘vestments,’ while my uncles and Harris are hammering at your gates? What d’you think it’ll mean to me to be out of this show? To be reading and going to concerts, while the secret I’ve dreamed of for ages is actually coming to light? While you three are trying to read it and facing a combination which is going to stick at nothing to bring you down?” She stopped there, twisting her hands. “I don’t know if *I* can stand it, and that’s the truth.”

“*We* shall be safe enough. Harris——”

“But you are so thoughtless,” cried Olivia. “Look at this morning. Look at the risk you took. That blackguard almost killed you, and it wasn’t your fault that he missed. You promised me you’d be careful: and then you go and lie there like—like a trusting lamb. We hadn’t seen the position, and so we supposed it was safe. But the moment you saw it you ought to have seen the danger and come right in. And you talk about fearing for me.”

“You’re worse than I am,” said I. “I didn’t see the danger. But you would have seen it *and stayed there*—you know you would. You must see that Salzburg is dangerous, and yet you mean to stay there. Say that we get some servants and fairly dig ourselves in. Your uncles and Harris will be frantic—ready to use any weapon, however foul. Then somebody sees you in Salzburg . . . and the news filters through to Haydn—that’s natural enough. Why, Harris would leave for Salzburg within the hour.”

“Do you imagine,” said Olivia, “that I’m going further away? A hundred and fifty miles is bad enough. Day after day, and no news. How can you write?”

“Don’t rub it in,” said I. “I feel exactly the same.”

“It comes to this,” said Olivia. “We both want me to be at Hohenems. You’ve some crazy idea that Harris is going to eat me. You want to protect your ‘neighbour from the power of the dog.’ And I shan’t have an easy moment while I’m away. Not one. Yet, as I told you this morning, if I were to do such a thing my name would be dishonoured for the rest of my life. It’s very stupid, of course: but when convention is backed by tradition, you’ve got to watch your step. A married woman can do whatever she likes. But I’m a *jeune fille*, my good John, and, to tell you the truth, a chaperon ought to be with me—here in this car.”

I said no more, but sought to put the matter out of my mind. This, of course, was hopeless, for, for one thing, she was sitting beside me, and, for another, all things seemed now unimportant except the light in her eyes.

‘My darling from the power of the dog.’

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The saying seemed inscribed upon my brain. Yet, in spite of its warning, I was to let her go . . .

This beautiful, peerless creature, whose presence, because I loved her, had come to enchant my world, was presently going to leave me—put out the light and leave me, to walk alone in the shadow cast by a peril which her amity for us had raised. We could not so much as communicate—for fear, of course, of

disclosing that she was without my walls. Days and weeks would go by, but I should know no more how she was faring than if I lay in some prison behind the enemy's lines.

I had, of course, no personal hope at all. More. I felt sure that if she dreamed that I loved her, the friendship which she had extended would be withdrawn. But, though I might hide my love, I could not conceal the disquiet which the prospect of her going aroused. At this, however, she could hardly take offence. It belonged to the natural relation between two friends. It occurred to me suddenly that all my solicitude for her had been founded on love, that the pictures she made had been limned by the love in my eyes . . .

I pulled myself together, determined to view the case calmly, as her dispassionate ally and not as a lovesick fool.

Was there danger in her staying at Salzburg? Or had I, because I loved her, conjured up some bogey which common sense would dispatch?

After careful reflection I decided that the peril was real.

Avarice knows no law. Because she had told us the secret, her uncles would both be itching for vengeance of any kind: if we could perceive that she would make a good hostage, the point would scarce escape Harris, whose acquaintance with evil was very much closer than ours: if she was well known at Salzburg—and of this there could be no doubt—Haydn would hear she was there within forty-eight hours.

I started to try to consider whether she would not be safer if

she remained at the inn . . . whether it would not be better . . .

And here my brain began to rebel against me, calling up visions of Olivia beset by Harris and bringing out the sweat on my face.

Meanwhile the minutes were passing, the furlongs were sliding by. And every one was bringing nearer the parting which I was dreading, which she herself did not want. I felt as though we were driving out of the sunlight into some cheerless region of cold and fear—and all because we could not discover the trick of going about.

“No way out, John?”

I knew she was smiling that gentle, half-mischievous smile.

I set my teeth.

“Not yet,” I said grimly.

171

It was she that smoothed my way when we came to the inn, for even had I known German, it would have been hard for me to break to the kindly people the news that we should not return. As it was, to our great distress, the hostess burst into tears which we could not dry, while the host made up such a bill as I was ashamed to pay. By the time I had packed up our things—and this, I may say, I did as a man in a dream—Olivia’s maid was seated in the back of the Rolls, and nothing remained to be done but partake of the lavish refreshment which our friends had prepared in the place of a stirrup-cup. Upon this we wasted ten minutes, because we had hurt them enough: then we

got into the car and, promising faithfully to visit them very soon, we left the two honest souls in the mouth of the inn, the woman weeping, with her apron over her head, and the man with his arm about her, trying to lend her a comfort he did not know.

We took the road for Mittal, whence a train would leave for Villach soon after midday. Olivia would alight at Villach, to take up the trunks she had left there two days before, and from there she would travel to Salzburg by the evening express. Since she was to go, it was best that she went at once: and though I implored her to let me drive her to Villach, I knew in my heart that I had not the time to spare.

“My dear, don’t be fantastic,” was all she said.

I had not the heart to talk, though the miles went by: and she, beside me, said nothing, although, indeed, there was so much to be said.

We were less than three miles from Mittal before she opened her mouth.

“Will you give me your cigarette-case?”

I took it out of my pocket and put it into her hand.

She took the parchment slip from her dress and slid it carefully under the cigarettes.

“Did you see what I did?”

“Yes, Olivia.”

She closed the case and offered it to me again.

As I took it, I touched her cool fingers . . .

I shall always believe that that contact taught me the way —released that extravagant notion which flamed in my brain for an instant and then took shape as a definite, desperate idea. 172

I glanced behind me. The glass partition was up.

“Olivia,” I said. “Do you really want to stay in the castle?”

“Don’t tempt me,” she said. “I’m doing the hardest thing that I’ve ever done in my life.”

“Listen,” I said. “By the grace of God, I’m a Catholic, and so are you. Marry me at Mittal—instead of taking the train. You’ll be my wife on paper. In the sight of Carinthia—the world, you’ll be my wife. But not in my eyes—I swear it. Nor Hubert’s, nor Palin’s, nor Stiven’s—they’ll know the truth. And when we’ve found, I’ll help you to get an annulment to set you free.”

I dared not look at her, but I felt her gaze on my face. I went on doggedly.

“It’s asking you to trust me a lot, but I—I won’t let you down. And, as I live, I can think of no other way.”

“D’you know what you’re saying?” said Olivia.

Her tone provoked me. I was a desperate man.

“Yes,” I said. “If you didn’t hear, I’ll say it all over again.”

A mile went by in silence.

Then—

“I suppose you mean well,” said Olivia.

“I suppose so,” said I.

“Ought I to feel honoured?”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t,” said I. “Ferrers is quite a good name.”

Another mile passed—before, I suppose, Olivia could trust her voice.

Then—

“What possessed you to make this suggestion?”

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“I want you within the castle,” said I.

“My neighbour from the power of the dog?”

“That’s right,” said I. “I’m afraid of Harris.”

“You’re rather quixotic, aren’t you?”

“No,” said I. “Only desperate.”

“I might as well marry Hubert.”

I hesitated. It had not occurred to me that any one of us three could serve the turn.

“Just—just as you please,” I stammered.

“I’m much obliged,” flashed Olivia. “You actually give me my choice.”

As before, her tone provoked me.

“No, I’m damned if I do,” I cried. “I take it back. You marry me or no one. And if you’re going to do it, you do it now. I’ve told you that you can trust me and that when the game is over I’ll set you free. I know it’s a strange proposal, but I’ve—I’ve got my back to the wall.”

There was a little silence.

“I suppose you know,” said Olivia, “that annulments are sometimes refused.”

“I have given my word,” I said coldly, “to set you free. And there’s Mittal, down in that hollow. Am I to drive to the station, or drive to the church?”

As I spoke the outrageous words, I braced myself for the lash. With the tail of my eye I could see my proud companion deciding how to lay on. Then—

“I’ll see you, John,” she said gently. “Drive to the church.”

As may be expected, our marriage created a stir.

The Rolls was well known to Mittal, but the name of Olivia Haydn was a household word. The priest himself knew her to speak to, and when she made known her wishes, appeared bereft of his wits, while Gertrude, Olivia's maid, who was to attend her mistress, was in such a flutter of excitement that Olivia sent her away to cool her heels in the church. It was, indeed, thanks to the verger, that we were married at all. He had been hastily fetched from his cobbler's shop and at once took charge of the matter, taking particulars from us and telling us what we must do and presently robing the priest and tolling the bell. Though we had given no notice, this point was waived, and, if there were others, Olivia and he between them swept them aside. I wed her at half-past twelve with my great-uncle's ring, wondering very much what Hubert and Palin would say and feeling very thankful that I had shaved and changed when I got to the inn. That these were not all my emotions I have no doubt, but the others I cannot recall, for I remember the ceremony just as I remember a dream. I know it took place: I remember its beginning and ending: but its detail is erased from my mind. Only one thing stands out, and that is that when it was over, I turned and smiled at Olivia, and she smiled back—a steady, magical smile, quite different to any that I had seen on her face. The sheer warmth of it thrilled me: before it the blood seemed to leap and dance in my veins: the world around me seemed misty, and I could see nothing but the glorious light in her eyes. Her hand was in mine, and I put it up to my lip . . .

We signed the register, and I feed the priest and the verger with Hubert's notes. Then my wife and I left for Hohenems, leaving Gertrude to take train to Villach and come back that evening to Mittal, bringing her mistress' trunks.

As we passed under the archway, I saw at once that Palin had not returned. This I found ominous, for it was long past one.

Presently Hubert appeared.

When he saw Olivia, he started.

Then—

“I hope this means,” he said, “that you’ve changed your mind. I was going to curse John to blazes for being so late, but if he’s won you over, the time he took to do it was very well spent.”

“Thank you,” said Olivia, smiling. “As a matter of fact, you’re quite right. He thought of a way, and it took some time to—to follow. And now what about my uncle? Did you search him again?”

“Yes,” said Hubert. “In vain. I knew from his demeanour that there was nothing to find. I mean, he didn’t resist.”

Olivia knitted her brows.

“Can’t be helped,” she said. “Where did you put what you found when you searched him last night? The plans and his watch and things? I’d like to go through them again.”

When my cousin had told her, she nodded and left us at once.

“And her maid?” said Hubert.

“Gone to Villach,” said I, “to pick up her trunks.”

“That’s right,” said my cousin. “How did you bring her round?”

I braced myself.

“I married her,” said I. “We couldn’t have let her go, and that was the only way.”

Hubert stared and stared, as though I had by my answer unmasked some Gorgon’s head.

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“Married her?” he said at last. “Do you mean to say she’s your wife?”

“On paper,” said I. “It won’t make any difference. And directly the show is over we’re going to get it annulled.”

My cousin put a hand to his head.

“Are you being funny?” he said.

“Not consciously,” said I. “We were married in church at Mittal an hour-and-a-quarter ago. But don’t tell ‘Holy.’ The news will have got to Haydn before he’s back.”

Hubert stepped to the basin and took his seat on its rim.

“Well, you two beat it,” he said. “As for Andrew, he’ll probably kill you. He loves her himself.”

“I can’t help that,” said I. “I was the only one there. Besides, I had the idea.”

“He probably had it, too. But he hadn’t the infernal impudence to voice it.”

“It’s only an arrangement,” said I. “A matter of form. And when we’ve got it annulled, he can start again. You and he and Stiven will know the truth, but everyone else must believe that we’re man and wife.”

“But that is the truth,” cried Hubert. “Unless you’ve been pulling my leg, she bears your name.”

“And there it ends,” said I. “She’s taken my name for a season because, as Olivia Haydn, she could not stay in this house. That is the secret which we four shall know and preserve. And now I want you to listen. I’ve got an idea.”

“More ideas,” said Hubert, and covered his face.

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Still, when I spoke of leaving the Rolls at some farm, he at once approved the project and called to Stiven to take the stuff out of the car, “for if,” said he, looking up, “you propose to survey that mountain, you ought to be off at once. But, first, you must go after Andrew and see what’s holding him up. I refuse to believe that he’s fallen foul of Harris, but the misgiving grows more obtrusive with every quarter of an hour. In fact, sitting here is the devil: but one of us must do it, and I seem to feel it’s my job. What time will the maid get to Mittal?”

I told him at half-past five.

He frowned.

“She’ll have to be fetched. I tell you straight, I hate this going

and coming. I've seen no sign of Harris, but I'll bet he's up on his toes."

"I'll bet he's sick of walking," said I.

My cousin fingered his chin.

"What did we do when we were sick of walking?"

"We took the Rolls."

"Exactly," said Hubert, rising. "And I can't help feeling that Harris might have the same idea. So for God's sake keep your eyes skinned, and don't stop to pick any flowers where the drive runs into the road. If you should find the way blocked, you must override the obstruction and put down your foot. If it's too big, clap her into reverse and squirt back as hard as you can. And I think you'll have to take Stiven. I don't like your going alone."

"He's not going alone," said Olivia.

Nothing we said could move her, and since we dared waste no more time she had her way. But I was desperately uneasy and made her sit with my pistol upon her knees.

My fears were justified.

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Had the Rolls been less silent, we must have run the gauntlet I dreaded so much.

As we swung round the last bend but one, there were Harris

and Bunch and Bugle in the midst of the way, plodding away from the castle and arguing as they went.

I could, I think, have killed two out of the three: but to run them down without warning would have been butchery, and I could not bring myself to do so ruthless a thing. As the great car leaped forward I, therefore, sounded the horn. Then I laid hold of the wheel, determined to show no more mercy, whatever befell.

I rather imagine the three knew what to expect, for they never so much as looked round, but hurled themselves into the bracken, like men possessed. Though they had time to jump clear, it was all they could do, and long before they could recover their poise I had whipped round the last of the bends and out of their sight.

“Which shows,” said Olivia calmly, “that we’re not the only people to make mistakes.”

“True,” said I, “but they won’t make that one again.” Here we came to the main road. “Shall we turn right or left?”

The decision to be made was a grave one. Palin was long overdue, and if he was on his way back, unless we met him and stopped him, he would run into Harris’ arms and, while he was alone and was using a far less responsive car, I had that moment taught Harris the value of lying in wait.

“Left for luck,” said Olivia, but though she said no more, I saw that she sat with her underlip caught in her teeth.

That we are creatures of Destiny cannot, I think, be denied.

Had we turned to the right we should have missed Palin by seconds. As it was, we met him roughly a mile from the hamlet which he had just left.

As the cars came to rest alongside—

“And Olivia, too,” said Palin. “Now, isn’t that nice? I pictured you nearing Villach. A moment ago I was raging at being kept waiting so long—I told that young sweep beside you to be as quick as he could. But ‘now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by’ the sight of you.” He turned to me. “I shall, therefore, omit the biting address of welcome which I had composed and pass direct to my news. I’ve got eight men and the steward, but they won’t budge until they’ve seen you. I must confess I don’t blame them. Harris was pretty well trained. He actually knew the servants’ Christian names. And his way all over the castle and the country about. If you ask me, the train was laid long before your great-uncle died. If ever the secret was found, Harris and his brother were going to get away with the stuff. This Harris was to play burglar, when the other gave him the word. He had his gang all warned, and, no doubt, had stood by for weeks, ready to leave the instant his brother wired. That’s why he was so quick off the mark. This is all surmise, I know, but it all fits in. Any way, if the steward likes you, his star has set. But they’ve all been badly shaken, and, of course, what they can’t understand is why we don’t call in the police. That’s an awkward question, you know. I mean, we know the answer, but it isn’t one we can give. And now drive on and I’ll follow. You’ll see a little old inn on the left-hand side.”

Ten minutes later the steward stood before me, twisting

his hat in his hands.

“My name’s John Ferrers,” I said. “You were my great-uncle’s man.”

Olivia, who was playing interpreter, translated my words. As luck would have it, the steward knew her by sight.

“I have been his man, sir, for more than twenty-one years.”

“I hope you will be mine and my cousin’s for the rest of your life.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“It’s easy to say I’m John Ferrers. A man called Harris said so five days ago. Ask me what questions you like to prove the truth of my words.”

The man hesitated.

“It is not for me, sir. And—and I do not know what to ask.”

There was an awkward silence. The man had been badly bitten and now was shy.

“I’m not very like my great-uncle. That I know.”

“No, sir,” came the obvious, but disconcerting reply.

I moistened my lips.

“My mother’s name was Helen. My great-uncle called her

Nell.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man respectfully. And then, “It is true, of course: but then I did not know that.”

“That is her portrait in the gallery—in a habit with a dog by her side.”

“Is it, indeed, sir? I never knew whose it was.”

“My father’s name was William: but I don’t suppose you ever saw him. He and my mother died a long time ago.”

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The steward inclined his head . . .

I decided to play the only card that I had.

With my eyes on his face, I stretched out my hand, palm downwards.

“Do you know this ring?”

As I spoke, I knew what I had done. As Palin afterwards put it, I had not only ‘torn it,’ but ‘bent it.’ I had drawn the steward’s attention—his very particular attention to the method I proposed to adopt of clearing the ditch of distrust. Then I had taken a short run and jumped ‘bung into it—with a couple of ‘b’s.’

Before I could think, Olivia’s hand was by mine.

“This is the ring to which my husband refers. He gave it me when we were married, two hours ago.”

“Olivia,” cried Palin, and the blood went out of his face.

“It’s the truth,” said Olivia, calmly. “Show the steward your wrist-watch, John, and let him compare the crests.”

As I unbuckled the strap—

“It is enough,” said the steward. “Whom my lady has honoured I am content to serve.”

For all that, we made him regard the two crests, and I think their identity scattered the rear of his doubts.

Then I gave him my hand, and he went down on one knee. Olivia gave him hers, and he did the same. Then he stepped to the door and called his men.

These were fine-looking fellows, up-standing, fresh-faced and honest, obviously country-bred.

The last closed the door behind him, and the eight stood silent and wide-eyed, like boys in school.

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“This is he indeed,” said the steward. “And there by his side is your mistress, his wedded wife.”

The eight shuffled uneasily.

“Tell me their names,” I said.

He called them out one by one, and one by one they knelt as they took my hand.

“And please remember,” said I, “that my cousin, now at the castle, is equal with me. The orders he gives are my orders, as mine are his. And all I do I do in his name, as well as in mine.”

“It is understood, sir,” said the steward, gravely.

“Good,” said I. “What about food?”

“In the storerooms, sir, there is food for us all for two months. But it is not fresh food.”

“Buy fresh food here. As much as they can carry. And let them start for the castle in two hours’ time. They are not to go by the main road. They must cut through the woods and join the road of approach after the second bend.”

“It shall be done, sir.”

“One word more. The quarrel with Harris is mine. I will not call in the police. He has insulted the living and he has insulted the dead. That is not stuff for a police-court. Hohenems can fight its own battles with those that defile its walls.”

I seemed to have said the right thing. As Olivia spoke the last sentence a growl of approval arose.

Then I nodded to the steward and he set open the door.

As the men passed out, I addressed him.

“Mr. Palin will drive you back. Choose two of the men to go with you. That road’s not safe.”

Then he bowed himself out, and Olivia and Palin and I were left to ourselves.

It was I that did the talking, while Olivia sat in the window, half on and half off the sill, and smiled at the play of some puppies in the sunlit garden below.

I could hardly ask her to leave, but I would have given a lot for her to be out of the room.

At length—

“Well, words fail me,” said Palin. “And that’s the unvarnished truth. I think you must be insane. Both of you. *Married?* You two *married?* You might as well say The Babes in the Wood were divorced. It’s like making a leading case of a Nursery Rhyme. And you talk about an arrangement . . . You seem to have married Olivia rather as most men give up their seats in a ’bus. ‘Do take my name, won’t you? I’m getting out almost at once.’”

Olivia’s shoulders were shaking and I fought hard not to smile.

“That’s right. You laugh,” said Palin. “See the humorous side. It is a scream, isn’t it? We trust you to take her to the station, and you marry her by the way. Talk about wolves in sheep’s clothing . . . And then you’ve the nerve to say that it’s ‘only a matter of form’ . . . Of course you must be deranged. There’s plenty of ground for annulment. The court’s only got to hear how you went to work.”

“It’s a game, I tell you,” I protested.

“Yes, I didn’t hear you tell the steward,” said Palin. “And I’ve got a sort of feeling that you didn’t tell the priest.”

“I hate defeating my object.”

“Oh, give me strength,” said Palin. “And now, for the love of God, let’s talk about something else. Harris, for instance.” He clenched an enormous fist. “If he crosses my path this evening, I’ll knock his face through his head.”

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“Then take off your coat,” said I. “You’re almost certain to meet him three miles from here.”

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My prophecy was, happily, vain.

Though I was not to know it till later, Harris had plainly decided that until he was ready the road must take care of itself, for Palin was not molested, and Stiven, who drove to Mittal to meet Olivia's maid, was able to go and come back without any let or hindrance on the part of the thieves.

Meanwhile, Olivia and I were fighting another foe.

We could not, as Joshua did, compel the sun to stand still, and though by three o'clock we were viewing the back of the mountain on which the castle was built, the hours which remained before nightfall slid by so fast that my uneasiness very soon changed to alarm. Even had I been alone, I should have been loth to be benighted in places which even by daylight could only be traversed with care or, what was still worse, which daylight might well have shown to be quite impassable: and I was not alone.

I have stated my twofold purpose—to find a way over the mountain from north to south and to find a farmer willing to house the Rolls. But, though, since the map was faithful, we were able with ease to determine the point at which our reconnaissance ought to begin, as I brought the car to rest by the side of the road, I perceived with a shock that I must take a decision for which I was not prepared.

The trouble, of course, was this—that I had not given the

matter sufficient thought. The day had been so crowded that, though from its conception the matter had been in my mind, I had not had time to consider the undertaking, still less the time and energy it would demand. But now that I looked upon the mountain, I saw at a glance that we had no time to survey it and that once we were up on its top we must not turn back. I, therefore, had to determine whether to abandon the project and forthwith drive the Rolls home, or whether to attack the position and take the risk of failure and all it entailed.

