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CHECKMATE.

BY

J. S. LEFANU,

AUTHOR OF

'TENANTS OF MALORY,' 'ALL IN THE DARK,' 'WILLING TO DIE,'
'WYLDER'S HAND,' ETC.

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By the same Author.

CHECKMATE.

ALL IN THE DARK.

GUY DEVERELL.

THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

TENANTS OF MALORY.

WILLING TO DIE.

WYLDER'S HAND.

HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD.

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CHECKMATE.

CHAPTER I.

MORTLAKE HALL.

THERE stands about a mile and a half beyond Islington, unless it has come down within the last two years, a singular and grand old house. It belonged to the family of Arden, once distinguished in the Northumbrian counties. About fifty acres of ground, rich with noble clumps and masses of old timber, surround it; old-world fish-ponds, with swans sailing upon them, tall yew hedges, quincunxes, leaden fauns and goddesses, and other obsolete splendours surround it. It rises, tall, florid, built of Caen stone, with a palatial flight of steps, and something of the grace and dignity of the genius of Inigo Jones, to whom it is ascribed, with the shadows of ancestral trees and the stains of two centuries upon it, and a vague character of gloom and melancholy, not improved by some indications not actually of decay, but of something too like neglect.

It is now evening, and a dusky glow envelopes the scene. The setting sun throws its level beams, through tall drawing-room windows, ruddily upon the Dutch tapestry on the opposite walls, and not unbecomingly lights up the little party assembled there.

Good-natured, fat Lady May Penrose, in her bonnet, sips her tea and chats agreeably. Her carriage waits outside. You will ask who is that extremely beautiful girl who sits opposite, her large soft grey eyes gazing towards the western sky with a look of abstraction, too forgetful for a time of her company,

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leaning upon the slender hand she has placed under her cheek. How silken and golden-tinted the dark brown hair that grows so near her brows, making her forehead low, and marking with its broad line the beautiful oval of her face! Is there carmine anywhere to match her brilliant lips? And when, recollecting something to tell Lady May, she turns on a sudden, smiling, how soft and pretty the dimples, and how even the little row of pearls she discloses!

This is Alice Arden, whose singularly handsome brother Richard, with some of her tints and outlines translated into masculine beauty, stands leaning on the back of a prie-dieu chair, and chatting gaily.

But who is the thin, tall man—the only sinister figure in the group—with one hand in his breast, the other on a cabinet, as he leans against the wall? Who is that pale, thin-lipped man, "with cadaverous aspect and broken beak," whose eyes never seem to light up, but maintain their dismal darkness while his pale lips smile? Those eyes are fixed on the pretty face of Alice Arden, as she talks to Lady May, with a strangely intense gaze. His eyebrows rise a little, like those of Mephistopheles, towards his temples, with an expression that is inflexibly sarcastic, and sometimes menacing. His jaw is slightly underhung, a formation which heightens the satirical effect of his smile, and, by contrast, marks the depression of his nose.

There was at this time in London a Mr. Longcluse, an agreeable man, a convenient man, who had got a sort of footing in many houses, nobody exactly knew how. He had a knack of obliging people when they really wanted a trifling kindness, and another of holding fast his advantage, and, without seeming to push, or ever appearing to flatter, of maintaining the acquaintance he had once founded. He looked about eight-and-thirty: he was really older. He was gentlemanlike, clever, and rich; but not a soul of all the men who knew him had ever heard of him at school or college. About his birth, parentage, and education, about his "life and adventures," he was dark.

How were his smart acquaintance made? Oddly, as we shall learn when we know him a little better. It was a great pity that there were some odd things said about this very agreeable, obliging, and gentlemanlike person. It was a pity that more was not known about him. The man had enemies, no doubt, and from the sort of reserve that enveloped him their opportunity arose. But were there not about town hundreds of men, well enough accepted, about whose early days no one cared a pin, and everything was just as dark?

Now Mr. Longcluse, with his pallid face, his flat nose, his sarcastic eyebrows, and thin-lipped smile, was overlooking this little company, his shoulder leaning against the frame that

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separated two pieces of the pretty Dutch tapestry which covered the walls.

"By-the-bye, Mr. Longcluse—you can tell me, for you always know everything," said Lady May—"is there still any hope of that poor child's recovering—I mean the one in that dreadful murder in Thames Street, where the six poor little children were stabbed?"

Mr. Longcluse smiled.

"I'm so glad, Lady May, I can answer you upon good authority! I stopped to-day to ask Sir Edwin Dudley that very question through his carriage window, and he said that he had just been to the hospital to see the poor little thing, and that it was likely to do well."

"I'm so glad! And what do they say can have been the motive of the murder?"

"Jealousy, they say; or else the man is mad."

"I should not wonder. I'm sure I hope he is. But they should take care to put him under lock and key."

"So they will, rely on it; that's a matter of course."

"I don't know how it is," continued Lady May, who was garrulous, "that murders interest people so much, who ought to be simply shocked at them."

"We have a murder in our family, you know," said Richard Arden.

"That was poor Henry Arden—I know," she answered, lowering her voice and dropping her eyes, with a side glance at Alice, for she did not know how she might like to hear it talked of.

"Oh, that happened when Alice was only five months old, I think," said Richard; and slipping into the chair beside Lady May, he laid his hand upon hers with a smile, and whispered, leaning towards her—

"You are always so thoughtful; it is *so* nice of you!"

And this short speech ended, his eyes remained fixed for some seconds, with a glow of tender admiration, on those of fat Lady May, who simpered with effusion, and did not draw her hand away until she thought she saw Mr. Longcluse glance their way.

It was quite true, all he said of Lady May. It would not be easy to find a simpler or more good-natured person. She was very rich also, and, it was said by people who love news and satire, had long been willing to share her gold and other chattels with handsome Richard Arden, who being but five-and-twenty, might very nearly have been her son.

"I remember that horrible affair," said Mr. Longcluse, with a little shrug and a shake of his head. "Where was I then—Paris or Vienna? Paris it was. I recollect it all now, for my purse was stolen by the very man who made his escape—Mace was his name; he was a sort of low man on the turf, I believe.

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I was very young then — somewhere about seventeen, I think."

"You can't have been more, of course," said good-natured Lady May.

"I should like very much some time to hear all about it," continued Mr. Longcluse.

"So you shall," said Richard, "whenever you like."

"Every old family has a murder, and a ghost, and a beauty also, though she does not always live and breathe, except in the canvas of Lely, or Kneller, or Reynolds: and they, you know, had roses and lilies to give away at discretion, in their paint-boxes, and were courtiers," remarked Mr. Longcluse, "who dealt sometimes in the old-fashioned business of making compliments. *I* say happy the man who lives in those summers when the loveliness of some beautiful family culminates, and who may, at ever such a distance, gaze and worship."

This ugly man spoke in a low tone, and his voice was rather sweet. He looked as he spoke at Miss Arden, from whom, indeed, his eyes did not often wander.

"Very prettily said!" applauded Lady May affably.

"I forgot to ask you, Lady May," inquired Alice, cruelly, at this moment, "how the pretty little Italian greyhound is that was so ill—better, I hope."

"Ever so much—quite well almost. I'd have taken him out for a drive to-day, poor dear little Pepsie! but that I thought the sun just a little overpowering. Didn't you?"

"Perhaps a little."

Mr. Longcluse lowered his eyes as he leaned against the wall and sighed, with a pained smile, that even upon his plain, pallid face, was pathetic.

Did proud Richard Arden perceive the devotion of the dubious Longcluse—undefined in position, in history, in origin, in character, in all things but in wealth? Of course he did, perfectly. But that wealth was said to be enormous. There were Jews, who ought to know, who said he was worth one million eight hundred thousand pounds, and that his annual income was considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds a year.

Was a man like that to be dismissed without inquiry? Had he not found him good-natured and gentlemanlike? What about those stories circulated among Jews and croupiers? Enemies might affect to believe them, and quote the old saw, "There is never smoke without fire;" but dare one of them utter a word of the kind aloud? Did they stand the test of five minutes' inquiry, such even as he had given them? Had he found a particle of proof, of evidence, of suspicion? Not a spark. What man had ever escaped stories who was worth forging a lie about?

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Here was a man worth more than a million. Why, if *he* let him slip through his fingers, some duchess would pounce on him for her daughter.

It was well that Longcluse was really in love—well, perhaps, that he did not appreciate the social omnipotence of money.

"Where is Sir Reginald at present?" asked Lady May.

"Not here, you may be sure," answered Richard. "My father does not admit my visits, you know."

"Really! And is that miserable quarrel kept up still?"

"Only too true. He is in France at present; at Vichy—ain't it Vichy?" he said to Alice.

But she, not choosing to talk, said simply, "Yes—Vichy."

"I'm going to take Alice into town again; she has promised to stay with me a little longer. And I think you neglect her a little, don't you? You ought to come and see her a little oftener," pleaded Lady May, in an undertone.