But for our brush with Harris I should have turned the Rolls round without more ado. Had I known that the drive was safe—as in fact it was—I could not have adventured Olivia on such an enterprise. But I feared an ambush so much and had been so much relieved to think she had seen the last of the road of approach that I could not face the prospect of taking her back that way, and the rigours of a night on the mountain seemed to me almost genial beside ‘the power of the dog.’

This I told her plainly, and when I said I hoped she agreed, she nodded her head.

“Harris missed you this morning. If he didn’t miss you this evening, where should I be?”

“Don’t talk about it,” said I. “It makes my blood run cold.”

“And don’t you think,” said Olivia, “that you’re rather too young to die? Never mind. What about this farm?”

We had passed not so much as a cottage for quite five miles, but a mile-and-a-half further on we came to a farm in a hollow which served our turn.

Olivia, of course, spoke for me and told a very good tale—that we were two of a party which was ranging the country about and was studying birds. The Rolls, she said, was too big for our present needs, but we or one of the others would come to seek her as soon as she was required. Meanwhile, if the farmer would house her, we would pay him a shilling a day. Upon this, the goodwife—for the farmer was in the fields—made haste to open the doors of a well-found barn and, when I had put in the car, promised to let no one touch her unless they produced her keys.

She then gave us some excellent coffee and fresh-baked bread, and whilst we were discussing this fare, Olivia asked her some questions about the farm. The idle conversation brought forth valuable fruit. Before we had done, we had learned that, though this spot was favoured, the northern side of the mountain was very dry, for that all the springs seemed to break on the southern side, “which is why,” said the dame, “we are lonely, for nowhere else hereabouts would a farm have water enough to serve its needs. But we have the Hohenems water, which is the best in the world.”

With that, she showed us a rill which ran by the side of the house and seemed to come down from a culvert beneath the road.

“That is the water that serves the Castle of Hohenems which is beyond the hills. Myself, I have never seen it, but my husband’s nephew says it is very fine. There is a courtyard there as big as a market-place.”

“But how,” said Olivia, “how do you know it’s the same?”

“It is from the same dell,” said the woman, lifting a hand. “The dell is up there, below the crest of that hill. Once we had but the overflow, and when the springs diminished, our water failed. But my father-in-law arranged it and laid a pipe in the dell, and now we always have water: and Hohenems does not miss it, for a great fall washes the castle by day and night.”

So we learned a way which would lead us straight up the mountain to the very point we desired. Two minutes later we bade our informant good-bye.

The sun was going down as we came to the dell, but though Olivia was weary, I dared not let her rest because the air was so chill.

Where the water came from I could not see, but a sturdy fountain was gushing out of the forest which lapped the dell. Here the water seethed for a moment before foaming down the channel which led to the castle fall, and out of this pool, no doubt, the farmer had led his pipe.

Now even if we could have done so, to follow the channel would have been waste of time, for I knew that it led to a cliff down which the water fell sheer for the first thirty feet of the fall: but if we bore to the left and then descended a little before we bore back to the right we should skirt the peak of the mountain and join the water again *below* the cliff. And then we should be directly above the castle, some three hundred feet below.

Three hundred feet.

I wiped the sweat from my brow.

I had arranged with Palin that, if we were not in by nightfall, a light should be shown in some window that faced the north: with this and the water to guide me, I had but little fear of missing my way, but I could not forget how rough a passage we had when we descended the mountain on the night that we stole the car, and I did not see how I could possibly subject Olivia to such a strain. Yet dusk was upon us, and up to this point there had been no sign of a path.

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There was nothing to do but go forward as fast as we could, making the most of the twilight and trusting to make such progress that we should be close to the castle before the darkness came in.

The going was now much more level, for the dell was sunk in a plateau which lay like a sloping step perhaps a hundred feet from the mountain's top. As the water passed to the right, so I proposed to pass to the left of this peak, but distance is deceptive and, besides, I might have remembered that water will always choose the shortest way.

Half an hour went by before we had surmounted the shoulder and so had begun to descend, and darkness was upon us before I dared bear to the right.

And here a new fear beset me, for, though I could have sworn that now we stood on the southern face of the mountain, I could not hear the rush of the water which was to be our guide.

“That,” said Olivia, “may be due to the shape of the ground. There’s probably still some spur between us and the fall. And

now I must rest for five minutes, whatever you say.”

I took off my coat, to put it about her shoulders: she protested, of course, but after a little she let me have my way. Then I went on a few paces, to prove the ground we must tread.

To my delight, before I had taken ten steps I suddenly
heard the cascade quite loud and clear. Without stopping
to consider the reason, I imprudently quickened my pace and an
instant later I stepped clean over some brink into mid-air.

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My fall was broken by bushes some twenty feet down, and though I was thoroughly frightened, I was not hurt, for I fell upon a network of briars, which received me rudely enough but were too stout and too many to let me down.

As I got to my feet, trembling, and hardly daring to hope that I had broken no bones, I knew that I must have fallen over the very cliff I had been at such pains to avoid and that Hohenems lay directly below me, although because of the leaves I could see no light. This was good to be sure of: what was less pleasant to realize was that I was cut off from Olivia as though by an arm of the sea.

Climb up the cliff I could not: it was too smooth and sheer.

I dared not shout, for, though she might have heard me, because of the sound of the water she could not have distinguished my words and would have been sure to make straight for the edge of the cliff.

I could rejoin her only by making my way round the cliff—a manœuvre which in the darkness might take me as long as an

hour.

An hour. Meanwhile . . .

All my previous fears were as nothing to the torment of apprehension I now endured. I felt quite sure that, when I did not return, she would set out to seek me as best she could: and that would be disastrous, for if she did not herself fall over the cliff, once she had moved from the spot at which I had left her, whether we met would depend upon nothing but chance. The thought of her stumbling alone over ground which the hardiest peasant would have been glad to avoid, concerned at my disappearance and presently chilled to the bone, was agonizing enough, but the thought of her falling, as I had, but not escaping, as I had, some serious hurt, not only tore at my heart-strings, but, because it was so likely, became an expectation which fed, like some fire, upon my nerves. I saw myself searching, yet not knowing where to look nor even where I was looking, because I was lost myself: I saw myself struggling to save her, when already the mischief was done: I heard myself shouting ‘Olivia,’ and yet, because she was past hearing, shouting her name in vain: and I saw myself, frantic, plunging down to the castle to summon a belated assistance which I knew in my heart that only the dawn could give. . . .

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A prey to these horrid reflections, I fought my way, like a madman, away from the sound of the fall, for my one idea was to come to the end of the cliff, which like some relentless wall, was blocking my way: but the progress I made was shocking, for again and again I missed my footing and fell and, because the slope was so steep, when I fell I fell down the mountain and had then to climb back to the cliff before I went on. At last,

in desperation, I seized the trunk of a fir-tree which was growing beside the cliff and started between the two to hoist myself up, now using some niche as foothold and now the stump of some bough: all the time I was horribly troubled in case I should find in a moment that I had been wasting my time, for I was as good as blindfold, and for all I knew the fir-tree was leaning away from the cliff.

And, in fact, it did lean away.

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The higher I climbed, the more apparent this grew, until I could only just straddle the gap between. Yet, though I could have climbed up the fir-tree, I dared not abandon the cliff: and this I could not climb up, without the help of the fir-tree, because the rock was too smooth.

I suddenly found that I was praying under my breath. . . .

It is strange how much a desperate man may achieve.

When, later on, I surveyed the spot by daylight, I could hardly believe that any man could have done what I did that night: and I think the truth is that I succeeded because I could not see where I was going or what I was attempting to do.

Be that as it may, after scrambling for three or four minutes, my frantic fingers encountered the edge of the cliff, and with one final, frenzied effort I flung myself off the fir-tree on to the sloping terrace from which I had taken my fall.

For an instant I thought I had failed, for the edge gave way beneath me and all the weight of my body was in mid-air, but I managed to drag myself forward and then to get to my feet. As

the roar of the cascade faded, I called Olivia's name. . . .

"What is it, John? What is it?"

I began to tremble. Her voice came from behind me . . . from a little to my left and *behind* me. And I was only six feet from that deadly brink.

Somehow or other I got out the vital words.

"Stand perfectly still. I'm coming."

"What is it, John?"

As I caught her outstretched hand—

"N—nothing," I stammered. "I—I lost you. I was afraid you might fall."

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I set her arm beneath mine and led her away from the brink.

"But you're shaking, John. What's the matter? Where have you been?"

I tried to steady my voice.

"I fell down," I said. "There's a cliff. And at first I couldn't get back. And I was afraid that when I didn't come back, you'd come to try and find me—and do the same. You were very . . . close to the edge."

"Was I?"

“T—two or three feet, Olivia.”

I was suddenly aware that my hand was covering hers and that my arm was pressing hers into my side.

“I’m sorry,” I said, and released her. “You see, I felt so helpless. If I’d called, you’d have come towards me, and, because of the roar of the water, you couldn’t have heard what I said.”

“You say you fell down. Are you hurt?”

“Oh, no. I’m all right. I was lucky. I fell on a bush. But you might not have. And then when I found you so close, it shook me up.”

With the sleeve of my shirt I wiped the sweat from my face.

“You’re very—very solicitous for me,” said Olivia.

“Naturally,” said I. “You’re not cold?”

“I’m warm—in your coat.”

“Then let’s get on,” said I. “It’s not very far. Once we can get round this cliff. . . .”

By my direction, she set a hand on my shoulder before we moved: but when we started, she could not keep it there, for the going was very rough and we did not move together, as we could have done on a road.

“Half measures are useless,” said I. “I must put my left arm

about you and you must put your right round my neck.”

Without a word, she did so: and though we went but slowly, the arrangement worked very well, for she was so light that I was hardly hampered and yet was able to lift her over the broken ground.

I shall never forget that journey, which, perhaps because Fortune was smiling, exacted no great effort and took us little more than an hour: but I was so proud and so happy to be holding her close to my heart that I could have gone on for leagues and would have dropped down in my tracks before letting her go.

Indeed, when I saw before us the light from the castle window thrusting between the leaves and knew that in two or three minutes our adventure would come to an end, I felt as though I were leaving some pretty garden which I should not enter again.

The thought startled me, and I felt suddenly cold.

“What is it, John?”

“Nothing,” said I, halting. “See. There are the stables before us, between the leaves.”

“What was it?” said Olivia.

I have said that my arm was about her and that hers was about my neck. Her face was four inches from mine. It was turned towards me, and I felt the breath of her lips. The scent of her was in my nostrils—and there was the wall of the coach-house

but twenty paces away.

“I—I’m sorry it’s over,” I stammered. “I like being alone with you. But I won’t let you down,” I added hastily. And then, “It’s been a great day.”

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“It has, hasn’t it?” breathed Olivia. “Our—our wedding day.”

For an instant my brain seemed to stagger, and my senses thrilled as strings before some exquisite touch.

The next moment I had myself in hand.

“I’ll never forget it,” I said thickly.

Then I let her go and caught her little left hand.

As I kissed the ring I had given her, I think that she touched my hair. . . .

And then I was hailing Stiven, who was keeping watch on the roof.

One minute later a ladder came sliding down.

I set my foot against it and handed her up. When she had taken two steps, I saw her look round and down.

“Has Hubert told Stiven?” she said.

“I expect so,” said I. “If not, I’ll tell him myself.”

“That it’s—it’s only a game?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t think I should,” said Olivia. “Gertrude knows a little English, and if he got talking to her he might give it away.”

“All right,” I said slowly. “Then—then you’re not going to tell Gertrude?”

“How can I?” said Olivia. And then, “Would you rather she knew?”

“Good Lord, no,” said I. “But that’s different. I mean, it’s a matter for you. I’m sailing under false colours.”

“So am I,” said Olivia.

“Oh, my dear . . .”

196

Olivia gave a light laugh. Then she set her face to the coach-house and made her way up to its roof.

The order we found in the castle did my heart good.

Lights were burning, a servant was at the front door, Olivia’s maid was waiting at the foot of the stairs: fires were blazing in the gallery, footmen were about their business, the dining-room table was laid. Nor was that all. The bedrooms were swept and garnished, the water was piping hot, and within half an hour of our entry an excellent dinner was served. There can be no doubt that, because he had but eight men, the steward had had to make shift, yet this was in no way apparent and nothing which could add to our comfort seemed to have been left

undone. Indeed, I can only say that out of our tribulation we seemed to have come into some Arabian Night.

At length the cloth was drawn and the servants withdrew.

“And now,” said Olivia, “tell me. My uncle, of course, has gone. I don’t suppose he gave you his blessing, but the terms upon which you parted would interest me no end.”

Seated upon her left hand, my cousin fingered his glass.

“I fear they were bad,” he said. “At half past five, when the servants on foot had arrived, we visited him in the stables, restored his watch and his purse and advised him to make for the cross roads without delay. We pointed out that his car would be there at six, and that, since he had three miles to go, unless his chauffeur was patient or he himself walked pretty fast, he would almost certainly spend a second night out. Then we told him in so many words that if he was wise he wouldn’t return to the charge, for the leniency which we had shown him would never be shown him again. He heard us quietly enough. Then he looked at his watch and his purse and asked for his breviary.” He paused there and looked at Palin, who was frowning upon the board. “In reply, I gave him the truth—which was that I couldn’t find it . . . I don’t know where you put it, my lady, but I looked for it high and low. I was going to add that I’d have it sent to him as soon as I could, but before I could get out the words he let himself go.”

197

“In fact,” said Palin, “we were forced to the painful conclusion that his reverence did not believe what Hubert said. More. So demoniac was his manner and so uncharitable his speech that it

began to dawn upon us that *he set upon his breviary a value quite out of proportion to its intrinsic worth*. And then we saw in a flash why it was that Hubert couldn't find it. . . . Upon my soul, Olivia, I give you best."

I looked from him to my wife. Her eager face was fairly alight with an excitement which she made no attempt to suppress.

"I don't understand," said I.

"You wouldn't," said Palin, shortly. "Your powers of comprehension are of another sort." Olivia covered her mouth. "All the same, it's very simple. Your—your better half had the idea. Alexander the Sixth used his breviary to cover his secret notes. It occurred to Olivia that her—your uncle might have possibly done the same. But she was too wise to say so. She simply hid the book and went off, leaving Hubert and me to play the hand she had dealt. We did so in all innocence—there's nothing like innocence for getting the wicked man's goat—with the happy result that the darling lost his temper and gave the whole show away."

198

"Then his share of the parchment——"

"—is probably burned," said Palin. "*But its burden is in his breviary*. You know. Letters or words underlined, or something like that. We may have to work to find it, but I'll lay a monkey it's there." He returned to Olivia. "When he left, he was fairly gibbering—couldn't get his words out right. His threats wouldn't construe. His curses couldn't be parsed. The word 'sacrilege' gave him peculiar difficulty: and when I offered him 'impiety,' he tried to spit in my face. And that, of course, was

the end. We led him over the drawbridge and pushed him off, and he went down the road in a series of short rushes, as though he were out of his mind. He'd run like mad for twenty steps or so: then he'd bring himself up all standing and throw up his arms and rave. I must confess I enjoyed the spectacle. At the same time I found it sinister. I don't know what he can do: but he'll take a lot of stopping, when once he's made up his mind."

"He'll get a lot of stopping," said Hubert. "Without an explosive you can't break into this place and I've arranged with the steward to have a man up all night. At the very first scent of danger, he'll sound the fire-alarm. We've thirteen men, and between us we've got six pistols and three scatter-guns. We've unlimited water, and food below for two months. And if we should have to withdraw, thanks to John's prevision, the Rolls is over the way. I don't suggest for one moment that we should put up our feet: but I can't help feeling that the others are up against it—closer up against it than we were five days ago. So much for our security. As for the work to be done, thanks to Olivia's brain-wave, we now hold two-thirds of the clue. And if, with that and the plans, we can't get home . . . In fact, as I'm the only one who has done nothing at all, I think I can say without boasting that, all things considered, we've had a pretty good day."

199

"Oh, wonderful," said Palin. "Quite—quite spectacular . . . thanks to John's prevision." He looked mournfully at Hubert. "Of course we missed the best part, you and I. And I do so love throwing confetti. But, you see, I couldn't get away. I had to get them some servants." He turned to me. "You're sure you haven't made a mistake? When you say you were married,

you're sure you don't mean 'baptized'?"

"I paid for a marriage," I said.

"Dear, dear," said Palin. "I do hope they didn't charge you too much. Who told you you'd have to have a ring?"

"I'd read it somewhere," said I.

"If you ask me," said Palin violently, "you'd read the whole blasted thing. I suppose you heard the bells saying 'Turn again Ferrers, Thrice lord and master of Haydn.'" Hubert, sitting on my right, began to shake with laughter. "Of course that priest ought to be unfrocked."

I glanced at Olivia, who was facing me and was seated on Palin's left. But her head was laid against the back of her chair, and her eyes were fast on the ceiling, on which was painted some brave Olympian scene.

200

"I acted," said I, "for the best. And I'd do it again to-morrow. At least, Olivia's safe."

"Oh, the self-sacrifice of him!" said Palin. He expired with great violence. "You know, I despair of chipping the scales from your eyes. Wedlock is an estate, not a fox-trot. It's even more momentous than musical chairs. And if you were to cut the name Haydn out of the *Almanach de Gotha*, you'd have to reset half the book. But I expect these long words are too hard for you. Let me give it you with a spoon.

"We're in a garden, we three—considerably troubled about a beautiful flower. There is . . . no other flower like it in all the

world. And we are afraid that a naughty man, called Harris, may do it some harm. So we take what precautions we can and go our ways. The next thing we know is that *you've picked the flower*. Stuck it up in your button-hole. . . . And while we're still wondering whether we see aright, you calmly explain that you did this to save it from Harris, and that when he's out of the way, you're going to put the bloom back."

"So I will," said I, firmly. "I've told you again and again that it's only a matter of form."

Palin let out a maniac's laugh.

"God knows you have," he screeched. "But you can't tell Vienna or Rome. What does *my* sight matter? In the sight of the world she's Lady Olivia Ferrers. And even if you get your annulment, you can never cross out the fact that for six months she bore your name."

"I don't want to," said I, hotly. "I'm damned proud of it and shall be as long as I live. But I didn't do it for that. I did it because I was desperate. *Desperate*. And in spite of all you've told me, I'd do it again."

201

Palin looked at me very hard. Then he turned to Olivia.

"He's shut my mouth," he said quietly. "And you?"

Olivia looked him full in the eyes.

"What d'you think, Andrew?" she said.

His words and her answer were so much Greek to me, but she

and Palin very clearly understood one another, for after a little the latter nodded his head.

“Then—then that’s all right,” he said slowly.

Olivia’s hand caught his, as it made for his glass.

“Honour Andrew, John,” she said gently, looking across to me. “He’s the best friend I ever had.”

“Love me, love my sheep-dog,” said Palin, with half a laugh.

“I meant no harm,” I said quickly.

“That’s all right,” said Palin, blinking. “If I’d known before I shouldn’t have twisted your tail.”

“I told you,” I said reproachfully.

“Yes, I—I didn’t get it,” said Palin. “I’m not very quick in the uptake.”

“That’s my failing,” said I.

“Oh, go on,” said Palin, and the three of them laughed. . . .

Then Palin stood up and solemnly drank to Olivia, and Hubert did the same: and Olivia coloured and thanked them both with her eyes.

Then Palin returned to me.

“You’re a strange young man,” he said. “I think you

belong to the Stone Age. Your singlemindedness certainly does. And the bricks you drop are the biggest I've ever seen. But I can't help liking you. There's an honesty in your eyes that looks me down: and your manner with the steward to-day was that of the blood royal."

With that he drank to me, as did Hubert, both looking very grave: and I said "Thank you," and could have sunk through the floor.

Then I saw Olivia smiling and lifting her glass to me. And at once my heart leaped up, because her look was so gentle and set me thinking of things which were ours alone and especially of our progress down the mountain and the precious words she had breathed and how, as I truly believed, she had touched my hair. Of such was the understanding which she seemed to me to invoke; and I think that she did so of pity, because she saw how much embarrassed I was. Be that as it may, I drank to her gratefully, for, though I had stood up to Palin, I felt the force of his words.

My conduct had been that of the Stone Age: I seemed to have taken my cue from a Nursery Rhyme. I had rushed in, where he, my elder and better, would not have dared to tread. I had been charged with Olivia—and I had married my ward. My one and only idea had been to save her from lying without our walls: it had not occurred to me that I was achieving that object to my immeasurable profit, but to her loss. Such simplicity was unpardonable . . .

Yet, strangely enough, I found Palin's hostility less disconcerting than the sudden end of it which he made, while

his formal recognition of my exalted estate seemed to me to be low comedy mouthed through a tragic mask.

Then Olivia rose, and we all went into the gallery; and while she and Hubert and I sat still by the fire, Palin sang and played upon a grand piano with which, when he had proved it, he seemed remarkably pleased. Though he rendered nothing more serious than two of Shakespeare's songs, it was easy to see how fine an artist he was: beneath his touch the place became quick with melody and, no doubt because of its proportions, we heard to great advantage his most engaging voice. Such was the music he gave us that with one accord we laid aside for the morrow the consideration of the problems which we were to solve: and that, I think, should show how potent was the spell which he cast. Indeed, we forgot all time, and the tall clock was chiming midnight before Olivia rose.

203

"You may play me upstairs, Orpheus: and then you really must stop. You've made us forget that we're tired: but we've got to get up to-morrow and put in a good day's work."

Palin looked up from the keys.

"Motley," he said, "is surely the only wear. And, that being so, the castle fool must earn his keep. And now he shall play you upstairs. Does my lady like Wagner?"

"No," said Olivia steadily. "Nor Mendelssohn."

Palin raised his eyebrows.

"I invoke tradition," he said. "The castle fool has a certain licence."

“Which he will be well advised not to overstep.”

Palin fingered his chin.

“But I don’t know the music to *The Taming of the Shrew*.”

As he spoke the words, the lilt of a Nursery Rhyme came swelling out of the rosewood. *A Frog he would a-wooing go . .*

Olivia began to laugh helplessly. . . .

Stiven was by Hubert’s side.

204

“Someone’s using a torch, sir, upon the road of approach.”

For what it was worth we all of us made for the ramparts: but, though we watched for some minutes, the light did not reappear.

As we turned to re-enter the castle, I saw that Olivia was gone.