"I only feared I was boring you all. Nothing, *you* know, would give me half so much pleasure," he answered.

"Well, then, she'll expect your visits, mind."

A little silence followed. Richard was vexed with his sister; she was, he thought, snubbing his friend Longcluse.

Well, when once he had spoken his mind and disclosed his treasures, Richard flattered himself he had some influence; and did not Lady May swear by Mr. Longcluse? And was his father, the most despotic and violent of baronets, and very much dipt, likely to listen to sentimental twaddle pleading against a hundred thousand a year? So, Miss Alice, if you were disposed to talk nonsense, it was not very likely to be listened to, and sharp and short logic might ensue.

How utterly unconscious of all this she sits there, thinking, I daresay, of quite another person!

Mr. Longcluse was also for a moment in profound reverie; so was Richard Arden. The secrecy of thought is a pleasant privilege to the thinker—perhaps hardly less a boon to the person pondered upon.

If each man's forehead could project its shadows and the light of his spirit shine through, and the confluence of figures and phantoms that cross and march behind it become visible, how that magic-lantern might appal good easy people!

And now the ladies fell to talking and comparing notes about their guipure lacework.

"How charming yours looks, my dear, round that little table!" exclaimed Lady May in a rapture. "I'm sure I hope mine may turn out half as pretty. I wanted to compare; I'm not quite sure whether it is exactly the same pattern."

And so on, until it was time for them to order their wings for town.

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The gentlemen have business of their own to transact, or pleasures to pursue. Mr. Longcluse has his trap there, to carry them into town when their hour comes. They can only put the ladies into their places, and bid them good-bye, and exchange parting reminders and good-natured speeches.

Pale Mr. Longcluse, as he stands on the steps, looks with his dark eyes after the disappearing carriage, and sighs deeply. He has forgotten all for the moment but one dream. Richard Arden wakens him, by laying his hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Longcluse, let us have a cigar in the billiard-room, and a talk. I have a box of Manillas that I think you will say are delicious—that is, if you like them full-flavoured."

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CHAPTER II.

MARTHA TANSEY.

"BY-THE-BYE, Longcluse," said Richard, as they entered together the long tiled passage that leads to the billiard-room, "you like pictures. There is one here, banished to the housekeeper's room, that they say is a Vandyck; we must have it cleaned and backed, and restored to its old place—but would you care to look at it?"

"Certainly, I should like extremely," said Mr. Longcluse.

They were now at the door of the housekeeper's room, and Richard Arden knocked.

"Come in," said the quavering voice of the old woman from within.

Richard Arden opened the door wide. The misty rose-coloured light of the setting sun filled the room. From the wall right opposite, the pale portrait of Sir Thomas Arden, who fought for the king during the great Civil War, looked forth from his deep dingy frame full upon them, stern and melancholy; the misty beams touching the softer lights of his long hair and the gleam of his armour so happily, that the figure came out from its dark background, and seemed ready to step forth to meet them. As it happened, there was no one in the room but old Mrs. Tansey, the housekeeper, who received Richard Arden standing.

From the threshold, Mr. Longcluse, lost in wonder at the noble picture, gazed on it, with the exclamation, almost a cry, "Good heaven! what a noble work! I had no idea there could be such a thing in existence and so little known." And he stood for awhile in a rapture, gazing from the threshold on the portrait.

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At sound of that voice, with a vague and terrible recognition, the housekeeper turned with a start towards the door, expecting, you'd have fancied from her face, the entrance of a ghost. There was a tremble in the voice with which she cried, "Lord! what's that?" a tremble in the hand extended towards the door, and a shake also in the pale frowning face, from which shone her glassy eyes.

Mr. Longcluse stepped in, and the old woman's gaze became, as he did so, more shrinking and intense. When he saw her he recoiled, as a man might who had all but trod upon a snake; and these two people gazed at one another with a strange, uncertain scowl.

In Mr. Longcluse's case, this dismal caprice of countenance did not last beyond a second or two. Richard Arden, as he turned his eyes from the picture to say a word to his companion, saw it for a moment, and it faded from his features—saw it, and the darkened countenance of the old housekeeper, with a momentary shock. He glanced from one to the other quickly, with a look of unconscious surprise. That look instantly recalled Mr. Longcluse, who, laying his hand on Richard Arden's arm, said, with a laugh—"I do believe I'm the most nervous man in the world."

"You don't find the room too hot?" said Richard, inwardly ruminating upon the strange looks he had just seen exchanged. "Mrs. Tansey keeps a fire all the year round — don't you, Martha?"

Martha did not answer, nor seem to hear; she pressed her lean hand, instead, to her heart, and drew back to a sofa and sat down, muttering, "My God, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee!" and she looked as if she were on the point of fainting.

"That is a true Vandyck," said Mr. Longcluse, who was now again looking stedfastly at the picture. "It deserves to rank among his finest portraits. I have never seen anything of his more forcible. You really ought not to leave it here, and in this state." He walked over and raised the lower end of the frame gently from the wall. "Yes, just as you said, it wants to be backed. That portrait would not stand a shake, I can tell you. The canvas is perfectly rotten, and the paint—if you stand here you'll see—is ready to flake off. It is an awful pity. You shouldn't leave it in such danger."

"No," said Richard, who was looking at the old woman. "I don't think Martha's well—will you excuse me for a moment?" And he was at the housekeeper's side. "What's the matter, Martha?" he said kindly. "Are you ill?"

"Very bad, Sir. I beg your pardon for sitting, but I could not help; and the gentleman will excuse me."

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"Of course—but what's the matter?" said Richard.

"A sudden fright like, Sir. I'm all over on a tremble," she quavered.

"See how exquisitely that hand is painted," continued Mr. Longcluse, pursuing his criticism, "and the art with which the lights are managed. It is a wonderful picture. It makes one positively angry to see it in that state, and anywhere but in the most conspicuous and honourable place. If I owned that picture, I should never be tired showing it. I should have it where everyone who came into my house should see it; and I should watch every crack and blur on its surface, as I should the symptoms of a dying child, or the looks of the mistress of my heart. Now just look at this. Where is he? Oh!"

"I beg your pardon, a thousand times, but I find my old friend Martha feels a little faint and ill," said Richard.

"Dear me! I hope she's better," said Mr. Longcluse, approaching with solicitude. "Can I be of any use? Shall I touch the bell?"

"I'm better, Sir, I thank you; I'm much better," said the old woman. "It won't signify nothing, only—" She was looking hard again at Mr. Longcluse, who now seemed perfectly at his ease, and showed in his countenance nothing but the commiseration befitting the occasion. "A sort of a weakness—a fright like—and I can't think, quite, what came over me."

"Don't you think a glass of wine might do her good?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"Thanks, Sir, I don't drink it. Oh, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee! Good Lord, a' mercy on us! I take them drops, hartshorn and valerian, on a little water, when I feel nervous like. I don't know when I was took wi' t' creepins before."

"You look better," said Richard.

"I'm quite right again, Sir," she said, with a sigh. She had taken her "drops," and seemed restored.

"Hadn't you better have one of the maids with you? I'm going now; I'll send some one," he said. "You must get all right, Martha. It pains me to see you ill. You're a very old friend, remember. You must be all right again; and, if you like, we'll have the doctor out, from town."

He said this, holding her thin old hand very kindly, for he was by no means without good-nature. So sending the promised attendant, he and Longcluse proceeded to the billiard-room, where, having got the lamps lighted, they began to enjoy their smoke. Each, I fancy, was thinking of the little incident in the housekeeper's room. There was a long silence.

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"Poor old Tansey! She looked awfully ill," said Richard Arden at last.

"By Jove! she did. Is that her name? She rather frightened me," said Mr. Longcluse. "I thought we had stumbled on a mad woman—she stared so. Has she ever had any kind of fit, poor thing?"

"No. She grumbles a good deal, but I really think she's a healthy old woman enough. She says she was frightened."

"We came in too suddenly, perhaps?"

"No, that wasn't it, for I knocked first," said Arden.

"Ah, yes, so you did. I only know she frightened me. I really thought she was out of her mind, and that she was going to stick me with a knife, perhaps," said Mr. Longcluse, with a little laugh and a shrug.

Arden laughed, and puffed away at his cigar till he had it in a glow again. Was this explanation of what he had seen in Longcluse's countenance—a picture presented but for a fraction of a second, but thenceforward ineffaceable—quite satisfactory?

In a short time Mr. Longcluse asked whether he could have a little brandy and water, which accordingly was furnished. In his first glass there was a great deal of brandy, and very little water indeed; and his second, sipped more at his leisure, was but little more diluted. A very faint flush tinged his pallid cheeks.

Richard Arden was, by this time, thinking of his own debts and ill-luck, and at last he said, "I wonder what the art of getting on in the world is. Is it communicable? or is it no art at all, but a simple run of luck?"