Brutally early next morning the rasp of curtain-rings haled me out of a slumber which I had thought belonged to the dead alone.

Too sleepy to focus the dial of my wrist-watch—

“What time is it, Stiven?” I yawned.

For a moment there was no answer. Then—

“Will *Monsieur* take tea?” said Gertrude, standing beside the

bed.

I suppose my demeanour was comic, for after a little she smiled.

“*Monsieur* is very tired.” She spoke in French. “He did not hear me knocking, and so I made bold to come in. Shall I bring *Monsieur* some tea? Or turn on his bath?”

With an effort I collected my wits.

“Turn on the bath, please, Gertrude. I don’t take tea.”

“Very well, sir.”

As in a dream I heard her turn on the water and watched her laying out linen and carefully folding the clothing which I had cast carelessly off.

Then—

“Is that all, sir?”

“That’s all, thank you,” I stammered.

“Thank you, sir. Now I will call *Madame*.”

With that she opened a door which I had believed to be locked—a door which opened directly into Olivia’s room.

As it closed behind her, I lay back and shut my eyes.

Not that I still felt sleepy: I never felt more wide awake. And the truth was standing out most painfully clear.

It was, of course, too late now: but Olivia had made a mistake. Gertrude should have been told that it was ‘only a game.’

When Palin handed me his rendering of Olivia's share of the clue, I must confess that I was profoundly dismayed.

I will not set it out here, for, read alone, it told us next to nothing and *doorway*, *arras* and *shutter* were its three most valuable words. But their contexts, of course, were not there.

The doorway to . . .

An arras hangs . . .

The shutter belonging . . .

And most of the word 'belonging' was Palin's guess.

It was, therefore, arranged that Olivia and Palin should take Father Herman's breviary and do their best to wring from its pages the secret we were sure that they held, while Hubert and Stiven and I explored the castle itself.

Now the plans we had found upon the priest made one thing perfectly plain, namely, that the Castle of Hohenems had once been rather less than a third of its present size. But this original building had not been destroyed. Instead, it had been embodied in the edifice afterwards raised, and it stood, complete and almost untouched, between the gallery and the gate-house, making of the whole that portion which two nights before we had found it so hard to search. And here we had little doubt that the 'vestments' lay.

We, therefore, attacked this very ancient stronghold with torch and measuring-tape, but even with the help of the

plans it was most hard to survey, and though by midday we could find our way to and fro with scarce a mistake, I know that I did so by recognizing stairways and halls, and not by my sense of direction which was continually at fault. As Olivia had predicted, there were eleven stairways, all of them stone and some of them shut by doors, and the whole of this fastness seemed to have been built at haphazard without regard to method of any sort. It was fully three times as large as we had believed, and again and again we were confounded by the mysteries of length and breadth. How many *doorways* there were, I dare not say: there was very little *arras*, and what there was hid nothing but smooth, stone wall: *shutters* there were none.

At noon we sent Stiven to his dinner, cleansed ourselves and made for the library, to find Olivia and Palin working with slips of paper on each of which they had written the alphabet down, and spelling out what seemed to be nonsense with infinite care.

“As you’ve no hats on,” said Palin, “you’d better take off your shoes. The floor upon which you are standing is holy ground. There is no goddess but Olivia: and I am her prophet.”

Olivia looked up and laughed.

“We’ve found the cipher,” she said. “Not the key, you know—the cipher.”

“‘We’?” said Palin. “I shouldn’t have found the cipher in fifty years. More. Thanks to the misrepresentation which that serpent saw fit to employ, I should have wasted my life in

a labour the futility of which would have passed all comprehension. The bare thought of it makes me go all gooseflesh.”

With that, he showed us that throughout the breviary little groups of words were occasionally underlined.

“Puzzle—find the cipher,” he said, and lighted a cigarette. “And not to make it too hard, I’ll give you a clue. The cipher is underlined.”

Hubert and I stared at the open book. At length—

“I’ll buy it,” said I. “Don’t those words contain the cipher?”

“No,” said Palin, “they don’t. The cipher is contained in groups of three words. In fact I strongly suspect that it always lies in the middle word of the three. But here, for instance, there are only two words: and here again there are four.”

Hubert shook his head.

“I’m utterly beaten,” he said. “Put me out of my pain.”

Palin lifted the book and held a page to the light.

“Dirty work,” he said. “That line is marking three words on the opposite side of the page. So’s every other line in the book.”

My cousin regarded my wife.

“How ever did you get it?” he said. “It wouldn’t have entered my head in a thousand years.”

“Pure fluke,” said Olivia. “The words didn’t look right somehow, and so I held a page to the light. But we’re not there yet. I’m inclined to think there’s a code-word we’ve got to guess. And now what d’you think of your castle? Can you honestly say you’ve been into every room?”

“Except the dungeons,” said Hubert, sinking into a chair. “We’ll do them this afternoon.”

“Arras?” said Palin.

209

“About fifty feet,” said Hubert. “And behind it, a wall like marble. There’s nothing there.”

“Shutters?” said Olivia.

“Never a one,” said I. “Plenty of doorways, though. I should think there are fifty-five.”

“Electric light?” said Palin.

“Next to none,” said Hubert. “We shall have to run out a wire.”

“That’s easy,” said Palin. “A word to the steward will certainly do the trick. I never saw such a man. You ought to have seen the menus he brought Olivia to-day.”

“Yes, but what shall we tell him?” said Hubert.

“If I were you,” said Olivia, “I’d tell him the truth.”

“Not the whole truth?” said Palin.

“No. But nothing but the truth.”

“She’s right,” said I. “I’m sure we can trust the man.”

After a little discussion we decided to take this step as soon as luncheon was done. Then Olivia and Palin returned to their Gordian knot, while Hubert and I inspected such drawers and cupboards as our great-uncle’s keys would unlock.

Here we found nothing that had any bearing at all on the matter in hand. Though it was possible that Harris had discovered papers which Bunch and Bugle had been careful to take away, I do not believe this was so: and I think the truth is that our great-uncle kept no record of his efforts to find out the secret the castle kept. I shall always believe that he was upon its track—how close, I have no idea: but, though he had lived and had brought us out to help him, I cannot think that we should have found the ‘vestments,’ because they were hidden so well.

It was I, after luncheon, that told the steward our needs, and, as before, Olivia translated my words. When I revealed our purpose, the light of understanding came into his eyes.

210

“The impostors, sir, were hoping to steal this treasure away.”

“Undoubtedly,” said I. “My great-uncle trusted his secretary, and his secretary was playing him false. And her ladyship’s uncles are against us. They, too, know of the treasure and they would make it theirs.”

“I wondered to see them here, sir. It was their very first visit in twenty-one years.”

“That I can well believe. And now tell me this, Sarem. Did my great-uncle spend much time in the older part of the castle?”

“Now and again, sir. Sometimes he would not go there for several months: and then he would spend some hours there day after day. He would have the light laid on from a plug in the hall—I have the reels all ready for you to use. What he did there, I never knew: but Harris went always with him, bearing a measuring-rod.”

“Did he spend any time there shortly before he died?”

“Yes, sir, he did. Just before he left for England he was going there every day. And the last day or two he spent some time in the drive—close to the gate-house, sir, as though he were viewing the walls. I remember that well, sir, for, while he was there, by his orders the drawbridge was taken up.”

“That’s very curious, Sarem.”

“Yes, sir. I find it strange.”

211

“Well, keep your own counsel,” I said. “We shall let you know how we go on. And if at any time you’ve any suggestion to make, come to me and make it without a moment’s delay.”

“I will, indeed, sir,” said Sarem: and, with that, he withdrew to fetch us the reels of wire.

““As though he were viewing the walls,”” said Palin. “And what on earth does that mean?”

“I can’t conceive,” said Hubert. “And why d’you imagine he

had the drawbridge raised?”

“The presumption is,” said Olivia, “that the drawbridge was obstructing his view. When it was down, I mean. But why should he want to look at the wall of the windlass-room?”

“Let’s hope it was a whim,” said Palin. “If we’ve got to do any work outside these walls . . .”

“Quite so,” said Olivia. “I don’t think you’d do it long.”

There was an uneasy silence. If the finding out of the secret required the performance of some labour upon the outside of the castle, we should, indeed, be hoist with our own petard.

“It was a whim,” said Palin. “Fate’s not so unkind as all that.” He got to his feet. “My lady, you and I need exercise. You mustn’t adorn the ramparts till after dark, so let us try the courtyard. I don’t actually need your husband, but if you feel you must have him, he can bring his scooter and he and Hubert can run along by our side.”

Olivia rose, smiling.

“John,” she said, “ask Gertrude to give you some gloves. You’re going to show me the dungeons, and I don’t want to dirty my hands.”

The way to the dungeons was shut by two mighty doors, the one at the head of the stairway and the other half way down. The moment we had opened the first we could hear the sound of water—water other than that of the castle fall. Indeed, it was clear that some substantial cascade was falling *within*

the dungeons, for the uproar was that of water which tumbles within a cave. When we opened the second door, this truth leaped out with the roar of a pent-up beast and a bitter chill smote upon us, like the rude breath of Death himself.

I have often pitied such captives as were no doubt in time past conducted this dreadful way. I hope they were few, for the stoutest heart must have quailed before the awful greeting which issued out of this jail: the darkness and the bellow of the water and the unearthly chill were big with hideous promise, and I can conceive men turning lunatic on being thrust down by turnkeys to such a doom.

Before we descended further, Hubert and Stiven went back to fetch us coats to put on against the cold, and whilst they were gone, I wedged the great door open with a block which I found in the kitchen which was close to the head of the stair. This was the ancient kitchen which served the original castle, but was now no longer in use.

The hand-lamp the steward had brought us was the one my great-uncle had used: it was fitted with a fine reflector which must have near doubled its light. We had, therefore, no fear of falling or of coming to any harm, and as soon as my cousin was back, I led the way down the stair.

This brought us into a chamber some thirty feet square, but, though the noise was now deafening, there was here no sign of the water which was roaring so loud.

The first thing we saw was a fireplace, with a hood to receive the smoke, and, beneath this, the wreck of a cage which rust

had so much corrupted that there was little left. To the right, a structure of stone was standing clear of the wall: this was some two feet high and had very much the shape of an altar tomb. On the left was an open doorway, some five feet high, and through this was coming the uproar of which the chamber was full.

As we came to the hearth, I saw that two iron tools were lying on one of its hobs. Both were consumed with rust, but one had the shape of a poker and the other roughly that of a two-pronged fork. Supposing them to be fire-irons, I was turning the light elsewhere, when Palin stopped me and picked up the second tool.

It was this ancient instrument which told him the shocking uses to which the place had been put: and when he had shouted the truth, my blood ran cold.

We stood in a torture-chamber, and the thing which he had in his hand was a blinding iron.

Once he had pointed them out, the proofs were clear.

There was the grate in which the irons had been heated, and there the 'operating table,' with at each of its corners a staple to which, no doubt, the pitiless bonds were made fast: mouldering hooks and rings were upon the walls—some of them higher than any man could have reached, while the clamour, I suppose, was convenient to smother the victim's cries.

I was glad to turn to the doorway set in the wall.

Six steps brought us down to a very much larger

dungeon, on the farther side of which was falling the rude cascade—a considerable head of water, white with wrath. Compared with the fall without the castle, this was of no account, but, being confined, it seemed much more important, and the force and fury of its being dreadful to watch. This, no doubt, was natural: the wind one is glad to breast in the open air would seem a monstrous termagant, blowing within four walls. Then again the bellow was unnatural and was magnified fifty times because it could not escape.

The water issued from a conduit high in the wall and fell down the wall clean into a well in the floor. Inspecting this well, we found its shape that of a funnel, so that a few feet down the water's progress was restricted, and this, of course, convulsed it the more with rage. Indeed, it was not the cascade so much as the regurgitation which made so horrid a sound.

Two of the walls of this dungeon were of the living rock, but the floor was paved and was sloping towards the well.

Speech was out of the question, so we all of us stood in silence whilst I threw the light on the walls: but here there was nothing to be seen, and after a little we returned to the torture-chamber and made our way up the stair.

Without thinking, I led on to the courtyard, because, I fancy, I felt the need of the sunshine and open air: and I well remember how it seemed like some fragrant hot-house, while the splash of the water in the basin and the steady rush of the water without our gates seemed to make us a music which we had not noticed before.

“Interlude,” said Olivia. She was sitting on the rim of the basin, dabbling her fingers in its pool. “I find this peace unnatural—the calm before the storm.”

“Let it break,” said I, “and spend itself on our walls.”

215

“I propose to, my dear, because I can do nothing else. But I regret it. I love your castle, John, but I don’t like being besieged. I want to ride down that valley and fish that stream.”

“So you shall,” said I, “as soon as the danger’s past.”

“More interludes,” said Olivia. “Still, I’ll hold you to that. And I’ll help you choose a site for your stables—you can’t keep horses up here. And you must have a farm in the valley, and cows and sheep. And now I’ve got it. I know what’s troubling me. War’s out of order in such a beautiful place. I saw it once years ago, when I was a little girl. My father sent me with the chauffeur, but only as far as the bridge. And I’ve always written it down as a slice of the golden world.”

“Like to like,” said I. “You’re out of that world yourself. I wish I had seen you when you were a little girl.”

“Your future wife,” flashed Olivia.

I swallowed.

“You never thought you’d be mistress of Hohenems.”

“For a season,” added Olivia. “I admit I did not. Considering he’s a man’s man, Sarem accepts me beautifully.”

“‘Accepts’?” said I. “He’s damned proud to serve you, of course.”

Olivia laid a hand on my arm.

“Don’t deify me, John. I’m human and mortal as you are: and nothing like as patient, and—and—well, you’ve seen me rude.”

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“There’s no one like you,” I said.

“Which is absurd,” said Olivia. “Still, I’ll accept the posy because it smells so sweet. But don’t deify me.”

I glanced at the slight fingers resting upon my sleeve.

“I think we all worship you,” I said. “You heard Andrew only this morning. ‘There is no goddess but Olivia.’ You may say that he was jesting: but I know he meant what he said.”

“If Andrew likes to be foolish, that’s his affair. I don’t want worship from you. I’m not your goddess: I’m your—your neighbour . . . that you’re saving from the power of the dog.”

I put a hand to my head.

“It’s hard to explain,” I said. “I—I don’t think you know your power. I know I used the word ‘neighbour,’ but one doesn’t have neighbours like you. And I don’t deify you, Olivia—I don’t indeed. I admire you, of course—I can’t help it. None of us can. You are so very attractive, and all your ways are so sweet. But it isn’t worship we—we offer: it’s devotion. And you can’t control that, you know: if it’s there, it will out.

Andrew——”

“Speak for yourself.”

“I am,” said I. “I am speaking for myself. I am—devoted to you.”

“You’ve only known me five days.”

“That doesn’t matter at all. Before I’d known you five minutes it was the same. If you could see yourself, you’d understand. You’re rather—rather dazzling, Olivia.”

Olivia looked away.

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“I’m sorry you find me dazzling. I’d much rather you liked me, you know.”

“I like you better,” said I, “than anyone I’ve ever seen. And—
and when the game is over, I hope you’ll let me see you
sometimes and stay your friend.”

With that, I turned and left her, for I knew that my voice was unsteady, and the turn which the talk had taken was one which I could not bear.

This, I think, is easy to understand, for though I was mad about her and though each time I saw her I seemed to love her the more, I was upon my honour to hold my peace. *Court Olivia I could not, because I had made her my wife.*

When I first realized this truth, I do not know: but I think it stole slowly upon me, and I can only remember that some time

that day I seemed to lift up my eyes to see before me a very shining prospect between which and myself there was a great gulf fixed. . . .

As I went, I heard her call me, but, pretending not to have heard her, I made my way into the house, for, as I have said, I could not tread that smooth path down which, all unsuspecting, she had decided to stray.

Ten minutes later I met her again in the gallery, chin in air.

“You heard me call you,” she said.

“I know,” I said. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t come.”

“I see,” she said coldly. “Well, next time I call, be good enough to remember——”

“I shall come—if I can,” said I.

Olivia stared. Then she stepped to a sofa and took her seat on its arm.

“You do belong to the Stone Age, don’t you?” she said.

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“I suppose so,” I said grimly.

She examined her wedding-ring.

“Your crest should be a bear and a ragged staff.”

I laughed.

“The staff to you,” I said. “To beat the bear with, to make him dance.”

I saw her expression change.

“John,” she said suddenly, “come here.”

I went to her side, and she put her hands on my shoulders and looked me full in the eyes.

“I don’t want to beat my bear: I like him too well. But he mustn’t be rude to me. . . . Yesterday you said you liked being alone with me.”

“I told you the truth,” I said.

“Then why did you leave me just now, though I called you to stay?”

“To hide my feelings,” said I. “I get worried, Olivia, at the thought of your going away.”

Olivia opened her eyes.

“But ‘the power of the dog’ will be over.”

“I know. It’s very stupid. I—I expect it’ll wear off.”

“I expect so,” said Olivia thoughtfully. And then, “Tell me one thing. Just now you said something I didn’t quite understand. You said ‘I know I used the word *neighbour*.’ What did you mean?”

“I—I put it badly,” I stammered. “The Psalmist may say ‘my neighbour,’ but it’s not a very good word. I mean, it doesn’t suit you.”

“It did yesterday. You couldn’t get it out of your head.”

“The phrase as a whole was appropriate.”

Olivia nodded gravely.

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“After all, I am your neighbour,” she said. “You can’t get away from that. And your action was—neighbourly. I expect the Psalmist knew best.”

The breath I drew was charged with her perfume: beneath her touch my veins seemed to run with wine.

“I—I expect he did,” I said slowly.

Olivia rose to her feet, took her hands from my shoulders and put them behind her back.

“And now I must go to my work.”

I stood aside, and she passed to the library’s door.

With her hand on the latch she turned.

“What I said about your crest was nonsense.” Again she glanced at her ring. “I love this device, and to tell you the truth, John dear, it suits you down to the ground.”

She flung me a dazzling smile and passed out of sight.

I remember feeling something comforted. Why my crest should suit me, I could not tell—a hooded falcon, rising out of a crown. But at least it was better than a bear—a bear with a ragged staff.

I found Hubert in the old kitchen, where Stiven was scouring the floor with a stable-broom.

At my look of surprise he smiled.

“I frankly admit,” he said, “that I’m wasting time. They didn’t hang kitchens with arras, and those windows can’t have been shuttered because of the bars. But that cascade intrigues me—the one in the dungeon, I mean. I want to know why it’s there. I believe it was the water-supply of the original castle. And if I’m right, I think we shall find a flap here which we can pull up.” He stooped to tilt a bucket and send a film of water skimming over the flags. “More to your right, Stiven.”

“I take it,” said I, “that it comes from the fall outside.”

220

“Undoubtedly,” said Hubert. “But when you tap a fountain like that, you’re bound to get more than you want. So you must provide a big outlet, or else you’ll be flooded out. Hence the well in the dungeon floor. The well leads into a waste-pipe—just like the waste of a bath.” He paused to re-light his pipe. “Look at it this way. Hohenems has plenty of water, and always had. But just now we are besieged. Very well. If we had no water-supply *within* the castle, we should be forced to draw water *without* the walls. And that would be very awkward—not to say dangerous. It was every bit as awkward six hundred years ago. And so, when the castle was built—this part, I mean

—they led a pipe or conduit out of the castle fall, under this floor and into the dungeons beyond. At least, I believe they did. And if——”

“Here we are, sir,” said Stiven, triumphantly.

The man was right.

In the middle of one of the flags was a clean-cut scar, which, when we had cleaned it out, proved to be a niche or a socket in which a hook could find hold.

Half an hour went by before we could raise the flap, for this was very heavy and had not been disturbed for God knows how many years. The hook, of course, was gone, and we could discover no tool which would take its place: at last, however, we managed to prize up the slab, to expose a miniature mill-race and hear at once the bellow which we had heard in the dungeon an hour before.

“And that’s that,” said Hubert, brushing the dirt from his hands. “I’m glad to have proved my theory: but you mustn’t rate my brain-work too high. They used to have these things in kitchens: in fact, I’ve seen one before. Water-supply and refuse-shoot in one. Primitive, but very convenient.” He sighed. “A cascade in a cellar is strange. Well, we’ve got to the bottom of that. Now let’s look for some other curious feature—an unnecessarily low doorway, for instance. And when we’ve found one, we’ll try and account for that.”

221

“You weren’t wasting your time, then,” said I.

“In a sense I wasn’t,” said my cousin. “Unless and until they

can decode that cipher, we've got to depend on our wits. And as, to be perfectly honest, I don't know where to begin, I propose to go looking for problems and then try and work them out."

"You're afraid of that cipher," said I.

"I won't say that," said Hubert. "But unless you're an expert, a cipher can break your heart. And suppose there is some code-word which is hidden in Holy's brain. . . ."

I could not argue with him, for I knew no more of ciphers than the man in the moon: but I lately discussed the matter with a man who has in his time deciphered many a message hidden in code. From him I learned how great were the odds against Olivia and Palin, working without any tables or other aids: indeed, he compared them to two children seeking to cross some desert which no patrol would essay without compass and map.

Though we worked till sundown that day, the only thing we found was that the plans of the castle had served their turn. While they showed every chamber and passage—and so had helped us much—they were not true to scale, and when they had twice misled us, we put them up.

Here I should say that throughout this part of the castle the walls and floors were of stone and most of the rooms were furnished much as we judged they had been furnished some hundreds of years before: indeed, I afterwards learned that it had been our great-uncle's pleasure so far as he could to recapture their venerable style. This, though we did not then

know it, he had done with considerable skill, and the place in fact was rarer than any museum, because the collection he had made was housed in the very setting to which it truly belonged. Nearly always, however, the walls were bare. Two or three rooms were panelled, and one was hung with black arras from ceiling to floor: but in most of the others lay rolls of tapestry or hangings which I can only suppose that our great-uncle would not set up until he had found out the secret he suspected some wall might conceal.

It was, indeed, the nakedness of the walls that first made us think of sounding them with a club, and Stiven was sent for a maul and a pair of steps: but though we sounded those which were hung with the arras foot by foot, it was an unprofitable exercise because we could not interpret the sounds we drew. We, therefore, fell back on our measuring-tape and rules, taking the length of a passage and comparing with this the lengths of the rooms it served, for so we were bound to discover whether some wall or other was over-thick and so might be concealing a secret stair. Since the place was so rambling, our progress was very slow, but at least our conclusions were certain, for measurement cannot lie.