Mr. Longcluse smiled scornfully. "There are men who have immense faith in themselves," said he, "who have indomitable will, and who are provided with craft and pliancy for any situation. Those men are giants from the first to the last hour of action, unless, as happened to Napoleon, success enervates them. In the cradle, they strangle serpents; blind, they pull down palaces; old as Dandolo, they burn fleets and capture cities. It is only when they have taken to bragging that the *Iues Napoleonica* has set in. Now I have been, in a sense, a successful man—I am worth some money. If I were the sort of man I describe, I should be worth, if I cared for it, ten times what I have in as many years. But I don't care to confess I made my money by flukes. If, having no tenderness, you have two attributes — profound cunning and perfect audacity—nothing can keep you back. I'm a common-place man, I say; but I know what constitutes power. Life is a battle, and the general's qualities win."

"I have not got the general's qualities, I think; and I know

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I haven't luck," said Arden; "so for my part I may as well drift, with as little trouble as may be, wherever the current drives. Happiness is not for all men."

"Happiness is for *no* man," said Mr. Longcluse. And a little silence followed. "Now suppose a fellow has got more money than ever he dreamed of," he resumed, "and finds money, after all, not quite what he fancied, and that he has come to long for a prize quite distinct and infinitely more precious; so that he finds, at last, that he never can be happy for an hour without it, and yet, for all his longing and his pains, sees it is unattainable as that star." (He pointed to a planet that shone down through the skylight.) "Is that man happy? He carries with him, go where he may, an aching heart, the pangs of jealousy and despair, and the longing of the damned for Paradise. That is *my* miserable case."

Richard Arden laughed, as he lighted his second cigar.

"Well, if that's your case, you can't be one of those giants you described just now. Women are not the obdurate and cruel creatures you fancy. They are proud, and vain, and unforgiving; but the misery and the perseverance of a lover constitute a worship that first flatters and then wins them. Remember this, a woman finds it very hard to give up a worshipper, except for another. Now why should you despair? You are a gentleman, you are a clever fellow, an agreeable fellow; you are what is accounted a young man still, and you can make your wife rich. They all like that. It is not avarice, but pride. I don't know the young lady, but I see no good reason why you should fail."

"I wish, Arden, I dare tell you all; but some day I'll tell you more."

"The only thing is —— You'll not mind my telling you, as you have been so frank with me?"

"Pray say whatever you think. I shall be ever so much obliged. I forget so many things about English manners and ways of thinking—I have lived so very much abroad. Should I be put up for a club?"

"Well, I should not mind a club just yet, till you know more people — quite time enough. But you must manage better. Why should those Jew fellows, and other people, who don't hold, and never can, a position the least like yours, be among your acquaintance? You must make it a rule to drop all objectionable persons, and know none but good people. Of course, when you are strong enough it doesn't so much matter, provided you keep them at arm's length. But you passed your younger days abroad, as you say, and not being yet so well known here, you will have to be particular—don't

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you see? A man is so much judged by his acquaintance; and, in fact, it is essential."

"A thousand thanks for any hints that strike you," said Longcluse good humouredly.

"They sound frivolous; but these trifles have immense weight with women," said Arden. "By Jove!" he added, glancing at his watch, "we shall be late. Your trap is at the door—suppose we go?"

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CHAPTER III.

MR. LONGCLUSE OPENS HIS HEART.

THE old housekeeper had drawn near her window, and stood close to the pane, through which she looked out upon the star-lit night. The stars shine down over the foliage of huge old trees. Dim as shadows stand the horse and tax-cart that await Mr. Longcluse and Richard Arden, who now at length appear. The groom fixes the lamps, one of which shines full on Mr. Longcluse's peculiar face.

"Ay—the voice; I could a' sworn to that," she muttered. "It went through me like a scythe. But that's a strange face; and yet there's summat in it, just a hint like, to call my thoughts out a-seeking up and down, and to and fro; and 'twill not let me rest until I come to find the truth. Mace? No, no. Langly? Not he. Yet 'twas summat *that night*, I think—summat awful. And who *was* there? No one. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord! for my heart is sore troubled."

Up jumped the groom. Mr. Longcluse had the reins in his hand, and he and his companion passed swiftly by the window, and the flash of the lamps crossed the panelled walls of the housekeeper's room. The light danced wildly from corner to corner of the wainscot, accompanied by the shadows of two geraniums in bow-pots on the window-stool. The lamps flew by, and she still stood there, with the palsied shake of her head and hand, looking out into the darkness, in rumination.

Arden and Longcluse glided through the night air in silence, under the mighty old trees that had witnessed generations of Ardens, down the darker, narrow road, and by the faded old inn, once famous in those regions as the "Guy of Warwick,"

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representing still on its board, in tarnished gold and colours, that redoubted champion, with a boar's head on the point of his sword, and a grotesque lion winding itself fawningly about his horse's legs.

As they passed swiftly along this smooth and deserted road, Longcluse spoke. *Aperit præcordia vinum.* In his brandy and water he had not spared alcohol, and the quantity was considerable.

"I have lots of money, Arden, and I can talk to people, as you say," he suddenly said, as if Richard Arden had spoken but a moment before; "but, on the whole, is there on earth a more miserable dog than I? There are things that trouble me that would make you laugh; there are others that would, if I dare tell them, make you sigh. Soon I shall be able; soon you shall know all. I'm not a bad fellow. I know how to give away money, and, what is harder to bestow on others, my time and labour. But who to look at me would believe it? I'm not a worse fellow than Penruddock. I can cry for pity and do a kind act like him; but I look in my glass, and I also feel like him, 'the mark of Cain' is on me—cruelty in my face. Why should Nature write on some men's faces such libels on their characters? Then here's another thing to make you laugh—you, a handsome fellow, to whom beauty belongs, I say, by right of birth—it would make me laugh also if I were not, as I am, forced every hour I live to count up, in agonies of hope and terror, my chances in that enterprise in which all my happiness for life is staked so wildly. Common ugliness does not matter, it is got over. But such a face as mine! Come, come! you are too good-natured to say. I'm not asking for consolation; I am only summing up my curses."

"You make too much of these. Lady May thinks your face, she says, very interesting—upon my honour, she does."

"Oh, heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Longcluse, with a shrug and a laugh.

"And what is more to the purpose (will you forgive my reporting all this—you won't mind?), some young lady friends of hers who were by said, I assure you, that you had so much expression, and that your features were extremely refined."

"It won't do, Arden; you are too good-natured," said he, laughing more bitterly.

"I should much rather be as I am, if I were you, than be gifted with vulgar beauty—plump, pink and white, with black beady eyes, and all that," said Arden.

"But the heaviest curse upon me is that which, perhaps, you do not suspect—the curse of—secrecy."

"Oh, really!" said Arden, laughing, as if he had thought up

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to then that Mr. Longcluse's history was as well known as that of the ex-Emperor Napoleon.

"I don't say that I shall come out like the enchanted hero in a fairy tale, and change in a moment from a beast into a prince; but I am something better than I seem. In a short time, if you cared to be bored with it, I shall have a great deal to tell you."

There followed here a silence of two or three minutes, and then, on a sudden, pathetically, Mr. Longcluse broke forth—

"What has a fellow like me to do with love? and less than beloved, can I ever be happy? I know something of the world—not of this London world, where I live less than I seem to do, and into which I came too late ever to understand it thoroughly—I know something of a greater world, and human nature is the same everywhere. You talk of a girl's pride inducing her to marry a man for the sake of his riches. Could I possess my beloved on those terms? I would rather place a pistol in my mouth, and blow my skull off. Arden, I'm unhappy; I'm the most miserable dog alive."

"Come, Longcluse, that's all nonsense. Beauty is no advantage to a man. The being agreeable is an immense one. But success is what women worship, and if, in addition to that, you possess wealth—not, as I said, that they are sordid, but only vain-glorious—you become very nearly irresistible. Now *you* are agreeable, successful and wealthy—you must see what follows."

"I'm out of spirits," said Longcluse, and relapsed into silence, with a great sigh.

By this time they had got within the lamps, and were threading streets, and rapidly approaching their destination. Five minutes more, and these gentlemen had entered a vast room, in the centre of which stood a billiard-table, with benches rising tier above tier to the walls, and a gallery running round the building above them, brilliantly lighted, as such places are, and already crowded with all kinds of people. There is going to be a great match of a "thousand up" played between Bill Hood and Bob Markham. The betting has been unusually high; it is still going on. The play won't begin for nearly half an hour. The "admirers of the game" have mustered in great force and variety. There are young peers, with sixty thousand a year, and there are gentlemen who live by their billiards. There are, for once in a way, grave persons, bankers, and counsel learned in the law; there are Jews and a sprinkling of foreigners; and there are members of Parliament and members of the swell mob.