As I have said, we found nothing which we could suspect. All the same, there were certain main walls which were immensely thick, such as those of which I have spoken containing the corkscrew stairs. At the thought of these, I confess, my heart sank down, for I could not think how to prove them without fairly pulling them down, yet any one might be hiding a suite of invisible cells.

That evening, however, at dinner Palin dispelled this fear.

“You must remember,” he said, “one very important point. Dalas ‘bestowed the vestments according to his Holiness’ command.’ Well, it is in the highest degree unlikely that his Holiness commanded their bestowal in some inaccessible place. They were, of course, safely bestowed: and that means they were secretly bestowed, for the simple reason that in those exhilarating days ‘safety’ and ‘secrecy’ were synonymous terms. But of course the goods were accessible. Alec the Good was not hoarding them up for us. He proposed to come here and enjoy them as soon as ever he could. They were, therefore, easy of access—*are* easy of access to-day. We may have to pull out some bricks or lift up a slab—they used a mason then much as to-day we use a lock and key. But we shan’t have to do any mining or breach any walls. You mark my words. Once we locate the strong-box, less than half-an-hour’s labour will let us in.”

“Andrew is right,” said Olivia, looking across at me. “You and Hubert mustn’t worry: at the present moment you’re only the second string. Andrew and I are the first. *We* have got to locate the strong-box by making the breviary talk. And we shall in the end, you know: but it may take time.”

“One thing occurs to me,” said Hubert. “We have his breviary, but Father Herman must know what his share of the parchment said. He may not remember their context, but he certainly remembers any important words. He and the Count, therefore, have practically two-thirds of the clue. Now we are banking on two-thirds being sufficient to get us home: and if we can get home on two thirds—well, so can they, provided they have the chance.”

“But they won’t have the chance,” said I. “In this case possession is all ten points of the law.”

“Quite so,” said my cousin. “But don’t lose sight of one thing. What was old Uncle Nicolas doing that last day or two in the drive? He was viewing the outside of the castle. If that was a whim, well and good. But if it wasn’t—if he believed that the way to the ‘vestments’ must be taken *without* the walls . . . and if he was right . . . *and if Haydn and Harris know this . . .*”

There was a startled silence.

Then—

“Suffering cats!” cried Palin. And then, “I’m sure you’re wrong.”

“So am I,” said Hubert “—almost. But I do think that somehow to-morrow we ought to try and get into touch. Hang it, if they had watched us, we shouldn’t be here.”

There was another silence.

At length—

“I see the boy’s point,” said Palin. “I dislike its shape, but I see it. And I’m afraid it’s sound. Surprise is bad for the heart. More. Let them surprise us once, and they won’t have to do it again. An hour in possession here is as much as they need.”

“Father Herman had more,” said I.

“True, Benedict,” said Palin: “but the great probability is that when he was here he’d only his share of the clue. Besides, the swab was alone, and if there’s work to be done, I guess it’s a two-men job.” He frowned upon his champagne. “No, no. We must not be surprised. It might affect my palate—and you’ve still got twenty-two dozen of this incomparable wine. Oh, and the brandy.” He raised his eyes to heaven. “Sarem showed me the cellars this afternoon.”

I saw Hubert glance at his watch.

“Too late now,” said Palin. “If any patrol’s to go out, it must go out at dusk. But I think we can sleep sound to-night. After all, they’ve got to get going, and yesterday all but the Count had a tiring day. And I doubt if Punter has reported. In fact, if they feel they must have him, I think it more than likely they’ll have to round him up. He’s probably lying abed at some village inn.”

For all that, when dinner was done, while Olivia and Palin continued their fight with the cryptogram, Hubert and I paced to and fro on the ramparts, searching the night for the glow of a distant headlight or the sudden gleam of a torch.

At eleven my lady joined us, but Palin went to the piano and played and sang: and I shall always remember strolling there in the darkness, with my wife’s slim arm upon mine and Palin’s melody leaping against the lisp of the fall. All our surroundings were gone: Sorcerer Night had melted them into an infinite space, and we moved on a hanging terrace under a breathless heaven, sown with a million stars.

Two hours later a stammer like that of a machine-gun tore some dream I was dreaming with a violence that knew no law.

I started up in bed dazedly.

The next instant I knew the truth.

The fire-alarm was ringing like fury.

In a flash I had switched on the light and had leaped for the door.

“John.”

I turned to see Olivia, barefoot, holding her dressing-gown about her, her beautiful hair all tumbled about her face.

“You can’t fight without shoes on, my dear. You’ll only have to come back.”

She was right, of course. If trouble was coming, I must be more or less clothed.

“Under the window,” I cried. “A rubber-soled pair.”

I turned to a drawer, whipped out a pair of trousers and dragged them on to my legs. Before I could button them up she had set some shoes by my feet.

“Your pistol and torch—where are they?”

I told her, and, when I was ready, she gave them into my hand.

“Go back to bed, I beg you,” was all I had time to say . . .

Though the landing was dim, lights were blazing on the staircase and down in the hall below. My cousin’s door was open; as I reached the head of the staircase I glanced behind to see Palin fling out of his room. All the time the alarm was

pealing, drowning all other sounds in its distracting din.

Hubert was shouting in English.

“Stop that gong, for God’s sake: and send the sentry to me.”

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Behind me, with the roar of a bull, Palin translated his words.

As I entered the gallery the deafening clamour ceased, to be succeeded by the unmistakable sound of a heavy blow upon wood.

“The postern!” cried Hubert. “You two go that way and I’ll go this.”

As we ran the way we had come I heard Palin talking to himself.

“No rehearsal: no orders: no nothing. It serves us damned well right.”

I shall never forget the scene in the long stone passage which gave to the postern door. The way along which we had stolen three nights before was now alive with servants variously armed. Pistol in hand, Stiven and the sentry stood on either side of the door of the room by which we had entered, from which was coming the sound of splintering wood. Beyond Stiven was crouching Sarem, with one hand grasping a shot-gun and the other outstretched as though to enjoin the indignant posse behind him to bide its time.

As we came up, Hubert thrust his way through the press.

“Ask the sentry what happened, Andrew.”

The man had been on the ramparts and, looking over the battlements before he withdrew had seen the flash of a torch on the postern steps. At once he had run and sounded the fire-alarm.

“This may be a feint,” said my cousin. “John, you and Andrew get back to the other side. Take five of these fellows with you and post them as you think best. Andrew, tell this sentry to make his way up to my room. He’s to turn out the light and watch the ramparts from there. If he sees anyone, he’s to fire.”

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After a moment’s discussion our plans were laid.

I took two men and the sentry and ran the way I had come, while Palin took three and ran the way we had taken three nights before. I was to make for the gate-house, posting my men as I went, while he was for the servants’ quarters upon the opposite side. So we could command the courtyard if any attempt should be made to enter from there.

But neither of us was destined to gain the advantage he sought.

As I parted the heavy curtains which Father Herman had parted two nights before, I had the shock of my life.

The hall and the staircase were in darkness, and the front door stood wide open, admitting the cool night air.

For a moment I stared blankly. Then I saw the unsavoury truth.

We had indeed been caught napping. The attack on the postern was a feint, and the enemy was in.

I can never describe the anguish of being unable at this juncture to make myself understood.

Olivia was alone and unprotected; for all I knew, the enemy was up in her room. Yet, because I could speak no German I could not send word to Hubert, but must myself return to tell him the truth.

I turned and ran like a madman the way I had come . . .

My cousin should have been a soldier.

Before I had finished speaking, his plans were made.

230

“Up the back stairs, John, to Olivia’s room. Stiven, to Mr. Palin and tell him all you know. Bring him to me by way of the gallery. I shall be in the hall at the foot of the stairs.”

That was as much as I heard, and twenty seconds later I was once more on the landing which served the four bedrooms we used. This was dimly lighted as when I had seen it last, and, though the others were open, Olivia’s door was shut.

I went to it straight, and knocked.

“Olivia,” I said, “it’s me.”

When she did not answer, I tried to open the door, but this was fast, so I entered her room by mine.

Again I called her—in vain. And when I had found a switch I saw that she was not there.

Trembling with anxiety, I ran to the head of the stairs.

“Olivia!” I cried. “Olivia!”

As her name passed my lips a streak of flame leaped out of the black of the hall and the deafening roar of a pistol drowned Hubert’s warning cry.

The bullet must have gone wide for I never so much as heard it, but I had the sense to fling myself on my face. As I did so, a second roar suggested that Hubert was returning the enemy’s fire.

Half-mad with apprehension, I tried to think what to do.

The enemy was at large in the castle and Olivia was not in her room. At the best that meant that she was in instant peril: at the worst that she was already in the enemy’s hands. What had happened was hideously clear. She had not gone to her bed, as I had desired; instead, she had left her chamber and had followed us down the grand staircase to see and hear what she could, and if, before she had got there, the lights had gone out she might very well have walked clean into the enemy’s arms.

231

My hair rose upon my head and I found myself murmuring something under my breath.

My darling from the power of the dog.

It occurred to me suddenly that the enemy was now in the older part of the castle. That, of course, had been his objective, for there, without any doubt, the treasure was hid. As though to confirm this conclusion, his fire had come from the passage which led that way.

Blessing the hours I had spent in learning my way about there, I began to crawl past the staircase towards the curtained archway which gave to the older building from the head of the stairs.

The next moment I was past the curtains and was treading the three stone steps . . .

Now two things must be remembered. First, in this part of the castle all the floors were of stone, and a man that was shod as I was could move as a cat; but, secondly, as though to balance this advantage, the sound of the fall without the castle was here just loud enough to embarrass the ear.

I did not believe that the thieves were upon the first floor, but though I could have gone down by more than one stair, it seemed best to go the length of the building and then descend, for so there was just a chance that I might take them in rear.

I, therefore, moved boldly forward, not daring to use my torch, but touching the wall with my hand and counting the doorways as I went. So, thanks to my labour that day, I knew very well where I was, and, one minute later, I was standing at the head of a stairway by the side of the main west wall.

The rush of the fall, now but some eight feet away, was here

inconveniently loud, but this could not be helped and, using the greatest caution, I began to go down the stair. This was stone and spiral, and was made of eleven steps, and, before I was halfway down, I could see the glow of a torch.

On the last step but one I rested, straining my ears, and wondering whether to put out my head would be madness, for with sight and hearing denied me I could do nothing at all.

Then suddenly Punter spoke.

“It’s no good you gnashin’ your teeth: if you have to have a thick ear you’re not goin’ into that room.”

“Vengeance is mine,” mouthed Father Herman.

“And there you’re wrong,” said Punter. “I don’t care what she’s done; as long as we’ve got her tight we hold a hell of a hand, and if you can’t see that——”

“She is my niece,” said Father Herman.

“And our little bit,” said Punter. “Harris won her, you know. Not you.”

With his words I heard steps approaching: and then came Harris’ voice.

“The girl all right?”

“You bet,” said Punter. “But Holy’s a naughty boy. Give him his way, I believe he’d do her in.”

“She is a traitress,” hissed the priest.

“She’s my affair,” said Harris. “And now let’s see what you know. Where’s this wall you spoke of that’s got to come down?”

“I await my servants,” said the priest.

“The drawbridge is down,” said Harris. “If they don’t want to walk in that’s not my fault. I guess they’re scared of the firing. And now come on.”

233

“I regret,” said Father Herman. “When my servants arrive I will lead you the way you seek.”

So pregnant was the silence which succeeded his words that even I could perceive the state of the game.

The entrance had been effected by Harris’ gang. They had, no doubt, entered the courtyard by way of the coach-house roof; then, while we were deceived by the feint at the postern-gate, one had entered the servants’ quarters, passed through the gallery, opened the front door and admitted his fellows to the hall. With these had entered the priest, who was to reveal the spot where the ‘vestments’ lay.

But Haydn did not trust Harris, and Haydn was not a fool . . .

In the drive without the castle stood Haydn’s men. And not until these had been admitted, to back him up, would Father Herman reveal the secret he knew. *And these had not been admitted.* Of that I was sure. Harris was lying when he said that the drawbridge was down. He had never meant to admit them. He

did not mean to admit them, because they would spoil his game—which was to seize the treasure in Haydn’s teeth and then withdraw with his party by the way they had come. And Father Herman knew this . . . The thieves had fallen out.

As yet, the capture of Olivia did not affect the case. Only if the priest would not speak would Harris play against us the trump which he had picked up.

When the fellow spoke again he seemed to be striving to keep his voice under control.

“I’ll be honest with you,” he said. “Your men are in the courtyard: but the squirts are holding the hall so they can’t get into the house. If I was there to lead them I’d —— soon have them in, but they’re not used to shooting and they’re staying out of the wet.”

234

“Let them enter by the window,” said the priest.

“And who’s to show ’em?” flashed Harris. “Who’s going to cross that hall and get a hole in his guts?”

“Mount this stair,” said the other, “and the passage above it will take you the length of the house. So you can go and return without——”

“I’m not your —— lackey, and I didn’t come here to-night to play hide-and-seek.”

“My friend,” said the priest—I could see his uplifted hands —“be calm. A house divided against itself falleth. When my servants arrive to assist us——”

“You —— sinner,” spat Harris, “don’t prate to me. For forty years you’ve been squatting outside this fort, and now I’ve opened the door and handed you in. And now, by God, it’s your turn. Spill your brains here and now, or I drop my end of the cord. I’ve got the girl, and she’s good enough for me. But don’t think you’re in on that deal. If I quit to-night without the goods, I leave you here.”

Now all the time they had been speaking I had been trying as well to listen as to decide what to do. Had it been day I would have gone down and shot Harris at point-blank range, but now the torch had been extinguished, and I was afraid of failing to kill my man. And if I tried, but failed, he would most surely kill me, and then Olivia was lost, for I alone knew that she was captive and where she was.

Thanks to our work that day, I knew the style of the chamber in which she was now confined. If my great-uncle’s judgment was good, it had been the dining-hall, for as such it was sparsely furnished with two tables running lengthwise and another running breadthwise and set on a little dais. This one was served by four or five massive stalls, but the others were flanked by benches or not at all.

235

I made up my mind that I must enter this room—if possible, unobserved, for so alone could I stand between my darling and Harris, to say nothing of Father Herman, who, though I could scarce believe it, would actually offer her violence if only he had the chance. More. I must enter at once, without any further delay, for Hubert or Palin might any moment arrive by the way I had come, and when Harris knew himself surrounded he would instantly join his captive to place himself in a position

to make his infamous terms.

Now Harris and his companions were standing some three or four paces from the foot of the spiral stair, for that was the distance of the door of the room I sought. I, therefore, drew my pistol and stepped out into the passage with infinite care. At this moment no one was speaking, so that I had nothing to aim at—not even the sound of a voice, but as fast as I could press trigger, I fired three times at a venture into the dark.

I believe that they ran for cover like so many hares, but to this I cannot swear, for the roar of my pistol not only covered all sounds but left me half deaf myself for a quarter of an hour. Indeed, for all I knew, I might have butchered the three, but with that I was not concerned, for my one idea was to enter the dining-hall, and, before the echoes had faded, I flung myself at the door.

For a moment I fumbled for the latch . . . And then I was in and had my back to the oak.

236

“Olivia,” I cried.

I heard a sigh of relief.

“Are you all right, Olivia?”

“Yes, I’m all right. I——I might have cost you your life.”

“Where are you?” I used my torch. “Take this, my dear, and light me. We haven’t a second to lose. I’m going to get one of these tables against the door.”

As she took the torch—

“You’ll never be able,” cried Olivia. “I tried to move one of the benches, but I couldn’t get it along.”

She was right. When I sought to move a table it might have been clamped to the floor.

Frantically I stooped to a bench, and, as I picked it up, the light of the torch went out.

Before I had time to exclaim, Olivia had gripped my wrist, and I knew she had perceived some danger of which I was not aware.

I afterwards learned that she heard the clack of the latch, which, because they still were singing, my ears had missed, but, as I stood there, still as death, with her fingers about my wrist and the heavy bench in my hands, the door of the room was shut.

The shock of that sound will stay with me so long as I live. That the door of the room had been opened had never entered my head. I supposed she had heard some sound in the passage without. I was ready for the door to be opened, but not for it to be shut. The peril I had thought was approaching had passed me before I knew.

There was nothing to be done but stand still and make no sound. I could not draw my pistol because of the bench in my hands, and I could not set down the bench because the sound would give our position away. Had I been alone . . .

Suddenly, out in the passage, a volley was fired.

Then I heard Hubert's voice.

“Come on. The passage is clear.”

Then the indistinct sound of footsteps showed that this part of the castle was being ‘combed.’ Palin, no doubt, was still commanding the hall.

My cousin lifted his voice.

“John!” he cried. “John, where are you?”

It was plain that he was standing directly without the door. He and his men with him. And I, six paces away—I dared not reply.

With all my might I willed him to enter the room . . .

After a long moment—

“Post a man here,” said my cousin, “and tell him to watch these doors. If one of them moves, he’s to fire.”

“Very good, sir,” said Stiven’s voice.

“The rest come on.”

With a sinking heart I listened to the tramp of the feet . . .

That the man beside us was Harris, I had no doubt. Confounded though he was for the moment by my attack, he would never

have allowed Father Herman to have his way with his prize. Besides, he would have been the first to recover his wits. He knew, of course, that I was within the room. Had he not guessed it before, Hubert's words had told him that I was there.

The weight of the bench I was holding was beginning to make itself felt. Besides, I was not holding it square. I had picked it up to carry, but not to hold. Sooner or later I should have to set it down on the floor. And when I did, Harris would fire at the sound. And Olivia's fingers were always about my wrist . . .

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I dared not tell her to leave me. Could I have found her ear, I do not think my whisper would have been heard. But, even if she obeyed me, Harris might hear her movement and think it mine. He had no desire, of course, to fire upon her, but I had to be put out of action, and the lady must take her chance.

There was nothing to be done but to stand still and wait upon Harris and to pray that he would move before I could bear no longer the weight of the bench. But the strain upon the nerves were dreadful, and, but for the touch of Olivia, whose hand was as steady as when we were being wed, I do not believe I could have stood it, but must have launched myself at where I thought Harris stood. Instead, I tried to think of the duels that used to be fought in darkened rooms and how, as I have heard tell, the victory always went to him that could the longer possess his soul.

Perhaps two minutes went by, but none of us moved.

My shoulders and arms and fingers were aching cruelly

beneath the weight of the bench. Hold it much longer I could not, whatever befell. My tired muscles were yielding; very soon the dead weight would beat them and slip from my frantic fingers and crash to the floor.

It occurred to me that the dice were loaded against us. Had I not been so encumbered I could have stood like a statue for half an hour. Or, had Harris entered a moment sooner, or later

Olivia's fingers tightened, and I strained my eyes and ears as never before.

Harris was moving—I could hear him. I judged him four paces away. He was stealing very slowly towards us. Unless he changed his direction he would almost certainly touch us before thirty seconds were out.

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For an instant my brain zigzagged. Then, very slowly, I swung my bench to the left. When I could swing it no further I paused—for a moment of time. Then I brought it round like a scythe, waist-high, with all my might.

I struck the man's hand, or his pistol—I know not which, but, certain it is that the weapon fell to the ground. As it fell it went off and at once I dropped my bench and flung myself at his throat.

Till that moment I never knew that Harris was down on the ground, for the sound of his fall had been masked by the pistol's roar, so my hands encountered nothing, but I stumbled over his body and fell myself.

The door was open, and Olivia was shrieking ‘Hubert!’ and crying orders in German which I could not understand. Harris was cursing and his torch was sweeping the floor. As its beam fell upon his pistol I caught his legs and brought him down with a crash, but though his torch went flying he kicked me off and, before I could draw, he was up and had leaped for the door. Men were running in the passage and my cousin was shouting to Olivia, and she was still calling his name. Harris met someone in the doorway and knocked him down, but the shock of the encounter checked him and I caught the hem of his coat. And then the coat was dangling, and I heard his foot on the stair down which I had come.

Olivia tried to stop me, but I flung myself in pursuit.

As I tore up the stair behind him, I heard Olivia shrieking “The stair on the left!” and I knew that my cousin was behind me with some of our men. Remembering Stiven’s mistake, I did not fire, but I made up my mind to catch Harris before he could gain the archway at the head of the principal stairs.

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As we ran, I heard firing ahead and then Palin’s voice shouting German, as I thought, demanding the truth, but Harris never faltered, but ran like the wind. An instant later I saw the thin bar of light which was lying beneath the curtains which gave to the landing beyond. As Harris dived between these I grasped his shirt, but he dragged me on to the landing, do what I would. Then, in a flash, he turned and struck at my chin, but I jerked my head to one side and he missed his aim. As I seized him he swung me about and plunged for the stairs.

Had I not bent my head forward I must have broken my neck, for we crashed down the flight together, and his body was full upon mine. As it was, I was no more than bruised and was just as fit as before to tackle my man.

The hall was yet in darkness, and since the stair-carpet was thick, the noise which we were making might have been that of one man that had missed his footing and taken a headlong fall.

Palin's challenge rang out.

"Who's that? Speak, or I fire."

"John," I yelled. "I've got Harris."

From that moment all was confusion.

Men were all about us. Somebody tore me from Harris and struck me across the mouth. The great light in the hall was switched on, but I saw Punter fire at the lantern and put it out. A torch was flashed on and off, and people were treading the steps. Then Palin roared some order in German, caught me in the hug of a bear and crushed me against the wall.

"Stop!" I yelled. "Andrew, it's me!"

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"God in heaven!" howled Palin, and let me go. "Where's Harris?"

I did not wait to answer, but darted out of the castle and down the steps. A flash came out of the darkness, and a bullet struck the ground at my feet, but all my thoughts were of Harris and how to prevent his escape. I ran across the courtyard and down

past the coach-house doors, and, as I pulled out my pistol, I brushed against a rope-ladder which was hanging against the wall . . .

In a flash I saw that if this ladder were gone we should have the enemy trapped as beasts in a pound, and, since I could not pull it down, I began to go up its rungs as fast as I could.

If my purpose was good I made one bad mistake. I should have taken with me the bottom rung. In that way I should have drawn up the ladder as fast as I went myself and, before I was ten feet high, my object would have been won. As it was, I set out to gain the ridge-pole and then pull the ladder up, but I might have known that before I had time to do this one or more of the rogues would have begun to ascend.