Mr. Longcluse has a good deal to think about this night. He *is* out of spirits. Richard Arden is no longer with him, having picked up a friend or two in the room. Longcluse, with folded

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arms, and his shoulders against the wall, is in a profound reverie, his dark eyes for the time lowered to the floor, beside the point of his French boot. *There* unfold themselves beneath him picture after picture, the scenes of many a year ago. Looking down, there creeps over him an old horror, a supernatural disgust, and he sees in the dark a pair of wide, white eyes, staring up at him in an agony of terror, and a shrill yell, piercing a distance of many years, makes him shake his ears with a sudden chill. Is this the witches' Sabbath of our pale Mephistopheles —his night of goblins? He raised his eyes, and they met those of a person whom he had not seen for a very long time—a third part of his whole life. The two pairs of eyes, at nearly half across the room, have met, and for a moment fixed. The stranger smiles and nods. Mr. Longcluse does neither. He affects now to be looking over the stranger's shoulder at some more distant object. There is a strange chill and commotion at his heart.

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CHAPTER IV.

MONSIEUR LEBAS.

MR. LONGCLUSE leaned still with folded arms, and his shoulder to the wall. The stranger, smiling and fussy, was making his way to him. There is nothing in this man's appearance to associate him with tragic incident or emotion of any kind. He is plainly a foreigner. He is short, fat, middle-aged, with a round fat face, radiant with good humour and good-natured enjoyment. His dress is cut in the somewhat grotesque style of a low French tailor. It is not very new, and has some spots of grease upon it. Mr. Longcluse perceives that he is now making his way towards him. Longcluse for a moment thought of making his escape by the door, which was close to him; but he reflected, "He is about the most innocent and good-natured soul on earth, and why should I seem to avoid him? Better, if he's looking for me, to let him find me, and say his say." So Longcluse looked another way, his arms still folded, and his shoulders against the wall as before.

"Ah, ha! Monsieur is thinking profoundly," said a gay voice in French. "Ah, ha, ha, ha! you are surprised, Sir, to see me here. So am I, my faith! I saw you. I never forget a face."

"Nor a friend, Lebas. Who could have imagined anything to bring you to London?" answered Longcluse, in the same language, shaking him warmly by the hand, and smiling down on the little man. "I shall never forget your kindness. I think I should have died in that *illness* but for you. How can I ever thank you half enough?"

"And the grand secret—the political difficulty—Monsieur found it well evaded," he said, mysteriously touching his upper lip with two fingers.

"Not all quiet yet. I suppose you thought I was in Vienna?"

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"Eh? well, yes—so I did," answered Lebas, with a shrug. "But perhaps you think this place safer."

"Hush! You'll come to me to-morrow. I'll tell you where to find me before we part, and you'll bring your portmanteau and stay with me while you remain in London, and the longer the better."

"Monsieur is too kind, a great deal; but I am staying for my visit to London with my brother-in-law, Gabriel Laroque, the watchmaker. He lives on the Hill of Ludgate, and he would be offended if I were to reside anywhere but in his house while I stay. But if Monsieur would be so good as to permit me to call ——"

"You must come and dine with me to-morrow; I have a box for the opera. You love music, or you are not the Pierre Lebas whom I remember sitting with his violin at an open window. So come early, come before six; I have ever so much to ask you. And what has brought you to London?"

"A very little business and a great deal of pleasure; but all in a week," said the little man, with a shrug and a hearty laugh. "I have come over here about some little things like that." He smiled archly as he produced from his waistcoat pocket a little flat box with a glass top, and shook something in it. "Commerce, you see. I have to see two or three more of the London people, and then my business will have terminated, and nothing remain for the rest of the week but pleasure—ha, ha!"

"You left all at home well, I hope—children?" He was going to say "Madame," but a good many years had passed.

"I have seven children. Monsieur will remember two. Three are by my first marriage, four by my second, and all enjoy the very best health. Three are very young—three, two, one year old; and they say a fourth is not impossible very soon," he added archly.

Longcluse laughed kindly, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"You must take charge of a little present for each from me, and one for Madame. And the old business still flourishes?"

"A thousand thanks! yes, the business is the same—the file, the chisel, and knife." And he made a corresponding movement of his hand as he mentioned each instrument.

"*Hush!*" said Longcluse, smiling, so that no one who did not hear him would have supposed there was so much cautious emphasis in the word. "My good friend, remember there are details we talk of, you and I together, that are not to be mentioned so suitably in a place like this," and he pressed his hand on his wrist, and shook it gently.

"A thousand pardons! I am, I know, too careless, and let my tongue too often run before my caution. My wife, she says,

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'You can't wash your shirt but you must tell the world.' It is my weakness truly. She is a woman of extraordinary penetration."

Mr. Longcluse glanced from the corners of his eyes about the room. Perhaps he wished to ascertain whether his talk with this man, whom you would have taken to be little above the level of a French mechanic, had excited anyone's attention. But there was nothing to make him think so.

"Now, Pierre, my friend, you must win some money upon this match—do you see? And you won't deny me the pleasure of putting down your stake for you; and, if you win, you shall buy something pretty for Madame—and, win or lose, I shall think it friendly of you after so many years, and like you the better."

"Monsieur is too good," he said with effusion.

"Now look. Do you see that fat Jew over there on the front bench—you can't mistake him—with the velvet waistcoat all in wrinkles, and the enormous lips, who talks to every second person who passes?"

"I see perfectly, Monsieur."

"He is betting three to one upon Markham. You must take his offer, and back Hood. I'm told *he'll* win. Here are ten pounds, you may as well make them thirty. Don't say a word. Our English custom is to *tip*, as we say, our friend's sons at school, and to make presents to everybody, as often as we like. Now there—not a word." He quietly slipped into his hand a little rouleau of ten pounds in gold. "If you say one word you wound me," he continued. "But, good Heaven! my dear friend, haven't you a breast-pocket?"

"No, Monsieur; but this is quite safe. I was paid, only five minutes before I came here, fifteen pounds in gold, a cheque of forty-four pounds, and ——"

"Be silent. You may be overheard. Speak here in a very low tone, as I do. And do you mean to tell me that you carry all that money in your coat pocket?"

"But in a pocket-book, Monsieur."

"All the more convenient for the *chevalier d'industrie*," said Longcluse. "Stop. Pray don't produce it; your fate is, perhaps, sealed if you do. There are gentlemen in this room who would hustle and rob you in the crowd as you get out; or, failing that, who, seeing that you are a stranger, would follow and murder you in the streets, for the sake of a twentieth part of that sum."

"Gabriel thought there would be none here but men distinguished," said Lebas, in some consternation.

"Distinguished by the special attention of the police, some of them," said Longcluse.

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"Hé! that is very true," said Monsieur Lebas—"very true, I am sure of it. See you that man there, Monsieur? Regard him for a moment. The tall man, who leans with his shoulder to the metal pillar of the gallery. My faith! he has observed my steps and followed me. I thought he was a spy. But my friend he says 'No, that is a man of bad character, dismissed for bad practices from the police.' Aha! he has watched me sideways, with the corner of his eye. I will watch him with the corner of mine—ha, ha!"

"It proves, at all events, Lebas, that there are people here other than gentlemen and men of honest lives," said Longcluse.

"But," said Lebas, brightening a little, "I have this weapon," producing a dagger from the same pocket.

"Put it back this instant. Worse and worse, my good friend. Don't you know that just now there is a police activity respecting foreigners, and that two have been arrested only yesterday on no charge but that of having weapons about their persons? I don't know what the devil you had best do."

"I can return to the Hill of Ludgate—eh?"

"Pity to lose the game; they won't let you back again," said Longcluse.

"What shall I do?" said Lebas, keeping his hand now in his pocket on his treasure.

Longcluse rubbed the tip of his finger a little over his eyebrow, thinking.

"Listen to me," said Longcluse, suddenly. "Is your brother-in-law here?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Well, you have some London friend in the room, haven't you?"

"One—yes."

"Only be sure he is one whom you can trust, and who has a safe pocket."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur, entirely! and I saw him place his purse so," he said, touching his coat, over his heart, with his fingers.

"Well, now, you can't manage it here, under the gaze of the people; but—*where* is best? Yes—you see those two doors at opposite sides in the wall, at the far end of the room? They open into two parallel corridors leading to the hall, and a little way down there is a cross passage, in the middle of which is a door opening into a smoking-room. That room will be deserted now, and there, unseen, you can place your money and dagger in his charge."

"Ah, thank you a hundred thousand times, Monsieur!" answered Lebas. "I shall be writing to the Baron van Boeren to-morrow, and I will tell him I have met Monsieur."

"Don't mind; how is the baron?" asked Longcluse.

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"Very well. Beginning to be not so young, you know, and thinking of retiring. I will tell him his work has succeeded. If he demolishes, he also secures. If he sometimes sheds blood ——"

"*Hush!*" whispered Longcluse, sternly.

"There is no one," murmured little Lebas, looking round, but dropping his voice to a whisper. "He also saves a neck sometimes from the blade of the guillotine.'

Longcluse frowned, a little embarrassed. Lebas smiled archly. In a moment Longcluse's impatient frown broke into a mysterious smile that responded.

"May I say one word more, and make one request of Monsieur, which I hope he will not think very impertinent?" asked Monsieur Lebas, who had just been on the point of taking his leave.

"It mayn't be in my power to grant it; but you can't be what you say—I am too much obliged to you—so speak quite freely," said Longcluse.

So they talked a little more and parted, and Monsieur Lebas went on his way.

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CHAPTER V.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE play has commenced. Longcluse, who likes and understands the game, sitting beside Richard Arden, is all eye. He is intensely eager and delighted He joins modestly in the clapping that now and then follows a stroke of extraordinary brilliancy. Now and then he whispers a criticism in Arden's ear. There are many vicissitudes in the game. The players have entered on the third hundred, and still "doubtful it stood." The excitement is extraordinary. The assembly is as hushed as if it were listening to a sermon, and, I am afraid, more attentive. Now, on a sudden, Hood scores a hundred and sixty-eight points in a single break. A burst of prolonged applause follows, and, during the clapping, in which he had at first joined, Longcluse says to Arden,—

"I can't tell you how that run of Hood's delights me. I saw a poor little friend of mine here before the play began—I had not seen him since I was little more than a boy—a Frenchman, a good-natured little soul, and I advised him to back Hood, and I have been trembling up to this moment. But I think he's safe now to win. Markham can't score this time. If he's in 'Queer Street,' as they whisper round the room, you'll find he'll either give a simple miss, or put himself into the pocket."

"Well, I'm sure I hope your friend will win, because it will put three hundred and eighty pounds into my pocket," said Richard Arden.

And now silence was called, and the building became, in a moment, hushed as a cathedral before the anthem; and Markham knocked his own ball into the pocket as Longcluse had predicted.

On sped the game. and at last Hood scored a thousand, and

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won the match, greeted by an uproar of applause that, now being no longer restrained, lasted for nearly five minutes. The assemblage had, by this time, descended from the benches, and crowded the floor in clusters, discussing the play or settling bets. The people in the gallery were pouring down by the four staircases, and adding to the crowd and buzz.

Suddenly there is a sort of excitement perceptible of a new kind—a gathering and pressure of men about one of the doors at the far corner of the room. Men are looking back and beckoning to their companions; others are shouldering forward as strenuously as they can. What is it—any dispute about the score?—a pair of men boxing in the passage?

"No suspicion of fire?" the men at this near end exclaim, and sniff over their shoulders, and look about them, and move toward the point where the crowd is thickening, not knowing what to make of the matter. But soon there runs a rumour about the room—"a man has just been found murdered in a room outside," and the crowd now press forward more energetically to the point of attraction.

In the cross-passage which connects the two corridors, as Mr. Longcluse described, there is an awful crush, and next to no light. A single jet of gas burns in the smoking-room, where the pressure of the crowd is not quite so much felt. There are two policemen in that chamber, in the ordinary uniform of the force, and three detectives in plain clothes, one supporting a corpse already stiffening, in a sitting posture, as it was found, in a far angle of the room, on the bench to your left as you look in. All the people are looking up the room. You can see nothing but hats, and backs of heads, and shoulders. There is a ceaseless buzz and clack of talk and conjecture. Even the policemen are looking, as the rest do, at the body. The man who has mounted on the chair near the door, with the other beside him, who has one foot on the rung and another on the seat, and an arm round the first gentleman's neck, although he has not the honour of his acquaintance, to support himself, can see, over the others' heads, the one silent face which looks back towards the door, upon so many gaping, and staring, and gabbling ones. The light is faint. It has occurred to no one to light the gas lamps in the centre. But that forlorn face is distinct enough. Fixed and leaden it is, with the chin a little raised. The eyes are wide open, with a deep and awful gaze; the mouth slightly distorted with what the doctors call "a convulsive smile," which shows the teeth a little, and has an odd, wincing look.

As I live, it is the little Frenchman, Pierre Lebas, who was talking so gaily to-night with Mr. Longcluse!

The ebony haft of a dagger, sticking straight out, shows where the hand of the assassin planted the last stab of four, through

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his black satin waistcoat, embroidered with green leaves, red strawberries, and yellow flowers, which, I suppose, was one of the finest articles in the little wardrobe that Madame Lebas packed up for his holiday. It is not worth much now. It has four distinct cuts, as I have said, on the left side, right through it, and is soaked in blood.

His pockets have been rifled. The police have found nothing in them but a red pocket-handkerchief and a papier-maché snuff-box. If that dumb mouth could speak but fifty words, what a world of conjecture it would end, and poor Lebas's story would be listened to as never was story of his before!

A policeman now takes his place at the door to prevent further pressure. No new-comers will be admitted, except as others go out. Those outside are asking questions of those within, and transmitting, over their shoulders, particulars, eagerly repeated. On a sudden there is a subsidence of the buzz and gabble within, and one voice, speaking almost at the pitch of a shriek, is heard declaiming. White as a sheet, Mr. Longcluse, in high excitement, is haranguing in the smoking-room, mounted on a table.

"I say," he cried, "gentlemen, excuse me. There are so many together here, so many known to be wealthy, it is an opportunity for a word. Things are coming to a pretty pass—garotters in our streets and assassins in our houses of entertainment! Here is a poor little fellow—look at him—here to-night to see the game, perfectly well and happy, murdered by some miscreant for the sake of the money he had about him. It might have been the fate of anyone of us. I spoke to him to-night. I had not seen him since I was a boy almost. Seven children and a wife, he told me, dependent on him. I say there are two things wanted—first, a reward of such magnitude as will induce exertion. I promise, for my own share, to put down double the amount promised by the highest subscriber. Secondly, something should be done for the family he has left, in proportion to the loss they have sustained. Upon this point I shall make inquiry myself. But this is plain, the danger and scandal have attained a pitch at which none of us who cares to walk the streets at night, or at any time to look in upon amusements like that we attended this evening, can permit them longer to stand. There is a fatal defect somewhere. Are our police awake and active? Very possibly; but if so the force is not adequate. I say this frightful scandal must be abated if, as citizens of London, we desire to maintain our reputation for common sense and energy."

There was a tall thin fellow, shabbily dressed, standing nearly behind the door, with a long neck, and a flat mean face, slightly pitted with small-pox, rather pallid, who was smiling

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lazily, with half-closed eyes, as Mr. Longcluse declaimed; and when he alluded pointedly to the inadequacy of the police, this man's amusement improved, and he winked pleasantly at the clock which he was consulting at the moment with the corner of his eye.

And now a doctor arrived, and Gabriel Laroque the watch-maker, and more police, with an inspector. Laroque faints when he sees his murdered friend. Recovered after a time, he identifies the body, identifies the dagger also as the property of poor Lebas.

The police take the matter now quite into their hands, and clear the room.

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CHAPTER VI.

TO BED.

MR. LONGCLUSE jumped into a cab, and told the man to drive to his house in Bolton Street, Piccadilly. He rolled his coat about him with a kind of violence, and threw himself into a corner. Then, as it were, *in furore*, and with a stamp on the floor, he pitched himself into the other corner.

"I've seen to-night what I never thought I should see. What devil possessed me to tell him to go into that black little smoking-room?" he muttered. "What a room it is! It has seized my brain somehow. Am I in a fever, or going mad, or what? That cursed smoking-room! I can't get out of it. It is in the centre of the earth. I'm built round and round in it. The moment I begin to think, I'm in it. The moment I close my eyes, its four stifling walls are round me. There is no way out. It is like hell."

The wind had come round to the south, and a soft rain was pattering on the windows. He stopped the cab somewhere near St. James's Street, and got out. It was late—it was just past two o'clock, and the streets were quiet. Wonderfully still was the great city at this hour, and the descent of the rain went on with a sound like a prolonged "hush" all round. He paid the man, and stood for a while on the kerbstone, looking up and down the street, under the downpour of the rain. You might have taken this millionaire for a man who knew not where to lay his head that night. He took off his hat, and let the refreshing rain saturate his hair, and stream down his forehead and temples.

"Your cab's stuffy and hot, ain't it? Standing half the day with the glass in the sun, I daresay," said he to the man, who

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was fumbling in his pockets, and pretending a difficulty about finding change.

"See, never mind, if you haven't got change; I'll go on. Heavier rain than I fancied; very pleasant though. When did the rain begin?" asked Mr. Longcluse, who seemed in no hurry to get back again.

"A trifle past ten, Sir."

"I say, your horse's knees are a bit broken, ain't they? Never mind, I don't care. He can pull you and me to Bolton Street, I daresay."

"Will you please to get in, Sir?" inquired the cabman.

Mr. Longcluse nodded, frowning and thinking of something else; the rain still descending on his bare head, his hat in his hand.