And so it fell out.

As I reached the slates the ladder tightened beneath me and someone began to climb up as fast as he could.

There was only one thing to be done.

I scrambled the last few feet, flung myself over the ridge-pole and, drawing my pistol, fired at the place at which the man's head would appear.

As though by magic the convulsions of the ladder stopped dead.

I kneeled up and lifted my voice.

“Hubert,” I roared, “we’ve got them. Call upon them to

surrender. And if they don't, open fire on——”

And that was as far as I got, for there I received such a blow on the side of my head as fairly sent me flying on to the slates, down which I half rolled and half slid towards the mountain side.

Of course I let go my pistol in the hope of saving myself, but I could obtain no handhold, and my fingers and my body went slipping where my rubber soles would have held. Indeed, in that moment I gave myself up for lost, for the eaves hung fifteen feet from the ground below and there were here no bushes to break my fall.

It was the gutter that saved me, though how I contrived to cling there I do not know, for I had, of course, no chance to dispose my limbs, but, when it checked me, I turned the check into a lodgment and lay there afraid to breathe. I had come to rest on my face at full length on the narrow ledge, with one arm bracing my body away from the brink and my left knee strained against some object which I presently guessed to be my pistol, which had come to the gutter first.

And whilst I lay there, sweating and wondering whether the gutter would stand the strain, I had the mortification of hearing the rogues escape.

My assailant, I learned, was Bugle, for I heard him tell Harris how he had struck me down.

“He's made no sound,” he said. “As like as not, he's broken his —— neck.”

“Please God he hasn’t,” said Harris. “I want to do that myself.”

With that, he let out a flood of the foulest abuse, calling me every name to which he could lay his tongue, for while, he made out, Father Herman had ‘let him down,’ I had ‘run between his legs’ and upset him when he was upon the point of saving the game.

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“I had the ——,” he spouted. “We hadn’t been in one minute when I had her tight in my arms. And if I hadn’t trusted that black-gutted son of slush, we’d have been a mile off by now —*and her with us . . .* and them still searching the castle and calling her —— name.”

This horrid apodosis made my blood run cold and seemed to me to warrant the curious apprehension I had felt for Olivia Haydn before she became my wife. As for Harris, I never shall understand how so far-seeing a blackguard could have made so bad a mistake, for had he withdrawn with Olivia when she had run into his arms, the game was his.

“Where’s Holy?” said Harris suddenly.

“Gone down by the tree,” said Bugle. “Trust him. He’ll never get left.”

“See he don’t hop it,” said Harris. “He’s got ideas.”

I can only suppose that he meant that the priest must have seen, as I had, that the drawbridge was up, and so must be well aware that Harris had been playing him false, and that these ‘ideas’ might suggest to him the wisdom of withdrawing from an alliance which threatened, from his point of view, to defeat

its aim.

As Bugle followed the priest I heard the rope-ladder go slipping and sliding down, and after two or three minutes somebody moved below me by the side of the wall.

“He’s gone,” said Bugle. “Just here it was he fell off, an’ _____”

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“What’s that?” snarled Harris, approaching. “Who says he’s gone?”

“Well, he’s not here,” said Bugle. “I wiped him off of the roof and let him lie. He must have the lives of a cat if——”

“Search round,” snapped Harris. “He’s hurt and he’s crawled away. Where’s that torch of yours, Punter?”

“Shot out of me ’and,” said Punter.

This most unlikely report sent Harris half out of his mind, for it seemed they had only two torches and I had made Harris drop his. Punter was savagely rent for a lying hound and he and Bugle were sent to scour the surroundings of the scene of my fall.

“He can’t be far,” said Harris. “Are you certain sure that he fell?”

I knew he was looking up, peering, and I felt he must see my body outlined against the sky.

“Every time,” said Bugle. “I tell you, I wiped——”

“Where’s that —— Holy?” cried Harris. “Don’t say you’ve let him go.”

“You called me,” protested Bugle. “You told me——”

The explosion his words provoked was truly awful. I had never conceived such blasphemies as streamed from his master’s mouth, and, of my simplicity, I never would have believed that a man could so deeply provoke his Maker, yet not be struck down. Had this not sobered me I think I must have laughed, for the scene was comic enough, and I, in a sense, was enjoying a seat in the stalls. Here were the three of them searching for something which was not there and, in their zeal, mislaying that which they had. All this in impenetrable darkness, among the great roots of trees, over which they continually stumbled and more than once fell.

It was to the loss of ‘Holy’ that I finally owed my escape, for Harris decided forthwith that he must be overtaken before he could get to the cars, and the three set off down the mountain in about as vile a humour as can be conceived—Harris ripe for murder, because his designs had failed, Punter and Bugle smarting because Harris was venting on them a fury they had not aroused, and all of them loathing the prospect of trying to hasten by night over ground which, a week ago, they would no more have thought of essaying than boiling oil.

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As their curses faded, I heard a step on the roof . . .

“Is that you, Hubert?” I said.

When he heard I was safe and sound, my cousin sent word to

Olivia and then sat down on the slates. When I told him how best to assist me, he lighted a cigarette. And when I protested that I had been hanging in jeopardy long enough, he observed that he was concerned less for the health of my body than for that of my soul.

With that, he spoke of the folly of doing what I had done, of how I had embarrassed my party, for, because I was with the thieves, Palin and he had been forced to withhold their fire and, lastly, of Olivia's anxiety on my behalf.

“For my part,” he concluded, “you would have died unwept: when people get what they ask for it leaves me cold. But Olivia's more forgiving, and if you'd seen the look in her eyes when I said the courtyard was empty—well, I'm pretty tough, but I know that it tore my heart.”

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Then he got to his feet and called Stiven, and the two of them dragged me up.

Warm with the liquor which, while I was telling my story, Palin had made me drink, I stole upstairs to my room, determined not to wake Olivia, who had returned to bed.

As I closed the door behind me—

“*Madame* would speak with *Monsieur*,” said Gertrude's voice.

Then she stood to one side and held open the door which gave to Olivia's room.

Olivia was sitting up in bed, with a cup of tea in her hand.

“Sit down, John,” she said, smiling, and pointed to a chair by her side. “And now please tell me what happened. You went up the stair after Harris—that’s all I know.” Before I could speak, she handed Gertrude her cup. “That’ll do, Gertrude, thank you. Call me at nine.”

When the maid had withdrawn, I told what there was to tell.

“I’m very sorry,” I finished. “I was so mad with Harris, I didn’t stop to think. I’m afraid—Hubert said you looked worried.”

“He looked pretty worried himself.”

“He didn’t sound very worried. I hope you haven’t caught cold. Your hand was like ice.”

“If I have, it’s my fault,” said Olivia. She laid back her head and smiled. “John, my dear, I can’t blame you, because I’m to blame myself. You told me to go back to bed, but that was too much to ask. I did wait for a while on the landing: then, when the lights went out, I went to the head of the stairs. The front door was open then, and Harris must have seen me, although, of course, I couldn’t see him. Though I never heard him, he must have come up the stairs, for the first I knew was that I was in his arms and his hand was upon my mouth.” She shuddered at the memory, and I felt the blood of anger come into my face. “The rest you can guess. He carried me down the stairs and the length of the passage below. Then he put me into that room and shut the door. He never addressed me once, but when Uncle Herman said something he laughed in

his face.

“‘Finding’s keeping,’ he said: and that was all.

“Of course, I was helpless. I didn’t dare cry out, for that would have brought you pelting into their net. And Harris had posted Punter outside the door. I knew when you found I was gone you’d do what you could, but I couldn’t see what you could do, for I was in ‘the power of the dog.’ And then you—got me out, John.”

“He should never have left you,” I said. “He went on when he should have stood still. You see, he’d a winning hand. He’d picked up a queen.”

Olivia laughed delightedly.

“Why, John,” she said, “I thought you belonged to the Stone Age. But primitive men don’t say pretty things like that.”

I got to my feet.

“Primitive men,” said I, “don’t have pretty neighbours like you. I tell you truly, Olivia, I’m ready to dance and sing. The thought that you’re lying there safe . . .”

She put out a little hand, and I took it in both of mine and went down on my knees.

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“Oh, Olivia,” I cried, “I’m so very thankful, my dear.”

“So am I, John. When—when they told me you weren’t in the courtyard, I never thought I’d see you again.”

Hubert's words came into my mind.

'If you'd seen the look in her eyes . . .'

After all, it was natural enough. We were very good friends, and I had that moment saved her 'from the power of the dog.'

I put her hand to my lips. Then I rose and stepped to the door by which Gertrude had left.

"I'm going to lock this," I said, "or I shan't be able to sleep. And please may I leave our door open—the door between our two rooms? After to-night, I feel I want you under my hand."

"Yes," said Olivia, quietly. "Why were you 'so mad with Harris?'"

Her question was unexpected. When I asked myself the answer, I found that it was an answer I could not make.

"I think," I said slowly, "because he'd picked up my queen."

I knew that her eyes were upon me, although she did not reply: but my words had unleashed emotions which I was bound to restrain, and though I had looked forward to looking once more upon her before I bade her good-night, I passed instead to the doorway between our rooms.

"Good-night, Olivia," I said. And then, "Sleep well."

"You, too, John," she said gently.

Before I was back in my bed her light was out.

I confess that I dreamed of her. Had I not done so I must have been of the Stone Age stony indeed. I dreamed that she stooped and kissed me, and when I started up, glowing, to find it was only a dream, I fancied I could smell her perfume; such is the power of love.

From that time on we slept with sentries doubled, and Hubert or Stiven or I was always on guard by day, but though we were all persuaded that we had not done with the rogues, they gave us no sign of their existence either by day or by night. While this made my cousin uneasy, I could not share his alarm, for unless Harris fell from the clouds he could not now surprise us, and his words with the priest had convinced me that the way to the ‘vestments’ must be taken within our walls.

Palin agreed with me and more than once insisted that the worst of the danger was past.

“I believe,” said he, “that Harris and Haydn have split. I believe they split that night when Holy saw that Harris was letting him down. I mean, would you go on with such a partner?”

“He can’t do without him,” said Hubert. “Besides, he knew what to expect. That’s why he had his men there. He knew that Harris would let him down if he could—just as he would let Harris down if Harris gave him the chance. Partnerships like that have always an unwritten clause. I mean, it isn’t worth writing: it’s mutually understood. ‘Each party will lose no opportunity of doing the other down.’”

“D’you think he knew the secret?” said Palin.

“Yes,” said I. “From what I heard I firmly believe that he did. And I think the strong-box is close to the dining-

hall. Why else should they have gone there? They were going to jump off from that passage—from that end of that passage. And if Harris had let down the drawbridge, they'd have had the 'vestments' that night."

"I quite think they would," said Hubert, and wiped the sweat from his face. "It was a damned near thing. And that's why I'm so uneasy. I'll swear they're doing something, and I want to know what it is."

There was a little silence.

The sleepy afternoon sunshine was flooding the old courtyard: somewhere a wood-pigeon was calling, and a servant about his business was singing over his work: asprawl on the roof of the coach-house, Stiven was watching the foliage that hung like some gorgeous arras upon the mountain side: the tinkle of the fountain in the basin and the steady lisp of the fall argued the virtue of idleness and freedom from care.

"Let ill alone," murmured Palin.

"So I will," said my cousin—"for twenty-four hours. If nothing has happened by then, I'm going out on patrol."

Five days had gone by since the attack upon the castle, and we had already fallen into regular ways. The cipher was still unsolved. Olivia and Palin fought with it all the morning and again between five and eight: during their hours of labour Hubert and I played watchman or strove by more direct action to discover where the 'vestments' were hid. After luncheon and dinner we all of us took our ease, using the courtyard by day and the ramparts when it was dark; for

Olivia's sake, as for mine, I treasured these pleasant hours, for she was not meant for study, and the sight of her bending to her table and frowning over her pages of letters and words made me think of a bright-eyed squirrel that should be swinging from branches and leaping on dewy lawns, but climbs a wheel for his living behind the bars of a cage. But, though she was a prisoner and the labour she did was unnatural and tedious beyond all words, she never once complained, but kept all our eyes upon the future and the day when the old Pope's secret should be revealed.

As for the cipher, I have here nothing to say, but Hubert and I at least had something to go on—that is to say, the sentence which I had heard Harris speak.

‘Where's this wall you spoke of, that's got to come down?’

There might, of course, be no wall that had to come down. Father Herman might well have been lying, because he distrusted Harris and had no mind to give him the ghost of a clue. But to that possibility we deliberately shut our eyes, for, though the hint might be false, it was all we had.

Wall after wall we proved—and proved in vain. The labour was very severe, for although we had hammers and chisels of excellent steel, the castle might have been built to resist our onslaught and it took us all we knew to cut a stone from its course. What troubled us most was that we could find no wall which could have been quickly pulled down. If the priest had told Harris the truth, the ‘vestments’ had been immured. One would, therefore, have expected some wall in which the layers of mortar were finger-thick, or in which there

was at least one stone that could be swiftly extracted, so that a breach could be made: the priest himself must have expected such a wall, for else the thieves could never have reached the treasure and carried it off that night. But no such wall existed. All the masonry was flawless: all the stones had been cut to measure, and nowhere appeared between them more than a film of cement.

At dusk on a Wednesday evening Hubert and Stiven went forth to find out what they could.

They did not come in until dawn, but though in those hours they covered a great deal of ground, they had nothing at all to report, except that a tree was down across the road of approach.

“There you are,” said Palin. “What did the wise man say? Are you satisfied now?”

“I’m still more uneasy,” said Hubert. “And that’s the truth.”

So was Olivia. I saw as much in her eyes.

I began to wonder whether there could be some menace—some wave which we could not see, which was all the time rising and swelling and would presently tower above us to break with a roar of havoc about our ears.

“Ugh,” said Andrew Palin. “You make me tired. I said they were doing nothing because there was nothing to be done, and now, on your own confession, you’ve proved the truth of my words. You’ve crawled about this homestead, marked well her bulwarks and told the towers thereof. You’ve crept up the

postern steps and down the road of approach. And you've seen nothing—not even a reed shaken with the wind. Do you suggest that they're tunnelling? Driving a shaft from Haydn under the ground?" He made a short calculation. "If they moved six feet a day, it'd take them a hundred years. And I can't see Punter really trying at a job like that."

Olivia and I began to shake with laughter.

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"I admit all you say," said my cousin. "I can offer no explanation of any kind. All the facts are against me. And yet I cannot believe that Harris and Father Herman have thrown in their hand. That, to my mind, is unthinkable. If I'm right, they're taking action . . .

"Now they know that any day we may find the key to the cipher—and once we've read the cipher, we've got the goods. Any action they may take is, therefore, as good as useless, unless it's swift. Very well. If I'm right, they are taking swift action—and I want to know what it is."

Palin lighted a cigar with infinite care.

"This cipher business," he said. "We haven't said much about it, because out of office hours we try to forget. But now we've both agreed that I shall tell you the truth.

"The result which Olivia and I are endeavouring to achieve demands a mental energy which tends to unhinge the mind that puts it forth. I'll tell you why. In the first place, we devote rather more than six hours a day to the arrangement, disarrangement and rearrangement of the alphabet—an exercise which is beneath the intelligence of a child of eight. Secondly,

there are so many million combinations of letters which may or may not be the one which we require that each time we start in to test a new one, the operation is not dignified by that spirit of excited hopefulness which means so much. Finally, it is impossible entirely to lose sight of the fact that if somebody bet me an even pony that we shan't have found out the cipher in six months' time, I wouldn't take him.

“Now this doesn't mean that we're not going to go straight on, because we are—until, of course, we go mad. But we've both of us come to the conclusion that if after one more week we've not got the swine by the throat, someone must go to London and get us some books. There must be some books on ciphers—some tables published that would save us no end of work. And, in any event, I know a man in the Navy who'll give us some good advice.”

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“You see,” said Olivia, “there's a code-word. We're certain of that. Some ordinary household word, like ‘horseman,’ or ‘liberty’—for all we know, it may be the name of a place—which will unlock the cipher the moment it's found. And what we want to know is how to test the cipher, so that we can eliminate certain classes of words. I mean, there must be some way. Code-words *are* discovered, and they aren't discovered by chance.”

“A week,” said my cousin, thoughtfully. “You know, you're very patient. If the enemy doesn't show up, to-morrow evening I'm going out again.”

And so he did. And Stiven and I with him.

Hubert stepped to a window and glanced at the failing light.

“Any time, now,” he murmured. “I think we might get on our things.”

A fine rain was falling: the weather had broken only the night before. This was provoking: a patrol can get very wet, and we proposed to be out for thirty-six hours.

I rose from the table and entered the gallery.

As I took up my raincoat—

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“No stunts,” said Palin. “You give me your solemn word. No running after Harris, to bite his neck.”

“I promise,” I said. “Where’s Olivia?”

“In the library, I fancy.”

I was making my way to the door when I missed my torch. This should have been in the pocket of my raincoat, but I had, it seemed, left it upstairs. All the same, I could have sworn . . .

I should have been wrong.

Directly I entered my bedroom, I saw the torch by my bed.

As I snatched it up there was a movement, and I looked up to see Olivia with her back to the jamb of the doorway between our rooms.

She was paler than I had seen her, and she seemed to be

drooping a little, as will a flower droop at noon.

“Are you going now?”

“In a minute,” said I. “But you—you don’t look yourself.”

“I’m tired,” she said. “When you’ve gone I’m going to lie down.”

I frowned.

“Hans will sleep on the landing,” I said: “and you’re going to lock both doors.” She nodded. “You’re sure you’re all right, Olivia?”

“Sure,” she said. “Only tired. I—I wish I had something to give you, to bring you luck.”

Her tone was fretful. Had I not known her better, I should have said that she was not far from tears.

I went to her quickly, and she gave her hand into mine.

“You’re very sweet, Olivia. If you want to give me something . . .”

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“Yes?”

“That night on the mountain . . . just at the last . . .”

“Yes?”

“I stooped to kiss your hand, and I thought that you touched my

hair.” I bent my head. “If you want to give me something, will you touch it again?”

“Oh, my dear . . .”

I looked up sharply. Her lashes were wet with tears.

“Olivia,” I cried. “What is it? Why——”

She put up her arms and took my face in her hands.

“Come back safe, John,” she whispered, and put up her beautiful mouth.

As a man in a dream, I stooped and kissed her lips.

The patrol on which we set out on that Friday evening was to be much more far-reaching than that of two nights before: and, as I have said, not until dawn on Sunday did we expect to come in.

Our plan was to compass the castle, keeping to the foot of the walls, to explore the postern steps and then to come up by the fall to the road of approach. Once there, we should leave the castle and make our way by road to the farm where the Rolls was lodged. This meant a journey on foot of some thirteen miles, but we reckoned that if all went well, we should reach the farm before the daylight came in. There we proposed to breakfast and rest for an hour, and then we should take the car and drive directly to Haydn or, at least, as near as we dared. Having found some thicket in which to bestow the Rolls, we should then settle down to watch Haydn—if need be,

the whole of that day, in the hope of learning something of what was afoot. If my cousin's contention was good and the enemy was at work, it was likely that some time that day he would leave Haydn by car for the scene of the operation on which he was now engaged. If he did so leave Haydn we should immediately follow and let him lead us up to the place he sought. This might be a lawyer's office, or it might be the mouth of a shaft, but, whatever it was, we were sure it would speak for itself and would give us at least some idea of how the rogues were proposing to bring us down. That night we should return to the farm, put the Rolls back in her barn and then go over the mountain and so to Hohenems. If nobody were to leave Haydn, our plan must fail; but I think that it was a good plan and would have done no dishonour to the crafty Odysseus himself. I need hardly say that it came out of Hubert's head.

Soon after midnight we gained the road of approach.

Our circuit of the castle had taught us nothing at all: if one of the gang was there, we saw no sign of him. Our state, however, was piteous. The night, though wet, was warm, and, because of the raincoats we wore, our shirts and even our jackets were drenched with sweat: because of the rain, the going was worse than ever, and we had all slipped and fallen a hundred times; as a result, we were simply plastered with dirt, and our shoes and socks and trousers had not the look of apparel because they had been so soused and were coated so thick with mire. This alone prevented us from moving with the care a patrol should use; but, apart from the falls themselves, so many springs had broken that our footfalls were continually lost in the plash and gurgle of water until we had passed the tree which was blocking the road.

“And now,” said Hubert, “I fancy we’ve nothing to fear. If they are about, we’ve passed them, and I don’t mind betting we have the roads to ourselves.”

Here he was right. All our way was deserted, and we came to the farm at sunrise, just as the rain was ceasing and the clouds had begun to break.

The farmer was already abroad and was putting his oxen to a waggon as we walked into his yard, and as soon as he understood that we were come for the Rolls, he led the way to the kitchen and bawled for his wife.

In spite of my horrid condition, the good woman knew me at once and offered us food and shelter before we could ask. Whilst she was preparing some breakfast the farmer brought us some water and soap and towels, and by helping one another we cleaned ourselves fairly well. After that, our shoes and socks were put in the oven to dry, and we broke our fast in our shirt-sleeves, all seated about a good fire.

At length I went off to the barn, to find the Rolls as I had left her, all ready for use: so I set the engine running and Stiven to ‘rub her down,’ whilst I went back to the kitchen to help Hubert settle our bill.

Now, instead of returning direct, I made to walk round the house: and here my luck went out, for the rill which the woman had shown Olivia and me was very swollen, and, as I stepped across it, its bank gave way. Though I did not fall, I went in over both knees, and such was the force of the water that I was wet to the waist before I got out.

When they saw me more drenched than before, the good people made quite a scene: though I could not understand what they said, they seemed to know at once what had happened and to be indignant with Nature for swelling the rill. Their manner was so excited and their indictment so fierce that Hubert and I could scarcely forbear to smile, and I remember thinking that they would have got on with Xerxes, who had the sea whipped and had fetters cast into its deeps, because his bridge had been broken by the force of its waves.

However, there was nothing to be done, and ten minutes later I drove the Rolls out of the steading and on to the fast-drying road.

Though we were close to Haydn within the hour, it was nearly ten o'clock that morning before we had taken up positions which would subserve the purpose for which we had come. Though Olivia had made us a map, we never, of course, had set eyes on the castle before and were forced to reconnoitre its surroundings with infinite care. In the end, however, we did very well.