The cabman thought this "cove" had been drinking and must be a trifle "tight." He would not mind if he stood so for a couple of hours; it would run his fare up to something pretty. So cabby had thoughts of clapping a nosebag to his horse's jaws, and was making up his mind to a bivouac. But Mr. Longcluse on a sudden got in, repeating his direction to the driver in a gay and brisk tone, that did not represent his real sensations.

"Why should I be so disturbed at that little French fellow? Have I been ill, that my nerve is gone and I such a fool? One would think I had never seen a dead fellow till now. Better for him to be quiet than at his wit's ends, devising ways and means to keep his seven cubs in bread and butter. I should have gone away when the game was over. What earthly reason led me into that d——d room, when I heard the fuss there? I've a mind to go and play hazard, or see a doctor. Arden said he'd look in, in the morning. I should like that; I'll talk to Arden. I sha'n't sleep, I know; I can't, all night; I've got imprisoned in that suffocating room. Shall I ever close my eyes again?"

They had now reached the door of the small, unpretending house of this wealthy man. The servant who opened the door, though he knew his business, stared a little, for he had never seen his master return in such a plight before, and looking so haggard.

"Where's Franklin?"

"Arranging things in your room, Sir."

"Give me a candle. The cab is paid. Mr. Arden, mind, may call in the morning; if I should not be down, show him to my room. You are not to let him go without seeing me."

Up-stairs went the pale master of the house. "Franklin!" he called, as he mounted the last flight of stairs, next his bedroom.

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"Yes, Sir."

"I sha'n't want you to-night, I think—that is, I shall manage what I want for myself; but I mean to ring for you by-and-by." He was in his dressing-room by this time, and looked round to see that his comforts were provided for as usual—his foot-bath and hot water.

"Shall I fetch your tea, Sir?"

"I'll drink no tea to-night; I've been disgusted. I've seen a dead man, quite unexpectedly; and I sha'n't get over it for some hours, I daresay. I feel ill. And what you must do is this: when I ring my bell, you come back, and you must sit up here till eight in the morning. I shall leave the door between this and the next room open; and should you hear me sleeping uneasily, moaning, or anything like nightmare, you must come in and waken me. And you are not to go to sleep, mind; the moment I call, I expect you in my room. Keep yourself awake how you can; you may sleep all to-morrow, if you like."

With this charge Franklin departed.

But Mr. Longcluse's preparations for bed occupied a longer time than he had anticipated. When nearly an hour had passed, Mr. Franklin ventured up-stairs, and quietly approached the dressing-room door; but there he heard his master still busy with his preparations, and withdrew. It was not until nearly half-an-hour more had passed that his bell gave the promised signal, and Mr. Franklin established himself for the night, in the easy-chair in the dressing-room, with the connecting door between the two rooms open.

Mr. Longcluse was right. The shock which his nerves had received did not permit him to sleep very soon. Two hours later he called for the Eau-de-Cologne that stood on his dressing-table; and although he made belief to wet his temples with it, and kept it at his bedside with that professed design, it was Mr. Franklin's belief that he drank the greater part of what remained in the capacious cut-glass bottle. It was not until people were beginning to "turn out" for their daily labour that sleep at length visited the wearied eye-balls of the Crœsus.

Three hours of death-like sleep, and Mr. Longcluse, with a little start, was wide awake.

"Franklin!"

"Yes, Sir." And Mr. Franklin stood at his bedside.

"What o'clock is it?"

"Just struck ten, Sir."

"Hand me the *Times*." This was done.

"Tell them to get breakfast as usual. I'm coming down. Open the shutters, and draw the curtains, quite."

When Franklin had done this and gone down, Mr. Longcluse read the *Times* with a stern eagerness, still in bed. The

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great billiard match between Hood and Markham was given in spirited detail; but he was looking for something else. Just under this piece of news, he found it—"Murder and Robbery, in the Saloon Tavern." He read this twice over, and then searched the paper in vain for any further news respecting it. After this search, he again read the short account he had seen before, very carefully, and more than once. Then he jumped out of bed, and looked at himself in the glass in his dressing-room.

"How awfully seedy I am looking!" he muttered, after a careful inspection. "Better by-and-by."

His hand was shaking like that of a man who had made a debauch, or was worn out with ague. He looked ten years older.

"I should hardly know myself," muttered he. "What a confounded, sinful old fogey I look, and I so young and innocent!"

The sneer was for himself and at himself. The delivery of such is an odd luxury which, at one time or other, most men indulge in. Perhaps it should teach us to take them more kindly when other people crack such cynical jokes on our heads, or, at least, to perceive that they don't always argue personal antipathy.

The sour smile which had, for a moment, flickered with a wintry light on his face, gave place suddenly to a dark fatigue; his features sank, and he heaved a long, deep, and almost shuddering sigh.

There are moments, happily very rare, when the idea of suicide is distinct enough to be dangerous, and having passed which, a man feels that Death has looked him very nearly in the face. Nothing more trite and true than the omnipresence of suffering. The possession of wealth exempts the unfortunate owner from, say, two-thirds of the curse that lies heavy on the human race. Two thirds is a great deal; but so is the other third, and it may have in it, at times, something as terrible as human nature can support.

Mr. Longcluse, the millionarie, had, of course, many poor enviers. Had any one of all these uttered such a sigh that morning? Or did any one among them feel wearier of life?

"When I have had my tub, I shall be quite another man," said he.

But it did not give him the usual fillip; on the contrary, he felt rather chilled.

"What can the matter be? I'm a changed man," said he, wondering, as people do at the days growing shorter in autumn, that time had produced some changes. "I remember when a scene or an excitement produced no more effect upon

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re, after the moment, than a glass of champagne; and now I feel as if I had swallowed poison, or drunk the cup of madness. Shaking!—hand, heart, every joint. I have grown such a muff!"

Mr. Longcluse had at length completed his very careless toilet, and looking ill, went down-stairs in his dressing-gown and slippers.

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CHAPTER VII.

FAST FRIENDS.

IN little more than half-an-hour, as Mr. Longcluse was sitting at his breakfast in his dining-room, Richard Arden was shown in.

"Dressing-gown and slippers—what a lazy dog I am compared with you!" said Longcluse gaily as he entered.

"Don't say another word on that subject, I beg. I should have been later myself, had I dared; but my Uncle David had appointed to meet me at ten."

"Won't you take something?"

"Well, as I have had no breakfast, I don't mind if I do," said Arden, laughing.

Longcluse rang the bell.

"When did you leave that place last night?" asked Longcluse.

"I fancy about the same time that you went—about five or ten minutes after the match ended. You heard there was a man murdered in a passage there? I tried to get down and see it but the crowd was awful."

"I was more lucky—I came earlier," said Longcluse. "It was perfectly sickening, and I have been seedy ever since. You may guess what a shock it was to me. The murdered man was that poor little Frenchman I told you of, who had been talking to me, in high spirits, just before the play began—and there he was, poor fellow! You'll see it all there; it makes me sick."

He handed him the *Times*.

"Yes, I see. I daresay the police will make him out," said Arden, as he glanced hastily over it. "Did you remark some awfully ill-looking fellows there?"

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"I never saw so many together in a place of the kind before," said Longcluse.

"That's a capital account of the match," said Arden, whom it interested more than the tragedy of poor little Lebas did. He read snatches of it aloud as he ate his breakfast: and then, laying the paper down, he said, "By-the-bye, I need not bother you by asking your advice, as I intended. My uncle David has been blowing me up, and I think he'll make everything straight. When he sends for me and gives me an awful lecture, he always makes it up to me afterwards."

"I wish, Arden, I stood as little in need of your advice as you do, it seems, of mine," said Longcluse suddenly, after a short silence. His dark eyes were fixed on Richard Arden's. "I have been fifty times on the point of making a confession to you, and my heart has failed me. The hour is coming. These things won't wait. I must speak, Arden, soon or never — *very* soon, or never. *Never*, perhaps, would be wisest."

"Speak *now*, on the contrary," said Arden, laying down his knife and fork, and leaning back. "Now is the best time always. If it's a bad thing, why, it's over; and if it's a good one, the sooner we have it the better."

Longcluse rose, looking down in meditation, and in silence walked slowly to the window, where, for a time, without speaking he stood in a reverie. Then, looking up, he said, "No man likes a crisis. 'No good general ever fights a pitched battle if he can help it.' Wasn't that Napoleon's saying? No man who has not lost his head likes to get together all he has on earth, and make one stake of it. I have been on the point of speaking to you often. I have always recoiled."

"Here I am, my dear Longcluse," said Richard Arden, rising and following him to the window, "ready to hear you. I ought to say, only too happy if I can be of the least use."

"Immense! everything?" said Longcluse vehemently. "And yet I don't know how to ask you—how to begin—so much depends. Don't you conjecture the subject?"

"Well, perhaps I do—perhaps I don't. Give me some clue."

"Have you formed no conjecture?" asked Longcluse.

"Perhaps."