There was but one entrance to the castle, and seventy yards from this rose a grass-grown mound. I do not think it was natural, but rather was all that was left of some ancient fortification, commanding the castle's approach; for the drive went curling around it, before dropping into a bottom or low-lying brake. On the top of the mound was a hollow, some two feet deep and wide enough to have covered a dozen men: and since the grass was uncropped, we could lie in this cup at our ease, yet have no fear of peering over its rim.

So much for ourselves. But such a post would have been useless, unless we could bring up the car—and, when she was up, bestow her so that she could not be seen. But luck was with us.

The drive rose out of the bottom to sever some pleasant paddocks, as English as ever I saw. Between these fields and the bottom, and so out of sight of the house, a track led into a sand-pit some two hundred yards from the drive: and though I confess that I drove there with my heart in my mouth—for the drive was two miles long, and, had we seen the enemy coming, we had barely room to pass him, much less to avoid his eyes—at a quarter past nine that morning I turned the Rolls round in the sand-pit and threw out the clutch.

Now a man at the head of the sand-pit could see the top of the mound. It was therefore arranged that I should stay at that point, a few yards from the car, while Hubert lay close in the cup on the top of the mound. If a car came out of the castle, Hubert would signal to me, and I should at once start the engine and bring the Rolls up to the drive as soon as I dared. Here Hubert would join me, having run from the top of the mound, when we should have nothing to do but take up the pursuit.

After some hesitation we decided that Stiven must retire to where the drive joined the main road and must choose some point by that junction where he could lie hid. Unless he was there to tell us which way the car had turned, we should have to see this for ourselves, and that would mean following closer than really was safe. For all that, I was more than sorry to see him go, for it meant that all three must now watch without any relief, and I was already sleepy and the day was already hot.

My fears were realized. How I fought off slumber that day, I shall never know: but to Hubert must go the honours, for he was as tired as I, yet he could not stand up and walk and so give battle, but had to lie still on his face, with the drowsy warmth of the sunshine sleeking his back.

Be that as it may, there were times when I sat hunched up with an open knife in my fist and the point of the blade directly beneath my chin, so that when I nodded, I pricked myself back into a vigilance which my sense of duty was able no longer to command.

I had food for thought and to spare, and for that reason was grateful to be alone: but even that feast was denied me, for so often as I thought of Olivia, my thoughts began to slide into dreams and I had to force my mind back to my surroundings—to the turrets of the house of Haydn, and the rookery neighbouring these, and the manifold flowers that were starring the sides of the mound.

Such hopes as I had harboured began to go down with the sun.

Once dusk had come in, though a score of cars left Haydn, Hubert would be unable to see their occupants, and though, of course, we should follow, as like as not we should be on a wild-geese chase.

Though I could not see the drive, I had heard the sound of an engine several times, but I knew that it did not concern us, for Hubert had given no sign. I afterwards learned that two vans had come to the castle and that both had gone empty away, and that during the afternoon a servant, perched in a dog-cart, drove

forth and back. And that was all.

The evening breeze sprang up, played for a little while and died. Then the sun went down in glory, and dusk came in.

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Half an hour later perhaps came a flash from my cousin's torch.

As I leaped to my feet, I heard the drone of a car . . .

It was now too dark to be seen, so I lifted the Rolls from the sand-pit and on to the track.

I was fifty yards from the drive when two cars went by.

The sight of them scattered my fears of being misled: there was that about their passage which convinced me that here was the enemy going to sow his tares.

Though Hubert must have run like the wind, their tail-lights had disappeared before he had reached the Rolls, and since I could not go very fast—for, until we were clear of the drive, I dared not put on our lights—our posting of Stiven at the junction bade fair to prove essential to our success. And so it did, for when I pulled the Rolls up in the mouth of the drive, there was nothing whatever to tell me which way the cars had gone.

Then—

“To the left, sir,” cried Stiven, and swung himself on to the step.

We ran with lights until we had sighted the cars: then we

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switched them off, for the roads were unfrequented and, when things were going so well, it would have been more than grievous to have given our presence away. Not that we had much to fear. Even Harris' suspicions would have been hard to arouse, for he thought he had clipped our wings by blocking the road of approach. Still, when thieves are about their business, they do not take things for granted, as other men: and we had no wish to set the enemy thinking and looking over his shoulder and wondering who we were.

Now we very soon suspected and presently knew that the cars before us were making for the region in which Hohenems stood: this because they led us along the very roads we had used that morning, so that we soon had no doubt that they were for the castle itself. The further we went, the more convinced we became that we were going to witness another attack and so began to consider how best we could bring this to naught.

So for an hour and more. Then we had the surprise of our lives, for when the cars came to the cross roads, they turned to the right, instead of going straight on.

Now had they gone straight on, they would in half a mile have come to the road of approach: but the right-hand road would take them away from Hohenems, unless after two or three miles they turned to the left. And that way would certainly bring them round to our farm—to the back of the mountain on the face of which Hohenems stood. I could hardly believe . . .

Yet so it fell out.

Three miles further on, the two cars turned to the left.

“Well, I’m damned,” said Hubert. “They can’t be proposing to go that way to attack. They wouldn’t be fit to stand up by the time they’d got up to our walls.”

I fell back a little. There was plainly need for caution, and we could not lose them now this side of the farm.

The road now began to twist and soon became
serpentine, so that the tail-lights were often out of our
view: this made us uneasy each time we rounded a bend, in
case we should find that the cars had suddenly stopped and that
we were too close upon them not to be seen. This risk,
however, we had to run: but the following four or five miles
were very trying, and as we stole round the turnings, I think we
all strained our eyes as never before.

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But luck was with us.

Some three hundred yards from the farm we rounded a bend, to see the cars standing still not a furlong away.

At once I brought the Rolls to the side of the road, and twenty seconds later we were walking along in the shadows towards our prey . . .

“We’ll need all hands,” said Harris. “I’ve had enough bites at this cherry and I’m going to finish to-night.”

“It is nearly done,” said Father Herman. “Very soon now, my friend, we shall gather the fruit of our toil.”

“’Ark to Satan,” said Bunch. “’Ere followeth the anthem.”

There was a burst of laughter which Harris instantly checked.

“This ain’t a circus,” he flashed. “God knows we’ve clowns to spare, but we’re on the job. And put out those —— lights. We don’t want no one stopping to ask the time.” The lights of the cars were put out. “Where’s that —— of a chauffeur?”

“The man is here,” said the priest.

“Take him with you,” said Harris. “The cars won’t shift, and I’d like him under my hand.”

His issuing of his orders was as sharp as were the orders themselves, and I fancy that Father Herman must have been ready to burst when he heard himself so addressed by such a man.

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That no circumstance of offence might be omitted—

“An’ don’t go too fast,” said Punter. “I was all of a tremble last time we got up to the top.”

“In course you were,” said Bunch. “Under that skirt of his he’s got a couple of ’oooves.”

Bugle put in his oar.

“Well, pick up a stone, Satan. I guess there’s mountains in Hell, but you’re not there now.” He smothered a yawn. “I give you my word. I’m sick of these —— Alps. Scenery’s all right to look at, but you don’t want to come too close.”

“By God, you’re right,” said Punter, feelingly.

“Carry on,” snapped Harris.

An instant later the strange procession took shape and began to ascend the mountain, with the priest at its head and Harris himself in its rear.

My cousin put his lips to my ear.

“I’ll follow them up,” he said, “while you get rid of the car. Take her on to the farm, get hold of the farmer and put her into her barn. Then come back to this place and start in my wake. Stiven will be between us to act as connecting-file. I shall stick close to their heels, and from time to time I’ll flash my torch to guide Stiven, and he’ll flash his to guide you.”

“What on earth’s their game?” I whispered.

“God knows,” said Hubert. “But, by thunder, it’s lucky we came.”

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Nearly an hour had gone by, and I was still mounting blindly in Stiven’s wake, when I heard the gush of some considerable fountain somewhere ahead.

In that instant I knew where we were—that Father Herman had led us up to the dell which Olivia and I had visited ten days before. Sure enough, some two minutes later, I came to the sloping plateau below the ultimate crest. Though the priest had followed no path, the line he had taken was simpler than the way we had gone, but I think that he knew the mountain and which was the easiest way.

I was halfway across the plateau when somebody touched my arm.

“Listen,” said Hubert. “They’ve gone down into that dell. Is that the place that you and Olivia passed?”

“It is,” said I.

As I spoke, a torch was lighted, and then two more. And since until now the rogues had shown no light, that this was the scene of their action I had no doubt.

“I don’t like those torches,” said Hubert, “but we simply must see what’s what. You’ve seen this spot by daylight. Where do we go?”

“We must bear to the left,” said I. “And after thirty paces we’ll strike the trees.”

“I leave it to you,” said Hubert.

We hastened across the plateau and came to the trees.

These were clothing the peak, up which I struck obliquely, so as to bring us above where the enemy stood.

While we must not, of course, be seen, we could not be heard, for the sound of the heavy fountain which issued into the dell and the rush of the race which fed the Hohenems fall were far too loud for anyone down in the dell to hear anything else.

Indeed, though I could not see, the ceaseless song of the water guided my steps, and after four or five minutes I came to the brink of the channel down which the water was surging on its way to the castle fall. At once I turned, proposing to pass through the bushes which grew between me and the dell, but

before I had taken three steps, a torch was suddenly lighted not six feet from where I stood.

For one shocking moment I thought that we had been seen. Then I saw that two men were below me, close to the head of the channel, where this ran out of the dell. And they were at work. I could see the head of a hammer, driving a heavy chisel into the ground.

Now the night was very dark, and the only light the rogues had was that of their four or five torches, flashed to and fro. I suppose that Harris and his men were well enough accustomed to working by such a light, but to watch them was incredibly trying, for the scene was kaleidoscopic and might have been some constantly changing example of post-impressionist art. To add to our troubles, two or three times a minute some torch would be turned our way: this was disconcerting, for though we had all picked positions which were screened by a veil of leaves, we had the false impression that the beam must give us away, but, what was worse, we were always momentarily blinded, and, before our sight had come back, as like as not we were to be blinded again.

For myself, half an hour had gone by before I perceived the nature of the work which was being done. But the moment I saw its nature, I saw its aim.

The rogues were preparing to cut off the castle fall.

“Never,” said Palin, incredulously.

“Hard fact,” said Hubert. “They’d rigged up a sort of blind sluice which they could let down just at the head of the channel, where the channel runs out of the dell. The ground didn’t help, and they had to cut it away. I rather think they’d already sunk some timber we couldn’t see. And the sluice was to slide down and meet this, just as the sash of a window slides down to meet its sill. And that would explain why the rill at the farm was swollen and why the man and his wife were so much upset.”

“They’ll be a damned sight more upset when the sluice goes down.”

“For heaven’s sake!” cried Olivia. “The farm will be swept away.”

“Hush,” said Palin. “Allow the lad to proceed.”

“Well,” continued Hubert, “they worked on and off until three, but though I’ve no doubt they consulted, because of the noise of the water we never heard a word that was said. That was heart-breaking, but, of course, it couldn’t be helped. But right at the last I’m almost certain they held a sort of rehearsal of the ceremony of lowering the sluice—short, of course, of actually letting it fall. And in any event I was sure that the work was done.

“I give you my word, I couldn’t think what to do. Everything was ready: any moment now the sluice would fall into place: and in that instant our water-supply would be cut. This meant that in twenty-four hours—at the very most, Hohenems Castle would have neither water nor light. As for the farm, the man

and his wife and his oxen and all that was his would simply be blotted out.

“I decided that we must take action, cost what it might; and when next they approached the sluice we must open fire. So I got hold of John and Stiven, and we all stood by to loose off for all we were worth.

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“Now the thieves had withdrawn a little into the dell—I supposed, to have some refreshment before the balloon went up. But after a little they seemed to stop using their torches, and when I could bear it no longer, I crept down to see what it meant. Damn it, the dell was empty. The lot were gone.

“For a long time I couldn’t believe it. Why, if all was ready, hadn’t they let down the sluice? What were they waiting for? What could be their object in waiting? And then in the flick of an eyelid I saw the truth.

“They were going to divert the fall, but *not* with the object of cutting our water-supply. That would, of course, have been madness—I see it now: for long before we had surrendered, the countryside would have been roused by the sudden flowing of a river where no river had flowed before. The phenomenon would have been examined, and the sluice discovered and destroyed before any more damage was done.

“No. You know the cascade in the dungeon . . . and the conduit that brings it in . . . and the flap in the kitchen floor. . . . Very well. *Cut off the castle fall, and a man can crawl down that conduit and enter the castle that way. A man? Ten men . . . fifty men . . .*

“And there you are. They know that conduit exists, and they’ve laid their plans. At a given moment to-night—or to-morrow, or Tuesday: but I rather fancy to-night—the sluice will go down and the Hohenems fall will stop. Only two men are needed to let down the sluice. The rest will be waiting outside the castle wall on the road of approach. And the moment the waterfall stops, they’ll step down into its bed, enter the conduit and make their way into the kitchen by lifting the flap. Or if they like, into the dungeon and then upstairs.

“I say ‘they will’: but they won’t. They’ll wait in the drive all right, but they’ll soon get tired of waiting for the sluice to go down. . . . The sluice no longer exists. We broke it up with the hammers and chucked it over the fall. The timber and wedges and ropes have disappeared. We slung the hammers and chisels into the woods. I admit it’s easy to destroy, but I never enjoyed twenty minutes so much in my life. And I’ve only one regret. That is that I shall not be present when Harris and Haydn are standing by the side of the waterfall, commenting upon each other’s comments upon its failure to stop.”

We were sitting at the dining-room table, on which a meal had been waiting for Hubert and me. The room was warm, for a good fire burned on the hearth, and the curtains were drawn although it was almost day. Hubert and I were all unshaven and stained and might have passed for a couple of broken tramps: Palin, gowned and slippers, was plainly fresh from his bath: and Olivia, dainty as ever, might just have come down to her breakfast at nine o’clock.

Palin looked at her, and she nodded and then sat back in her chair.

“We congratulate you,” said Palin. “No one could have done better. Not one in ten thousand would have done half so well.”

He stopped there and cleared his throat.

“What you’ve told us is of great interest—of quite extraordinary interest. And, as it happens, we are able to add to your tale. Or rather, let us say, to your theory.

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“Our friends would have entered the castle by the conduit, as you have surmised. But after perhaps fifty minutes, they would have withdrawn *with the ‘vestments’* by the way they had come.”

“Very probably,” said my cousin. “I give you that.”

“It’s not probable,” said Palin. “It’s certain. There is not one shadow of doubt.” He took a deep breath. “You see, *we’ve found out the cipher . . . and the way to get at the ‘vestments’ is to cut off the dungeon fall.*”

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I was so weary and Palin's announcement was so big that several seconds went by before I could take it in. Indeed, I was still saying over the words I had heard him use, when Hubert let out a cry and leaped to his feet.

"My God," he said, "then we've gone and torn everything up. The sluice was ready and waiting. If we hadn't broken it down, we could have used it this morning——"

"And wiped out the farm," said Olivia. "Now listen. I'll explain in a moment, but do get this into your head. What you have done is just perfect. Nothing could have been better. The thieves will go empty away, and we shall have the 'vestments' to-night."

My cousin stared. Then he sat down again slowly, with his eyes fast upon Olivia and a hand to his mouth.

"You see," said my wife, "it's this way. To open the secret chamber, the dungeon fall must be stopped. But the dungeon fall can be stopped without stopping the castle fall. And that we can do from within. There won't be any flooding. *We've got a sluice of our own.*"

And here is the place to set out the contents of that piece of parchment which Olivia's grandfather had cut into three vertical strips.

I cannot be certain that every word is correct, for we

never saw the strip which the Count of Haydn possessed. But Olivia had the first, and Father Herman's breviary gave us the third: and from these two Olivia and Palin were able, as they had hoped to be, to reconstruct the second beyond any reasonable doubt.

The vestments lie wrapped as they were received in three bales. They are in the inner dungeon of the three. This is hewn from living rock. The doorway to this dungeon is set in the wall of the great dungeon and is sealed with stones cut to fit it laid in cement. A cascade like an arras hangs down over the doorway to conceal it quite. None can ever enter except he first prevent the flow of the water. Let him let down the shutter belonging to the pipe, so the water will turn aside and flow back to the bed whence it came. In truth the shutter is the first rise at the foot of the stair by the kitchen and is locked into the first tread. The tread must be drawn forward. When this is done the shutter will fall into place.

Nothing could well have been clearer than these directions, and since I have described the dungeons and the pipe or conduit which ran under the kitchen floor, there is no need of any comment: but perhaps I may make bold to point out that the third of the vertical strips contained all the vital words.

As I read the answer to the riddle which we had been fighting to solve, all my weariness left me, and I was as eager as Hubert to start work at once: but neither Olivia nor Palin would hear our prayers.

“We expected this,” said the latter, “and we hardened our hearts before you ever came in. You’re both worn out, and you’ve got to go to bed for twelve hours. Twenty-four would be better, but we don’t want to twist your tails. And so we’ll call you this evening at seven o’clock: and after dinner we’ll go and collect the baubles according to the book of the rules. You see, there’s no sort of hurry—you’ve spiked the enemy’s guns. Personally, I think you’ve done more. Though he doesn’t know it yet, I believe you’ve broken his heart: and that when he finds out that his labour of love has been lost, he’ll go mad and throw in his hand. But that’s by the way. The point is we’ve won the game. The ‘vestments’ are yours for the taking, and to-night we’ll open the chamber and have a look at their shape. And though, as I say, we might wait, I’m bound to admit that it is appropriate that you should take what is yours, while those who have come to steal it are standing in some impatience without your gates. That most artistic effect will be due to you, for I haven’t a doubt in the world that they’ll come to-night. And rich as is Harris’ vocabulary, I cannot help feeling that to-night it is going to be strained. But I do hope Father Herman won’t forget himself . . .”

Olivia rose, laughing, and fairly drove us to bed.

Some thirteen hours had gone by, and I was sitting in the library, listening to the talk of Olivia and thinking how lovely she looked.

Her dress was of dark blue cloth, and its skirt was flared: at her neck and wrists were little bands of fair linen, and these and a white leather belt lent to the dress that

freshness which she herself always gave off. She was sitting on the high fender which fenced the hearth, with her small hands laid upon the leather on either side: her slim legs were crossed beneath her, and the toe of one little black slipper was planted upon the rug. Above her, two lamps were burning, and her soft, brown hair was reflecting the light they threw: her face was aglow with beauty—no feature was finer than its fellows, but all were superb. She used no artifice, except to redden her lips—and that was a work of supererogation, for they were redness itself. Her mouth was exquisite—I could hardly believe that I had dared kiss its pride: the jewellery of her eyes beggared description. She was eager, natural and royal: and these three qualities, each of them rare enough, made up a grace that would have taxed Shakespeare’s pen.

“The code-word was *Nebuchadnezzar*. Years ago Uncle Herman had a monkey—I think it was the only living being he ever liked. Nobody else liked it—no ordinary person could have liked such a brute. It was always cruel and spiteful in all it did. It used to torment the dogs till they nearly went mad, and one day one of them got it and broke its neck. Uncle Herman had the dog shot: if he could have found someone to do it, I think he’d have had it flayed. Well, the monkey was called Nebuchadnezzar: my mother gave it the name. That was thirteen years ago: and I’d forgotten the monkey—I was only eight when it died. I can’t think what made me remember, but the moment I did, I was sure that we’d done the sum. And so we had. We had to juggle a little, and then all at once the cipher began to come out.”

“When was this?” said I.

“About this time yesterday evening—when you were at the head of the sand-pit, watching the sun go down.”

I smiled ruefully.

“It makes our show look small. For all the good we’ve done, Hubert and Stiven and I might have never gone out.”

“Rot, my dear,” said Olivia. “You’ve saved the farm, and you’ve set the enemy back. You may have done more—much more. You can’t possibly tell. By the way, I think Sarem should know.”

“Yes,” said I, “and he ought to be in at the death. But nobody else.”

Olivia nodded.

“Why do you look at me so?”

With a shock I realized that I had been gazing upon her as though upon some work of art.

“I’m sorry,” I said, looking down. “But you—you’re very good to look at, and I’m glad to be with you again.”

“I’m glad you’re back, too,” said Olivia. “You’re reckless enough when you’re with me,” she added, gravely enough. And then, “Besides, you’re very refreshing. Simplicity always is.”

“You’re laughing at me,” I said.

“I mean what I say,” said Olivia, “I wouldn’t have you

different for worlds. And when the time comes, I shall miss you. You've been a wonderful squire."

The word stuck in my gizzard, and I think I went red.

"Honours are even," I said. "You've been a wonderful wife."

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I saw her delicate fingers tighten on the edge of the kerb.

"You passed your word," said Olivia.

I got to my feet.

"God knows I've kept it," said I.

Olivia raised her eyebrows.

"That's a matter of opinion," she said. "Five times you've kissed my hand."

"I don't think that——"

"And once—my lips."

I could hardly believe my ears.

"But you gave me them, Olivia," I cried. "You——"

"What?"

She was up on her feet, and her eyes were ablaze with wrath.

As I lowered my gaze, all my world seemed to crumble

beneath my feet.

“I’m sorry,” I heard myself saying. “I thought that you meant me to kiss you. I thought you were giving me leave.”

“Do I look that kind of girl?”

“No,” I said helplessly. “Of course not.” I put a hand to my head. “But I misunderstood your gesture. I thought you meant to give me a privilege I couldn’t take.”

“Why should I give it to you? Any more than to Hubert, or Andrew?”

“I don’t know. I just thought you did. I—I’m very sorry,” I finished miserably.

Olivia sat down on the fender and crossed her legs.

“I wish,” she said, “I wish you’d tell me the truth. You thought that I meant you to kiss me. Why did you think that I meant you to do such a—such a curious thing?”

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I took a deep breath.

“I thought you liked me,” I said.

“So I do,” said Olivia. “I’ve said so. As a squire——”

“More than that,” I said quietly. “You see, I know nothing of women. Nothing at all. But I’ve always heard that they play an indirect game, and—and——”

With her hands to her face, Olivia was laughing helplessly.

Half relieved, half indignant, I regarded her.

Presently she stood up, put her hands behind her, tilted her chin and looked me full in the eyes.

“John,” she said, “you’re forgiven—because you’re too good to be true.”

With that, she lowered her gaze.