"Is it anything in any way connected with your sister, Miss Arden?"

"It may be, possibly."

"Say what you think, Arden, I beseech you."

"Well, I think, perhaps, you admire her."

"Do I? Do I? Is that all? Would to God I could say that is all! Admiration, what is it?—Nothing. Love?—

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Nothing. Mine is adoration and utter madness. I have told my secret. What do you say? Do you hate me for it?"

"Hate you, my dear fellow! Why on earth should I hate you? On the contrary, I ought, I think, to like you better. I'm only a little surprised that your feelings should so much exceed anything I could have supposed."

"Yesterday, Arden, you spoke as if you liked me. As we drove into that place, I fancied you half understood me; and cheered by what you then said, I have spoken that which might have died with me, but for that."

"Well, what's the matter? My dear Longcluse, you talk as if I had shown signs of wavering friendship. Have I? Quite the contrary."

"Quite the contrary, that is true," said Longcluse eagerly. "Yes, you *should* like me better for it—that is true also. Yours is no wavering friendship, I'm sure of it. Let us shake hands upon it. A treaty, Arden, a treaty!"

With a fierce smile upon his pale face, and a sudden fire in his eyes, he extended his hand energetically, and took that of Arden, who answered the invitation with a look in which gleamed faintly something of amusement.

"Now, Richard Arden," he continued excitedly, "you have more influence with Miss Arden than falls commonly to the lot of a brother. I have observed it. It results from her having had during her earlier years little society but yours, and from your being some years her senior. It results from her strong affection for you, from her admiration of your talents, and from her having neither brother nor sister to divide those feelings. I never yet saw brother possessed of so evident and powerful an influence with a sister. You must use it all for me."

He continued to hold Arden's hand in his as he spoke.

"You can withdraw your hand if you decline," said he. "I sha'n't complain. But your hand remains—you don't. It is a treaty, then. Henceforward we live *fœdere icto*. I'm an exacting friend, but a good one."

"My dear fellow, you do me but justice. I am your friend, altogether. But you must not mistake me for a guardian or a father in the matter. I wish I could make my sister think exactly as I do upon every subject, and *that* above all others. All I can say is, in me you have a fast friend."

Longcluse pressed his hand, which he had not relinquished, at these words, with a firm grasp and a quick shake.

"Now listen. I must speak on this point, the one that is in my mind, my chief difficulty. Personally, there is not, I think, a living being in England who knows my history. I am glad of it, for reasons which you will approve by-and-by. But this is an enormous disadvantage, though only temporary, and the

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friends of the young lady must weigh my wealth against it for the present. But when the time comes, which can't now be distant, upon my honour! upon my soul!—by Heaven, I'll show you I'm of as good and old a family as any in England! We have been gentlemen up to the time of the Conqueror, here in England, and as far before him as record can be traced in Normandy. If I fail to show you this when the hour comes, stigmatise me as you will."

"I have not a doubt, dear Longcluse. But you are urging a point that really has no weight with us people in England. We have taken off our hats to the gentlemen in casques and tabards, and feudal glories are at a discount everywhere but in Debrett, where they are taken with allowance. Your ideas upon these matters are more Austrian than ours. We expect, perhaps, a little more from the man, but certainly less from his ancestors than our forefathers did. So till a title turns up, and the heralds want them, make your mind easy on matters of pedigree, and then you can furnish them with effect. All I can tell you is this—there are hardly fifty men in England who dare tell all the truth about their families."

"We are friends, then; and in that relation, Arden, if there are privileges, there are also liabilities, remember, and both extend into a possibly distant future."

Longcluse spoke with a gloomy excitement that his companion did not quite understand.

"That is quite true, of course," said Arden.

Each was looking in the other's face for a moment, and each face grew suddenly dark, darker—and the whole room darkened as the air was overshadowed by a mass of cloud that eclipsed the sun, threatening thunder.

"By Jove! How awfully dark in a moment!" said Arden, looking from the face thus suddenly overcast through the window towards the sky.

"Dark as the future we were speaking of," said Longcluse, with a sad smile.

"Dark in one sense, I mean unseen, but not darkened in the ill-omened sense," said Richard Arden. "I have great confidence in the future. I suppose I am sanguine."

"I ought to be sanguine, if having been lucky hitherto should make one so, and yet I'm not. *My* happiness depends on that which I cannot, in the least, control. Thought, action, energy, contribute nothing, and so I but drift, and—my heart fails me. Tell me, Arden, for Heaven's sake, truth—spare me nothing, conceal nothing. Let me but know it, however bitter. First tell me, does Miss Arden dislike me—has she an antipathy to me?"

"Dislike you! Nonsense. How could that be? She

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evidently enjoys your society, when you are in spirits and choose to be amusing. Dislike you? Oh, my dear Longcluse, you can't have fancied such a thing!" said Arden.

"A man placed as I am may fancy anything—things infinitely more unlikely. I sometimes hope she has never perceived my admiration. It seems strange and cruel, but I believe where a man cannot be beloved, nothing is so likely to make him *hated* as his presuming to love. *There* is the secret of half the tragedies we read of. The man cannot cease to love, and the idol of his passion not only disregards but insults it. It is their cruel nature; and thus the pangs of jealousy and the agitations of despair are heightened by a peculiar torture, the hardest of all hell's torture to endure."

"Well, I have seen you pretty often together, and you must see there is nothing of that kind," said Arden.

"You speak quite frankly, do you? For Heaven's sake don't spare me!" urged Longcluse.

"I say exactly what I think. There can't be any such feeling," said Arden.

Longcluse sighed, looked down thoughtfully, and then, raising his eyes again, he said—

"You must answer me another question, dear Arden, and I shall, for the present, task your kindness no more. If you think it a fair question, will you promise to answer me with unsparing frankness? Let me hear the worst."

"Certainly," answered his companion.

"Does your sister like anyone in particular—is she attached to anyone—are her affections quite disengaged?"

"So far as I am aware, certainly. She never cared for any one among all the people who admired her, and I am quite certain such a thing could not be without my observing it," answered Richard Arden.

"I don't know; perhaps not," said Longcluse. "But there is a young friend of yours, who I thought was an admirer of Miss Arden's, and possibly a favoured one. You guess, I dare-say, who it is I mean?"

"I give you my honour I have not the least idea."

"I mean an early friend of yours—a man about your own age—who has often been staying in Yorkshire and at Mortlake with you, and who was almost like a brother in your house—very intimate."

"Surely you can't mean Vivian Darnley?" exclaimed Richard Arden.

"I do. I mean no other."

"Vivian Darnley? Why, he has hardly enough to live on, much less to marry on. He has not an idea of any such thing. If my father fancied such an absurdity possible, he

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would take measures to prevent his ever seeing her more. You could not have hit upon a more impossible man," he resumed, after a moment's examination of a theory which, notwithstanding, made him a little more uneasy than he would have cared to confess. "Darnley is no fool either, and I think he is a honourable fellow; and altogether, knowing him as I do, the thing is utterly incredible. And as for Alice, the idea of his imagining any such folly, I can undertake to say, positively never entered her mind."

Here was another pause. Longcluse was again thoughtful.

"May I ask one other question, which I think you will have no difficulty in answering?" said he.

"What you please, dear Longcluse; you may command me."

"Only this, how do you think Sir Reginald would receive me?"

"A great deal better than he will ever receive me; with his best bow—no, not that, but with open arms and his brightest smile. I tell you, and you'll find it true, my father is a man of the world. Money won't, of course, do everything; but it can do a great deal. It can't make a vulgar man a gentleman, but it may make a gentleman anything. I really think you would find him a very fast friend. And now I must leave you, dear Longcluse. I have just time, and no more, to keep my appointment with old Mr. Blount, to whom my uncle commands me to go at twelve."

"Heaven keep us both, dear Arden, in this cheating world! Heaven keep us true in this false London world! And God punish the first who breaks faith with the other!"

So spoke Longcluse, taking his hand again, and holding it hard for a moment, with his unfathomable dark eyes on Arden. Was there a faint and unconscious menace in his pale face, as he uttered these words, which a little stirred Arden's pride?

"That's a comfortable litany to part with—a form of blessing elevated so neatly, at the close, into a malediction. However, I don't object. Amen, by all means," laughed Arden.

Longcluse smiled.

"A malediction? I really believe it was. Something very like it, and one that includes myself, doesn't it? But we are not likely to earn it. An arrow shot into the sea, it can hurt no one. But oh, dear Arden, what does such language mean but suffering? What is all bitterness but pain? Is any mind that deserves the name ever cruel, except from misery? We are good friends, Arden: and if ever I seem to you for a moment other than friendly, just say, 'It is his heart-ache and not he that speaks.' Good-bye! God bless you!"

At the door there was another parting.