For all my recent chastisement, I could not take my eyes from the bow of her beautiful mouth. The faintest of smiles hung about it, and, but for our late conversation . . .

Here the door was opened, and Sarem came into the room.

With the gravest of bows, he announced that dinner was served.

At ten o’clock that evening all was in train.

One sentry was pacing the ramparts, while another kept the courtyard: a third had been posted in one of the gate-house towers. Whatever they saw or heard, they were not to sound the alarm, but were to come and tell Sarem who would be, if not in the kitchen, at the foot of the dungeon steps.

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The old fellow was as excited as any child. I think that he loved the castle, as a dean his cathedral church, and so was all agog to see the holy of holies of which, high priest though he was, he never had dreamed.

Hammers and chisels and crowbars had been laid in the torture-chamber, ready to hand, and coats were piled on a chair at the head of the stairs. But first, of course, we had to let down the shutter, to cut off the flow of the water that made the dungeon fall.

We had trodden the little stairway a hundred times—and might have trod it a million and never dreamed that one of its treads would move: but here, of course, Time was against us, for though the whole of the castle was very clean, the dust of ages had sealed what cracks had been there. What was more, it had clogged the tread: and though, after twenty minutes, we could see that it was not fixed, we could not draw it forward or so much as make it budge. As we stood about my cousin, who was working with knife and sponge, I began to wonder whether, before some earthquake, the building at some time or other had settled down and whether because of its movement the tread had been jammed.

For over an hour we worked to loosen that tread, for we dared use no violence for fear of dislocating the engagement by which the shutter was held. And then at last it yielded and moved an eighth of an inch.

Beneath my cousin's wheedling, the tread came slowly forward, till a gap appeared between it and the second rise. At once we heard the water racing below: we could not hear it before because of the steady rush of the castle fall, for this was washing the wall in which the stairway was built.

And here I should say we had raised the flap in the kitchen before we had set to work, and Sarem was there with a lantern,

waiting to come and tell us the instant the water failed.

Now, though the tread was drawn forward, the rise below did not fall, but stayed where it was.

“That’s jammed, too,” said Palin. “Never mind. Go on with the tread.”

I had not expected that this would come right away: but it did, as the lid of a box, and Hubert and Stiven between them lifted it into the passage and laid it against the wall.

Examining it, we saw a long, clean-cut groove, and when we returned to the rise, there was the flange cut to fit this when once the tread was in place. I cannot conceive a more simple locking device, for once they were home, the length of the rise was locked into the length of the tread, and, each compelling the other, the two made up one step as steady as any rock.

There was now before us a hole, some two feet long by eight or nine inches wide, and when we had put in the lamp, the position was plain.

Let fall the rise or shutter, and the water foaming beneath us must turn to its right. There was a second conduit, wet only with spray: and this would conduct the water back to the castle fall. But the shutter was stiff in its runners. After all, it had not been lowered for more than four hundred years.

“The mallet,” said Hubert. . . .

Very gently he tapped the front and the back of the rise: then he struck it a short, sharp blow in the midst of its edge.

The rise fell down like a stone and passed out of view. The water seethed for an instant and then flung down the conduit which ran to its right.

As Olivia's hand slid into mine, Sarem came running from the kitchen to say that the water had failed.

It was past midnight before I drove a chisel into the dungeon's wall.

Before we could open the chamber, we had to erect a rough stage, for we could not set up a ladder because of the well in the floor. We had meant to board this over, but once the planks had been brought, we saw that to work from a stage would be half as easy again, so Stiven ran for some trestles and we laid the ladder as a grating across the mouth of the well. Some such fence was needful, for the slime thereabouts was like grease, and since all the pavement was sloping towards the well, if someone had lost his footing, he might very well have gone down into the depths.

The wall itself over which the water had flowed, was jacketed thick with slime, and Stiven had to go for a trowel before I could discover the joints of the stonework I was to attack. But when at last this was revealed, we saw before us a wall such as Hubert and I had sought. The stones had been carefully cut and lay four to a course, but between and above and below them the mortar lay half an inch thick.

Now whether the cement was poor, or whether the damp had gradually sapped its virtue I cannot pretend to say, but the fact remains that it crumbled before my chisel, and in

less than ten minutes' time I had the first stone in my hands.

After that, the work was nothing, and in less than another ten minutes I had opened a decent window some two feet square.

Then they gave me the lamp, and Palin lifted Olivia on to the stage.

The chamber looked very clean.

It was plainly hewn out of the rock and was larger than we had expected: it must have been twenty feet square by some seven high. There was no sign of dampness, but the air was faint and musty, as though we had opened the closet of Age himself. The floor was sloping upward from where we stood, and right at the end of the chamber lay three small bales.

Each was the size of two pillows, laid face to face, and they seemed to be done up in canvas or stuff like that. They were neither hooped nor corded, which I found strange, but Olivia said that the canvas was probably stitched.

Then I lifted Olivia down, and Hubert and Palin came up and looked their fill: then I gave them back the lamp, and Stiven came up and helped me to cut out the rest of the stones.

Twenty more minutes sufficed to open the doorway itself. Then Stiven produced a towel and wiped the lintel and jambs, and while he was so engaged, Sarem came up to view the chamber before we laid hands on the bales.

The old fellow gazed and gazed.

“It is like a fable, my lady—some fable of Æsop himself: and then again there is something sacred about it, and it has the look of a parable such as the Gospels tell.”

I cannot better his description. The three old bales, lying there in the rock-hewn chamber, seemed as well to belong to some legend as to be conveying some moral we could not read.

There was a hook in the ceiling, from which no doubt a lantern was meant to be hung, and when Sarem was gone and Olivia was up in his place, I entered and hung up our lamp, so twisting it that the reflector flung the light full on the bales.

Then I gave my hand to Olivia, and Hubert and Palin and Stiven followed her in.

For some reason the moment was solemn, and none of us spoke. The bales before us seemed relics, and we about to shatter a tradition more rare, more virgin and more venerable than any we had dreamed could exist. I had a ridiculous feeling that, now that we had seen them, we ought to wall up the chamber and leave the bales where they were . . .

We had brought three sheets with us, because it seemed more than likely that, as soon as we touched them the bales would crumble away. And as Palin and Stiven spread one of these sheets on the floor, Hubert and I between us took hold of one of the bales.

To our relief, neither stuff nor stitches gave way before our touch: so we raised the bale very gently and laid it down on the

sheet. And that seemed to break the spell, for I know that I felt more light-hearted, and Hubert opened his mouth.

“I should say there were vestments there. Of course, the jewels are within, but vestments are wrapped about them, to colour the lie.”

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“I think you’re right,” said I, watching Stiven swaddle the bale with infinite care. “There’s certainly some stiff fabric.”

““The king’s daughter,”” said Palin, ““is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.””

I saw Olivia smiling, and I smiled back.

Then—

“I’ve four guns here,” said Harris. “Don’t anyone move.”

The man was standing in shadow, for, as I have said, I had turned the lamp’s reflector away from the doorway, the better to illumine the bales. So half of the chamber was dark, but the half in which we were standing was brilliantly lit.

Resistance was not to be thought of, if only because of this, for although we all turned about, we could not at first see the speaker because of the light in our eyes. Add to this that we had not a pistol between us and that even the hammers and chisels had been left without on the stage.

Because, I suppose, we were peering——

“It’s me all right,” said Harris. “Put up your hands.” There was nothing to do but obey. “And if anyone wants to die, he’s only to open his mouth.”

I could see the man now. He was standing within the chamber, with a pistol in either hand. On his right stood a cassocked figure which I knew for that of the priest, and on his left stood either Bunch or Bugle—I thought it was Bunch.

“Ferrers,” said Harris sharply, “back to the wall.”

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I stood my ground.

“John,” said Olivia quietly, “do as he says.”

Feeling strangely weary, I backed till I came to the wall.

One by one the others joined me, as Harris spoke their names. Then he called to Punter and told him to bring up ‘that cord.’

I have tried to set down dispassionately exactly what took place, but when I say I felt weary, that feeling succeeded a string of such dreadful emotions as I doubt that a man can suffer and be the same. Stupefaction, horror, despair came down and swept me in turn, as some monstrous wave will sweep the deck of a ship; and before each onslaught my mind seemed to quake and stagger, as a ship will quake and stagger beneath the flail of the sea.

And this, I think, was natural.

Harris had struck us down, and we had a long way to fall—in a word, from the pinnacle of triumph into the depths of something

lower than failure and far more, depressing than defeat.

I was at first too much confounded to reason. I accepted Harris' presence because it could not be denied. By rights he should have been waiting on the road of approach, close to the gate-house, waiting for his sluice to go down and the castle fall to be stopped: why he was not there, fuming, how he had avoided our sentries were questions I could not answer—could scarcely frame.

Then the fellow stepped into the light, and I saw his state.

And the moment I saw it, the truth leaped into my mind, and again my wits seemed to stagger before their realization of the awful mistake we had made.

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We had only made one mistake. With one exception, all our assumptions were right. This was the night the rogues had chosen: Bugle and the chauffeur had been dispatched to the sluice: and Harris and the priest and the others had stood waiting without the castle—waiting for the water to stop. *But they had been waiting not at the mouth of the conduit, but at the mouth of the waste-pipe—not where the water entered, but where the water came out . . . somewhere below the castle, down in the woods. And the water had stopped . . . we had stopped it . . . by letting the shutter down.* And then they had come up the waste-pipe and made their way out of the well.

This, as I say, was patent: Harris was covered with slime.

It was Bunch that bound us, and I must say he did his work well. I should say he had been a sailor, so true and swift were

his knots. Harris and Punter covered us while he worked.

He bound Olivia last, and so, I think, spared my life, for the blood was pounding in my temples as he lashed her ankles and wrists, and when he looked up and leered and patted the limbs he had dishonoured, I flung myself forward upon him and brought him down to the ground.

He rose with a frightful curse and jerked me up to my feet: then with all his might he struck me between the eyes, and because my ankles were fastened I fell again. This time he let me lie—at Olivia's feet. And when I sat up, something dazed, I found her kneeling beside me and asking me how I did.

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Before I could answer, a figure was by my side—a dreadful, unearthly figure, that I should like to forget.

It was, of course, Father Herman.

His cassock was smeared and stained, and his hands were foul, and over his head he was wearing a loose black hood, such as Inquisitors wore when doing their sinister work. Though there were slits for his eyes, these could not be seen, and I know when I turned and saw him I felt the hair rise upon my head. No doubt he had put on the hood to protect him against the slime, but the effect was shocking, for, for one thing, it was unnatural, and, for another, it argued the Holy Office and all the abominations of secret torture and death.

In a low sibilant tone he began to speak, addressing himself to Olivia, and arching his back and stooping to bring his head level with hers. Since he spoke in German, I could not

understand what he said, but she never answered a word, but gazed on the floor beyond him as though he did not exist.

“Oh, shut up,” said I, abruptly, and Olivia looked round and laughed.

This most unpleasant attention was displaced by another as bad, for here Bunch came to gag us with pieces of one of our sheets.

Again I could not but admire the precision he showed. Six rolls he had, and six strips. Before I knew where I was, a roll was in my mouth, like a bit: then a strip was drawn tight on my face and knotted behind my head. Except that he gagged her, the rogue did Olivia no wrong: but to sit by and see her so used was enough to send a man mad, and what with that, and the roll in my mouth, and the strip bearing tight upon my nostrils, for a little my senses seemed to leave me and I sat like a man in a trance. . . .

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“This stuff’s all right,” said Harris.

At his words the priest swung about, and I saw that Harris and Bunch had uncovered the bale which Stiven had wrapped in a sheet.

“Good an’ strong,” said Bunch, and plucked at the bale. “There ain’t no call to undo it. Jus’ cord it up and——”

“No, no,” cried Father Herman. “Where are the bags? Should it break and the contents be scattered——”

“Holy’s right,” said Harris. “We don’t want to take no risks. I

left the bags on the staging.” Bunch got to his feet. “An’ just go an’ see that Punter’s at the foot of them steps.”

Father Herman turned over the bale.

“A knife,” he said. “It is stitched.”

“Half a minute,” said Harris, putting aside the priest’s hand. “I don’t want no surprises. I want to be sure that Punter’s watching them steps.”

Suddenly I thought of Sarem. We had not ordered him back to the foot of the steps. That was his post, and we had called him away. We had meant him to return there, of course: and if he had so returned . . .

Harris was speaking—addressing himself to us.

“If you’d known who I was, you’d have taken my hints lying down. There’s more than one Bank I could mention—I don’t keep no account there, but the moment they see my fist they honour my cheque. And that’s because they know me: and they’d sooner pay out the money than cross my path. But you didn’t know—and some fools will never learn . . .

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“I’ve a pretty long score against you—you’ve trod on my toes more than once: but I’d have passed that and chucked you back in the water and let you live. But you wouldn’t stop there—not you. And so at last you’ve bought it—bought what the Banks are afraid of—what spoils a good many’s sleep.”

As though enraged by our silence, though God knows we could not speak, he lashed himself into a rage.

“You —— fools!” he spouted. “You lousy pack of girl scouts! You couldn’t crack a tin chapel, and you’d match yourselves against me! If you’d been a police division it wouldn’t have made any odds. When I stepped into the ring, your chance was dead. I was bound to win these trinkets. I’d have had this castle bleeding before I’d have let them go. If you’d found them a month ago, you’d only have found them for me. They’re mine—they always were. I’ve been waiting for more than ten years to pick them up.”

His rage seemed to die, and he put a hand to his chin.

“There’s only two outsiders that ever saw me working and didn’t die young. They’re both in jug—at the moment: and I give you my word that they’re afraid to come out. Maybe you can guess why. But in case you can’t, I’ll help you. *Witnesses are a pleasure I can’t afford.* And when those bricks you took out are back in their place, and someone turns on the water that we’ve turned off, then perhaps you’ll see that them Banks have something to go on—that they’ve method in their madness when they tell their greasy clerks to honour my name.”

“So perish traitors,” hissed the priest. “It is written, ‘Woe to her that is——’”

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Bunch re-entered the chamber, satchels in hand.

“It *was* old Fishface,” he said.

I knew he meant Sarem, and my flicker of hope went out.

“Is he out?” said Harris.

“Near enough,” said Bunch. “He’s bleedin’.”

Harris took out two knives and gave him one.

“Open those packets,” he said. “You’ll find them sewn.”

Then he went down on his knees and began to slit the stitches of the bale which the priest was holding in the midst of the sheet.

I had no fear of the doom to which Harris had condemned us, for he plainly had no idea that the shutter was down, but believed that the sluice he had erected had cut off the castle fall: and, so long as the shutter was down, no cascade could ‘hang down like an arras’ at once to hide our prison and smother what sounds we could make. And so, though they put back the stones—they had, of course, no cement—we were sure enough to be succoured before many hours had gone by, for, when we did not reappear, the sentries would come to seek Sarem at the foot of the dungeon steps. But, as I sat there powerless, watching the rogues undoing those precious bales, I drained to the dregs the cups of mortification and vain regret. Then a black resentment settled upon my soul, and I asked myself what we had done to deserve so bitter a trial. We knew even better than Harris how empty his boasting was and that all his plans had miscarried because we had brought them to naught. We had pitted ourselves against him and beaten him time and again. And then at the last we had opened the door by the side of which he was waiting and had handed him into the kingdom from which we had shut him out.

Like a madman, I strained at my bonds, and for all the

good I did, I might have prayed the world to stand still. .

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..

The first bale was open now, and Harris and Father Herman were delving within. It was fashioned in the form of a sack, and within was a second wrapping of what seemed very fine silk. This was voluminous, and was folded over and over and stitched again and again: and at last Harris lost his patience and ripped the silk.

He plunged in his hands and drew out a folded vestment: this was the colour of cream and was laced with gold.

As he laid it down, the priest drew out a small object, tied up in a padded bag. In a trice he had torn off his hood, and I saw his vile fingers trembling, as he felt for the cords at the mouth of the little old jewel-case—for such it was.

And then he had it open, and there on his palm was a little sculptured head, which even I could see was that of the Gorgon Medusa, with serpents instead of hair.

Father Herman's breath was whistling, and Harris looked up sharply, with a hand in the bale.

For a moment he frowned at the jewel. Then—

“Jade,” he said shortly.

The noisy breathing ceased.

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Then—

“Yes,” said the priest. “It is jade.”

His voice betrayed him.

As he made to put it back in its bag, Harris caught his wrist and picked up the gem.

For a moment he scrutinized it. Then—

“You —— liar,” he said.

The head was an emerald, and had belonged to Beatrice of Este.

The priest did not seem to hear Harris: his hands were again in the bale . . .

They did not speak again, but only drew forth the jewels and stuffed them into the satchels which they had brought. Most they unwrapped and regarded, because, I suppose, they could not wait to consider their most stupendous haul. And that I could well understand, for I could not believe that even Harris had ever dreamed of handling so many fortunes at once.

That Bunch had exceeded his instructions will be easy enough to believe. He had opened only one bale and now was engaged in withdrawing its lovely contents with infinite care. And Harris let him be. The thing was too big for ill humour. And when from time to time Bunch showed him some gem which seemed too egregious to be real, he only stared and nodded and then returned to his own.

They might have forgotten our presence, and, such was their

occupation that, if any but Bunch had bound us, the tables might have been turned. But the cords were like steel upon me and might indeed have been welded on to my wrists.

Slowly the work went on . . .

Harris was inspecting his hands.

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“What’s this stuff?” he said. “Can’t be lime.”

“Used to be bran,” said Bunch. “Bran’s the stuff you put in a lucky dip.”

He scooped some out of his bale and let it run through his fingers on to the floor.

“It is linen,” said the priest. “There was linen here, and the linen has gone to dust.”

His hands, like those of the others, were white as those of a fuller fresh from his earth.

“‘Ark to ’Oly,” said Bunch. “What don’t he know?”

“No more here,” said Harris. “Give us that other bale.”

The priest was searching every corner of the bale which he had removed. Then he set it aside, and Bunch laid down before him the one which was yet untouched.

I watched Harris slit the stitches, as he had done before. . . .

Bunch had emptied his bale and was watching the priest and

Harris, yet busy with theirs, when I heard Father Herman exclaim and saw him clap a hand to his side.

Harris and Bunch regarded him curiously, but neither made any remark, and after a moment I saw them exchange a glance more suggestive of gratification than of concern.

The priest recovered himself and took out another jewel. . . .

Bunch turned his bale upside down. Then he pitched it away and got to his feet.

As he did so, I saw him wince.

Harris saw him, too—with the tail of his eye.

“What’s biting you?” he said sharply.

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“I’m —— if I know,” said Bunch, with a hand to his chest.

“—— iron goin’ through me. I must ’ave caught cold.”

Harris ran his eye over his prisoners, as though to be sure that no one of us could have done Bunch some sudden hurt.

“Well, do up them bags,” he said. “We don’t want to——”

The priest started violently, dropped the jewel he was holding and let out a moan of pain.

“What the devil’s the matter?” said Harris, and got to his feet.

The priest was breathing hard, as a man that is spent. Still on his knees, he now was leaning sideways and propping himself

on a hand. With the back of the other he made to wring the sweat from his brow.

“Go on. What’s the matter?” said Harris.

As though by way of answer, a much more serious convulsion seized Harris himself.

For an instant he writhed, with his fingers stiff and bent backwards—a horrid sight. Then the spasm passed, and he fell back against the wall. . . .

Bunch was white-faced and trembling—the picture of panic fear.

“My Gawd,” he said wildly. “It’s something about this place. Let’s——”

A second convulsion seized him, twisted and wrung his body, and left him shaken and gasping, with the sweat running down his face.

Harris’ hand was in his pocket.

“It’s him,” he said hoarsely, staring at Father Herman. And if ever doom sat in two words, it sat in those. “That—— hell-hound has done it on us. He’s all right: he’s pretending. But he’s gone an’ poisoned our——”

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A screech from Father Herman snapped the sentence in two. Then with a frightful effort he dragged himself up to his feet.

“*Poison!*” he mouthed. “*It is poison!*” and held up his whitened

hands.

There was no pretence there. The priest had death in his face.

His fellows were staring upon him, when a second shocking convulsion racked Harris' frame, and the pistol which he had been holding fell from his hand.

Ere the spasm was past, Bunch was again attacked: and before his agony was over, the priest was down on the ground, kicking like any madman, his face distorted out of the semblance of man's.

Harris tried to call Punter, but he could not lift up his voice, and when he made for the doorway, he stumbled over a satchel and fell to the ground.

What happened after that I cannot clearly describe, for confusion became confounded, and the three might have been three puppets which some unseen hand was jerking at the end of a string, making them twist and stagger and letting them sprawl upon the floor. That their minds were as good as gone there can be no doubt, but some instinct seemed to insist that they must be up on their feet, for though they fell again and again, they would not lie, but made the most frantic efforts to rise and stand. Now, however, their seizures followed one another so fast that almost before they were up, they were again attacked, and once their disorder ruled them, it carried them whither it would. Though I think they would have cried out, they seemed to have lost the power of giving tongue, and except for sobs and whimpers and the shocking sound of panting, they made no noise.

To say that the sight was awful means nothing at all. It was the most horrifying spectacle that ever a man's eyes saw. From no war that ever was waged has, I will swear, emerged a scene one half so frightful as that we witnessed that night. Looking upon it, I forgot time and place—forgot that I was their captive, that Olivia knelt by my side. Had I been free, I could not have moved to help them, for I was frozen with horror and might have been some statue, cut out of stone.

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And then at last Death stepped in.

One by one, his merciful touch released them: and after an agony which must, I think, have absolved them of all their sins, first Bunch, then the priest, and then Harris gave up the ghost.

Five minutes later, perhaps, Olivia's skilful fingers had freed my wrists.

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With the knife that was in my pocket I cut the cords at my feet. Then I turned to Olivia and took the gag from her mouth.

“Ungag the others,” she said, “and come back to me.”

I rose and turned to Palin, standing still by her side.

As I took the gag from his mouth—

“Listen,” he said, speaking low. “Gag Olivia again—at once. I mean what I say. Tie your handkerchief over her nose and mouth.” While I was doing his bidding, he continued to talk. “Everyone listen to me. Touch nothing in this chamber—nothing at all. That dust was deadly poison: and it’s all over the place. And they not only touched it—they breathed it in. But we were gagged.” I rose to my feet. “And now gag me again, John. And then cut all our bonds.”

I could not argue, for my gag was still in my mouth: and so, though all my thoughts were of Punter, I did as Palin had said. . .

Two minutes later we had left the chamber behind.

In the inner dungeon we tore the gags from our mouths.

“Leave Punter to me,” said Palin, and took off his coat. . . .

For perhaps five minutes we waited.

Then came a sudden scuffle, and Palin cried out, "All clear."

Whilst Stiven was binding our prisoner, I used his torch and very soon found Sarem flat on his face.

He was not dead, but was plainly badly hurt, for the back of his head was bloody and his senses were gone.

Between them, Hubert and Palin carried him off to his room, and there Olivia and Gertrude bathed and bandaged his wound.

Meanwhile Stiven and I cast Punter into a chamber from which there was no escape, and, bringing the sentry from the gate-house, posted the man in the doorway halfway down the dungeon stair. This, in case Bugle or another should make his way up the waste-pipe, to join the men that were dead. We then returned to the hall, and there my cousin met us, to bid us come to the council which Palin proposed to hold in the dining-room.

Whilst we were awaiting Olivia, my cousin poured us all brandy, which I, for one, was only too ready to drink: and when Olivia arrived, he would not hear her protests, but made her empty the wine-glass he set in her hand.

Then we took our seats at the table, and Stiven stood to the door.

"And now," said Palin, quietly . . .

For a moment nobody spoke. Then—

"Go on, Andrew," said Olivia. "I want to hear what you say."

“We owe our lives,” said Palin, “to the mercy of God. I won’t dilate upon that, but I don’t think it can be denied that, if Harris and Father Herman had not put a spoke in our wheel, we should have done as they did, and we should have died their deaths.”

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As though to shut out a vision, Olivia covered her eyes.

Palin proceeded slowly.

“It’s all so plain and so natural that with my knowledge of history I really feel quite ashamed. But till Harris inspected his hands, it never entered my head. And then in an instant I knew that the three were doomed.

“The age of Pope Alexander the Sixth was the poisoner’s age. People used poison then more lightly than we use drugs. They poisoned food and liquor: they poisoned gloves: they poisoned fans and bouquets, the rims of goblets, the hilts of poniards, even the leaves of books. . . . And the Pope himself was a poisoner. He died of his own confection, by drinking in error of the cup which he himself had prepared for one of his guests. . . . What, then, could be more natural than that he should safeguard with poison his private treasury? When he packed those jewels, he packed them masked and gloved: and so he would have unpacked them, for the jewels were laid up in poison, just as you lay up in camphor your curtains or clothes. It follows that the thief that touched them was bound to die. Talk about safe custody . . .

“Well, there are the facts. Whoever won the treasure was doomed—to a frightful death. We all worked hard

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enough to get there, but Providence stretched out an arm and we made one ghastly mistake. And as the result of our error, Harris and Bunch and Father Herman are lying dead in our place.

“Now the jewels are yours—not mine. And what you will do about them is not for me to decide. Still, I’m the oldest here: and that gives me the right to advise you, although you mayn’t take my advice.

“Down in that charnel-house are gems which are worth the ransom of many kings. The collection is beyond all value. Their history and their sculpture apart, the size and splendour of such of the stones as I saw were unbelievable. Now you can’t display this treasure—it wouldn’t be safe. Either it must be lent to a museum—and I really don’t know who’d take it, for what they’d have to pay for insurance I can’t conceive—or else the collection must be sold. No one on earth could pay you its proper price, but you couldn’t get less than two or three million pounds. . . . You may wonder why I choose this particular moment to discuss these two alternatives. It is because I’m going to suggest a third. *If I were you, I should let the gems lie where they are.* Seal up that cursed chamber, dead men and all: pull up the shutter and let the cascade come back. More. I’d wall up the way to the dungeons, and I’d jam or rivet that shutter so that it can never go down, for it’s my belief there’s a curse on that lovely treasure . . . and when you think who owned it and how it was got—why, the wonder is that the stones don’t cry out upon their history, and the evil hands that held them, and the envy, hatred and malice which they inspired.

“It isn’t as if you were poor. I don’t say you’re rolling,

but, damn it, you've money enough. And what do you want with millions? I never knew a rich man that was happy yet. . . . And you won't be destroying the collection—that is a measure I couldn't advise you to take. You will be keeping it—in safe custody. And if, in years to come, you feel that it should be unearthed—well, now you know the whole of the secret and exactly what you must do.”

There was a pregnant silence.

Then Olivia lifted her voice.

“I think we should vote,” she said. “The thing is above argument, and Andrew has said very well all there is to be said. And I think the ballot should be secret.”

She rose and opened the drawer of an old bureau.

“Here are red and white chessmen,” she said. She let them slide out of their bag and into the drawer. “Let white be for sealing the chamber, and red for leaving it open till we've taken the treasure away. We're only three, so it's easy enough to settle which we shall do. Two red will beat one white, and two white one red.”

She turned her back, dipped her hand into the drawer and then put it into the bag.

“Now Hubert,” she said, and came back to the chair she had left.

Hubert did as she had done and returned to his seat.

Then I cast my vote, as they had, and brought the bag to Palin and gave it into his hand. . . .

I can see the chessmen now, as he set them out on the table at which we sat.

A knight and a rook, and a pawn.

And all were white.

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In the carpenter's shop there were three or four sacks of cement, and with this we sealed the chamber before we did anything else. This work we did, masked and gloved. Palin would not allow me to enter and bring out our lamp: so we cut the wire and left the lamp in the chamber, and Stiven brought one from the coach-house to take its place.

Since I laid most of the stones, I must confess I was glad that the lamp I had hung was put out, for though Harris and Bunch lay in shadow, the light had been falling on Father Herman's face: and this was not fit to be seen, for his eyes were half out of their sockets and his lips were drawn back and the poor wretch had bitten his tongue, the end of which was hanging in a smother of blood.

To draw up the shutter proved simpler than we had hoped: but, what was more to the point, we found that, as with the tread, we could draw it clean out of its grooves and take it away. This we did without fear for our masonry, for the cement we had used was what is called 'quick-drying,' and, when the cascade was falling, all the weight of the water fell clear of the wall. Then we replaced the tread, proposing later to have

another rise fashioned, to block up the hole. But this, in fact, we never took the trouble to do.

Then we returned to the dungeon, to find the water falling as it had fallen before, and the way to the chamber at once concealed and obstructed as though it did not exist.

And now seven days had gone by.

Sarem was slowly mending, the road of approach was open, the Rolls had been brought from the farm, the drawbridge was down for good.

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We had driven Punter to Mittal, bought him a ticket for London and seen him aboard the train. Since he had not one penny upon him, he had, I think, no choice but to use the ticket we gave him to carry him home: and, indeed, his demeanour was humble and he gave us no sort of trouble from first to last. But this, no doubt, was because we gave him no chance. All the same, I disliked the man less than his fellows—perhaps because he took his profession more lightly and had to be driven if he was to play his part. And I think we owed him something, for when Palin went out to meet him that terrible night, he found him asleep at the foot of the dungeon steps.

We had driven Olivia to Haydn, and there in our armed presence she had told her uncle the truth.

The Count had already assumed that his brother was dead, supposing that Harris had killed him and then made off with the jewels: and that, it appeared, was also Bugle's belief—if one may trust the report which the Count himself delivered with

stamps and yells.

On that fatal Sunday evening Bugle, as we had surmised, 305 had gone out alone with the chauffeur, to let down the sluice. He had returned to Haydn at noon the next day—by car, but without the chauffeur with whom he had left. At once he had demanded his confederates, and, learning that they were not there, had proceeded to vent such violence as dangerous lunatics show, declaring that Harris had ‘done it on’ him, execrating Punter and Bunch, and vowing most shocking vengeance on all their heads. When efforts were made to restrain him, he had disabled such servants as had not had time to withdraw and had sought the turret-chamber to which the Count and Augustus had early repaired. Even his strength, however, was here defied, for though with his pistol he shattered the lock of the door, the Count had foreseen this gesture and had taken the frantic precaution of piling against the oak pieces of furniture so massive as only the fear of death could have lent him the strength to move. An unsatisfactory discussion had then ensued, for each desired information which neither was able to give, yet each believed that by persisting he might extract some item which would lead him up to the truth: moreover, while the Count could understand English, if it was carefully used, the English he spoke himself was incredibly bad, and the argument fairly bristled with misconception which Bugle’s offensive impatience did nothing at all to relieve. Still, out of this incoherence such truths emerged as enabled us, when we heard them, to guess the rest.

The thieves had never meant Haydn to share the spoil. Once they had seized the treasure, they proposed to silence the priest and then to retire by the drawbridge, or, failing that, by the

ramparts and so down the postern steps. Bugle was to meet them at the mouth of the road of approach—with the car, but without the chauffeur, whom he was to put out of action as soon as the sluice was down. Only in the last resort would they return to Haydn—that is to say, only if their plans miscarried, or they found themselves for some reason unable to deal with the priest.

Now finding the sluice destroyed, Bugle had at once set off to communicate to Harris this very unpleasant news, but, losing his way in the darkness, when once he had left the car, he only reached the mouth of the waste-pipe *after* the cascade was restored. At first he would not believe the account of those who were there that the flow of the water had ceased for nearly four hours, but the absence of the priest and his confederates argued the truth of this most astounding report: so at last he returned to the car, knocked the chauffeur senseless and proceeded to the road of approach. There, of course, he had waited in vain. After that, on his own admission, he had searched all the neighbouring roads for hour upon hour, at last returning to Haydn, to learn what he could: and there, as I have related, his horrid suspicions were confirmed.

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Though he would not allow such a theory, I think he must have wondered whether in fact we had not given battle and laid the four by the heels: but if that were so, his case was just as evil and all his expectations were just as thoroughly destroyed.

From the turret he had gone to the cellars, to see for himself whether there was not below a rarer spirit than any the Count had offered him during his stay. Here again he found his suspicions confirmed, discovering wines and spirits very much

richer and finer than any the Count had thought fit to produce to his guests. To mark his disapproval of such economy, he destroyed fifty-two dozen bottles in a quarter of an hour and then returned to daylight, bringing with him six bottles of brandy which was more than one hundred years old.

If the household had hoped that the end of its tribulation was now in sight, it was very soon disabused, for almost at once it appeared that Bugle was in search of refreshment, and not of such consolation as liquor will bring. Indeed, for the next four hours he worked with astonishing vigour, ransacking drawers and cupboards all over the house and doing most horrid damage wherever he went. Since he made no attempt to conceal his occupation, the noise of this mischief was continually heard by the Count, who went nearly out of his mind as door after door was burst open and drawer after drawer was forced: but though with howls and yells he besought and commanded the servants to interfere, they either remained out of earshot or preferred to provoke their master to provoking a strong man armed.

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At last, about half past four, Bugle had appeared in the courtyard and had laden the best of the cars with the booty which he had secured. He had then shouted up to the Count that unless he gave him money, he would set fire to the place. After a fearful scene, the Count had thrown down the best part of a hundred pounds and then, upon Bugle's demand, his watch and chain and tie-pin and diamond links. After that the rogue took his leave: and with him he took the wheel-caps of the car which he left, so as to put out of question any attempt at pursuit.

As though this were not enough, the Count was now

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unable to leave the turret-chamber in which he had spent the day, for the fear which had lent him the strength to move the furniture forward was now no longer present to help him to move it back. The oak which had stood against Bugle stood equally fast against the servants who sought to release their lord, and no ladder could reach the windows, because they were set too high. Two hideous hours went by before the door was reduced, for, as luck would have it, the carpenter was gone to Robin, to visit his aunt, and no one else had any but the rudest ideas of dealing with oak and iron. On his own something querulous confession, the Count was by now unfit to dwell at all usefully upon bringing Bugle to justice or taking any action which might go to right his wrongs, while the most distracting disorder prevailing in every room made such demands upon his reason that he presently suffered the servants to put him to bed. In the morning, however, overwhelmed by the emotion of vengeance, he determined, cost what it might, to call in the Salzburg police, and not until then was informed that the car which was yet in the garage could not be used.

So Bugle got clean away: and, though he little thought it, did better than any of his friends.

Here I would say that we let the Count of Haydn assume that we had removed the treasure and lodged it in the vaults of some bank: for we had had trouble enough, and though, as like as not, the Count would have kept our counsel, we could not afford to risk any breach of faith.

I do not believe he regretted his brother's death. He seemed much more taken up with the damage which Bugle had done and the thousand and one indignities which he

and his house had suffered while Harris and his men were his guests. And I do not find this surprising, for, because he was weak as water, his brother had ridden and driven him whither he would, and now, in a sense, the yoke he should never have carried, was off his neck.

One question he answered which had been perplexing us all—and that was how the thieves and his brother had scaled the inside of the waste-pipe without any help from above. When Olivia raised the point, he said at once that in all such old vertical drains there were steps or slots in the wall, just as there are in old chimneys: and that these were cut or left as well for the convenience of the masons that made the drains as for such as might have to come after, to clean or repair their work.

And now seven days had gone by, and I was once more in the forecourt of the inn where we had found Palin three weeks before.

The time was the afternoon of a summer's day: and Olivia was sitting beside me, under the limes.

Her dress was of powder-blue linen, her arms were bare: her small straw hat was off, and her dark brown curls were dappled with light and shade: and her beauty was so lively that she might have been the temple to which the spirit of summer had chosen this day to repair.

It was by her wish that she and I had taken tea at the inn: and since of late we had been but little alone, I had been only too ready to honour her sudden whim.

I shall always remember the scene, which might have belonged to the days when Nicolas Ferrers himself was a baby child. New washed with lime, the inn was as brave and fresh as a smock-frock straight from the iron, and the smiling lane before it was watered, to lay the dust. On the farther side of the doorway a saddle-horse was standing, with his bridle hitched to a staple, set for that purpose in the wall, and in the shade beyond him an apple-cheeked old fellow was sitting beneath the hedgerow, busily rushing a chair. From a meadow beside the inn the steady hiss of a scythe gladdened the ear, to yield from time to time to the ring of steel, so often as he who was reaping whetted his blade: and after a while, I remember, a school of goslings passed, with a little girl to switch them—a pretty, barefoot child, that made us a grave-eyed curtsy, as she went by.

These things were precious enough to stick in any man's mind: yet I remember them less for themselves than as the setting of what was for me the death-knell of hopes which I had not dared harbour, which, nevertheless, had risen out of my dreams.

Olivia had rung their knell in as casual a sentence as ever I heard her speak.

“And by the way, John, my dear, it's time I was gone. I want to be in Paris next week. And perhaps you'll take some action, as the *raison d'être* of our marriage has ceased to exist.”

Then, as though to avoid discussion, she had gone on to speak of the stables which only that morning she and my cousin had planned. These were to be built in the meadows at the foot of the postern steps.

What I answered I do not know, and when at length she suggested that we should revisit the scene of my brush with Harris on the day on which he escaped, I rose and stepped to the Rolls as a man in a dream.

Though I took the wheel and drove off, I did not know what I did, and, but for her, I might well have gone on to Robin, but almost at once, it seemed, I felt her hand on my sleeve.

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“This is the place, John. Just there, by the silver birch. Harris came out of those bushes, the other side of the road.”

In silence we left the car and took the line he had taken as far as the path, and two or three minutes later we came to the spring of water and the gutter dripping with silver and the golden green of the meadow blowing beyond.

And there we sat down, still in silence, and listened to the splash of the water and watched the shadows stealing over the grass.

“Are you asleep?” said Olivia.

I dared not look upon her, but I moved my head a little till I could see her slim ankles crossed on the sward.

“No,” I said. “I was thinking.” And then, “I like this place.”

“Tender memories?” flashed Olivia.

I knew she was referring to my drubbing, and forced a laugh.

But I was not thinking of Harris.

“What are you thinking of?”

“Of that quotation,” I said. “That verse from the Psalms. I suppose this place brought it back. ‘Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling from the power——’”

And there I stopped short:—too late. I could not call back the word. The damage was done.

There was a dreadful silence.

Then—

“My what?” said Olivia, faintly.

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I moistened my lips.

“‘Darling’ is right,” I said desperately. “The quotation is ‘my darling from the power of the dog.’ I altered it to ‘neighbour.’ And then, just now, I forgot.”

“Why did you alter it?” said Olivia.

“It—it seemed impertinent,” I stammered.

“Inappropriate,” said Olivia.

“Impertinent,” I repeated.

There was another silence.

Then—

“Why should you think of that quotation? The power of the dog is over. Your—your neighbour has been delivered.”

“I know,” I said slowly, “I know. But not my soul . . . from the sword. . . . You see, I’m sorry you’re going.”

Olivia caught her breath.

“You don’t mean to say. . . . Will that be the sword—my going?”

I could only nod.

“Oh, my dear,” cried Olivia, “what have I done? You married me to save me: and in return I’ve let you——”

“No, no,” said I. “It’s not true. I . . . loved you before we were married.”

“What?”

I felt better now—now that the murder was out.

“It’s the truth,” said I. “I’m sorry. God knows I never meant to steal a march. Our marriage was the only way out: but I would have cut off my hand—torn out an eye, if that would have saved my darling from the power of the dog.”

There was another silence.

Then—

“I—I think you might have told me,” said Olivia. “Before our

marriage, I mean.”

“If I had, you wouldn’t have married me. And, after all, it had nothing to do with the case.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Olivia. “And in any event, I knew.”

I swung round at that, staring.

“Knew what?” said I.

“That you loved me, of course,” said Olivia, regarding the sky. “That’s half the reason why I became your wife.”

Half the reason. . . . Half . . .

I seemed to see the dining-room at Hohenems, and Palin looking at Olivia, and Olivia meeting his gaze. And I seemed to hear his question and then her cryptic reply.

Trembling, I got to my feet.

“And Andrew,” I heard myself saying. “He knew that I loved you—that night. That’s what he meant when he said that I’d shut his mouth.”

I saw her nod.

“And then,” I said hoarsely, “then he turned to you and asked you. . . . Oh, Olivia, my darling, look at me.”

Her eyes came to rest upon mine.

For a moment I searched their depths.

Then she smiled, as she had smiled at our wedding, a steady, magical smile, and her lovely face was transfigured, and all my world was lightened by the glorious light in her eyes.

And, as she smiled, she put up her blessed hands.

I drew her up to her feet and into my arms.

“My beautiful darling,” I breathed. “How could I guess?”

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“How could I tell you?” she answered. “I did try to show you, you know: but you wouldn’t be shown.”

“All your ways are so sweet,” I said. “I saw no more than that. Besides, I couldn’t look any further: I’d passed my word.”

“Of your own accord, my darling. I never asked you to.”

“You reminded me of it once—suggested I hadn’t kept it, because I had kissed your hand.”

“That,” said Olivia, gravely, “was the woman’s indirect way of going to work. And I thought I had done it that time. And then Sarem opened the door and tore everything up.”

“Then you did mean me to kiss you?”

With her face three inches from mine, Olivia lowered her eyes.

“Do I look that kind of girl, John?”

Her voice betrayed her.

When I held her closer than ever, she looked up, flushed and laughing, a rosy child.

As I bent my head, her arms went about my neck.

There is little more to be told.

My cousin went off to England almost at once, for the lawyer wished to see him about our great-uncle's estate: and a day or two later, despite our efforts to detain him, Palin returned to the inn.

So Hohenems became our home.

This it will always be: and though we are often absent, its towers and woods and meadows are never out of our hearts, and we find few sights more grateful than the first view we have of the castle when we are driving from Mittal along the road of approach.

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One of the first things we did was to fulfil the decoration of the older part of the castle and to put up the tapestries and hangings which my great-uncle had procured. And when this was done, we threw that part open to visitors during the summer months. Then we built in the meadows the stables which Olivia and Hubert had designed and, further down the valley, a miniature farm.

Joint-owners, such as my cousin, must be, I think, hard to find: and when I say that Olivia and I would sooner share Hohenems

with him than own it alone, I am telling no more than the truth. Though he spends there less time than we do, we are always glad of his coming and sorry to let him go, and we know few happier moments than when he and Andrew Palin are together within our gates.

Here I should say that, visiting the latter one evening, we found that he had determined to establish himself at the inn and was sending for furniture from England with which to garnish the rooms which were to be his. Since Hohenems boasted two pianos, in Hubert's name and my own I immediately offered him one, on the strict understanding that he would come and play upon its fellow as often as he should be asked. To our great delight, he accepted the offer I made, and we carried him off there and then to spend the night at the castle and seal the bargain forthwith. It was Olivia's pleasure to supervise the arrangements which had to be made at the inn, and when all was done to her liking, the dignity and charm of his apartments had to be seen to be believed. And there Palin settled down to compose that handsome music which with his talent he should have composed before.

How wise was the counsel he gave us that terrible night becomes the more apparent as time goes by. The treasure is ours for the taking: secure in that knowledge, we think but little about it and care still less, and I find it hard to believe that we shall ever unearth it and court all the fuss and excitement which its revelation must bring.

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Though we live amongst the scenes of our struggles to come by our rights, other and fairer memories are rapidly overgrowing those of the violent prologue to the idyll in which we live, but

sometimes something will happen to bring back those furious days. And then the whole rout sweeps by, like some angry pageant, upon which I stare with a curious sense of detachment, as though not I, but some other had played the part I played.

I see the peasant in the roadway, and Hubert and Stiven lying senseless on the floor of the crazy cottage to which we had been decoyed: I see Harris, bound and bristling, and Father Herman glaring, as a serpent, upon Olivia's gloves: I hear myself calling Olivia, and the roar of the pistol which answered my anguished cry: I hear the door shut behind Harris, and I see his torch lighting the weapon which I had struck out of his hand: I see the man standing in the shadows, and the priest, a dreadful familiar, silent and hooded by his side: I see Bunch binding my darling, and I hear the priest loading with curses her lovely head: and then I see carried out that awful sentence which a jealous lord had pronounced four centuries before.

So often as I remember that terrible closing scene, I feel a natural impulse to fall on my bended knees and thank the God that spared us in our despite. But for His grace we must all have suffered and died most miserably, and, what is ten thousand times worse, I must have seen Olivia tortured to death.

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Of her and our life together I have but little to say, save that the one has made the other into a lively dream. Indeed, to sum up the matter, setting out to seek my fortune, I found my wife, and so became richer than any wealth could have made me, because of the love in her eyes.

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[The end of *Safe Custody* by Dornford Yates]