"There's a long dull day before me—say, rather, *night*;

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weary eyes, sleepless brain," murmured Longcluse, in a rather dismal soliloquy, standing in his slippers and dressing-gown again at the window. "Suspense! What a hell is in that word! Chain a man across a rail, in a tunnel—pleasant situation! let him listen for the faint fifing and drumming of the engine, miles away, not knowing whether deliverance or death may come first. Bad enough, that suspense. What is it to mine! I shall see her to-night. I shall see her, and how will it all be? Richard Arden wishes it—yes, he does. 'Away, slight man!' It is Brutus who says that, I think. Good Heaven! Think of my life—the giddy steps I go by. That dizzy walk by moonlight, when I lost my way in Switzerland—beautiful nightmare!—the two mile ledge of rock before me, narrow as a plank; up from my left, the sheer wall of rock; at my right so close that my glove might have dropped over it, the precipice; and curling vapour on the cliffs above, that seem about to break, and envelope all below in blinding mist. There is my life translated into landscape. It has been one long adventure—danger—fatigue. Nature is full of beauty—many a quiet nook in life, where peace resides; many a man whose path is broad and smooth. Woe to the man who loses his way on Alpine tracks, and is benighted!"

Now Mr. Longcluse recollected himself. He had letters to read and note. He did this rapidly. He had business in town. He had fifty things on his hands; and, the day over, he would see Alice Arden again.

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CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING A BOOT.

SEVERAL pairs of boots were placed in Mr. Longcluse's dressing-room.

"Where are the boots that I wore yesterday?" asked he.

"If you please, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, "the man called this morning for the right boot of that pair."

"What man?" asked Mr. Longcluse, rather grimly.

"Mr. Armagnac's man, Sir."

"Did you desire him to call for it?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"No, Sir. I thought you must have told some one else to order him to send for it," said Franklin.

"*I?* You ought to know I leave those things to *you*," said Mr. Longcluse, staring at him more aghast and fierce than the possible mislaying of a boot would seem to warrant. "Did you see Armagnac's man?"

"No, Sir. It was Charles who came up, at eight o'clock, when you were still asleep, and said the shoemaker had called for the right boot of the pair you wore yesterday. I had placed them outside the door, and I gave it him, Sir, supposing it all right."

"Perhaps it *was* all right; but you know Charles has not been a week here. Call him up. I'll come to the bottom of this."

Franklin disappeared, and Mr. Longcluse, with a stern frown, was staring vaguely at the varnished boot, as if it could tell something about its missing companion. His brain was already at work. What the plague was the meaning of this manœuvre about his boot? And why on earth, think I, should he make such a fuss and a tragedy about it? Charles followed Mr. Franklin up the stairs.

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"What's all this about my boot?" demanded Mr. Longcluse, peremptorily. "*Who* has got it?"

"A man called for it this morning, Sir."

"What man?"

"I think he said he came from Mr. Armagnac's, Sir."

"You *think*. Say what you *know*, Sir. What *did* he say?" said Mr. Longcluse, looking dangerous.

"Well, Sir," said the man, mending his case, "he did say, Sir, he came from Mr. Armagnac's, and wanted the right boot."

"What right boot?—*any* right boot?"

"No, Sir, please; the right boot of the pair you wore last night," answered the servant.

"And *you* gave it to him?"

"Yes, Sir, 'twas me," answered Charles.

"Well, you mayn't be quite such a fool as you look. I'll sift all this to the bottom. You go, if you please, this moment, to Monsieur Armagnac, and say I should be obliged to him for a line to say whether he this morning sent for my boot, and got it—and I must have it back, mind; *you* shall bring it back, you understand? And you had better make haste."

"I made bold, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, "to send for it myself, when you sent me down for Charles; and the boy will be back. Sir, in two or three minutes."

"Well, come you and Charles here again when the boy comes back, and bring him here also. I'll make out who has been playing tricks."

Mr. Longcluse shut his dressing-room door sharply; he walked to the window, and looked out with a vicious scowl; he turned about, and lifted up his clenched hand, and stamped on the floor. A sudden thought now struck him.

"The right foot? By Jove! it may not be the one."

The boot that was left was already in his hand. He was examining it curiously.

"Ay, by heaven! The right *was* the boot! What's the meaning of this? Conspiracy? I should not wonder."

He examined it carefully again, and flung it into its corner with violence.

"If it's an accident, it is a very odd one. It is a suspicious accident. It may be, of course, all right. I daresay it *is* all right. The odds are ten, twenty, a thousand to one that Armagnac has got it. I should have had a warm bath last night, and taken a ten miles' ride into the country this morning. It must be all right, and I am plaguing myself without a cause."

Yet he took up the boot, and examined it once more; then, dropping it, went to the window and looked into the street—

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came back, opened his door, and listened for the messenger's return.

It was not long deferred. As he heard them approach, Mr. Longcluse flung open his door and confronted them, in white waistcoat and shirt-sleeves, and with a very white and stern face—face and figure all white.

"Well, what about it? Where's the boot?" he demanded, sharply.

"The boy inquired, Sir," said Mr. Franklin, indicating the messenger with his open hand, and undertaking the office of spokesman; "and Mr. Armagnac did not send for the boot, Sir, and has not got it."

"Oh, oh! very good. And now, Sir," he said, in rising fury, turning upon Charles, "what have *you* got to say for yourself?"

"The man said he came from Mr. Armagnac, please, Sir," said Charles, "and wanted the boot, which Mr. Franklin should have back as early as he could return it."

"Then you gave it to a common thief with that cock-and-a-bull story, and you wish me to believe that you took it all for gospel. There are men who would pitch you over the bannisters for a less thing. If I could be certain of it, I'd put you beside him in the dock. But, by heavens! I'll come to the bottom of the whole thing yet."

He shut the door with a crash, in the faces of the three men, who stood on the lobby.

Mr. Franklin was a little puzzled at these transports, all about a boot. The servants looked at one another without a word. But just as they were going down, the dressing-room door opened, and the following dialogue ensued:—

"See, Charles, it was you who saw and spoke with that man?" said Longcluse.

"Yes, Sir."

"Should you know him again?"

"Yes, Sir, I think I should."

"What kind of man was he?"

"A very common person, Sir."

"Was he tall or short? What sort of figure?"

"Tall, Sir."

"Go on; what more? Describe him."

"Tall, Sir, with a long neck, and held himself straight; very flat feet, I noticed; a thin man, broad in the shoulders—pretty well that."

"Describe his face," said Longcluse.

"Nothing very particular, Sir; a shabby sort of face—a bad colour."

"How?"

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"A bad white, Sir, and pock-marked something; a broad face and flat, and a very little bit of a nose; his eyes almost shut, and a sort of smile about his mouth, and stingy bits of red whiskers, in a curl, down each cheek."

"How old?"

"He might be nigh fifty, Sir."

"Ha, ha! very good. How was he dressed?"

"Black frock coat, Sir, a good deal worn; an old flowered satin waistcoat, worn and dirty, Sir; and a pair of raither dirty tweed trousers. Nothing fitted him, and his hat was brown and greasy, begging your parding, Sir; and he had a stick in his hand, and cotton gloves—a-trying to look genteel."

"And he asked for the right boot?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, Sir."

"You are quite sure of that? Did he take the boot without looking at it, or did he examine it before he took it away?"

"He looked at it sharp enough, Sir, and turned up the sole, and he said 'It's all right,' and he went away, taking it along with him."

"He asked for the boot I wore yesterday, or last night—which did he say?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"I think it was last night he said, Sir," answered Charles.

"Try to recollect yourself. Can't you be certain? Which was it?"

"I think it was *last night*, Sir, he said."

"It doesn't signify," said Mr. Longcluse; "I wanted to see that your memory was pretty clear on the subject. You seem to remember all that passed pretty accurately."

"I recollect it perfectly well, Sir."

"H'm! That will do. Franklin, you'll remember that description—let every one of you remember it. It is the description of a thief; and when you see that fellow again, hold him fast till you put him in the hands of a policeman. And, Charles, you must be prepared, d'ye see, to swear to that description; for I am going to the detective office, and I shall give it to the police."

"Yes, Sir," answered Charles.

"I sha'n't want you, Franklin; let some one call a cab."

So he returned to his dressing-room, and shut the door, and thought—"That's the fellow whom that miserable little fool, Lebas, pointed out to me at the saloon last night. He watched him, he said, wherever he went. *I* saw him. There may be other circumstances. That is the fellow—that is the very man. Here's matter to think over! By heaven! that fellow must be denounced, and discovered, and brought to justice. It is a strong case—a pretty hanging case against him. We shall see."

Full of surmises about his lost boot, *Atra Cura* walking un-

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heard behind him, with her cold hand on his shoulder, and with the image of the ex-detective always gliding before or beside him, and peering with an odious familiarity over his shoulder into his face, Mr. Longcluse marched eastward with a firm tread and a cheerful countenance. Friends who nodded to him, as he walked along Piccadilly, down Saint James's Street, and by Pall Mall, citywards, thought he had just been listening to an amusing story. Others, who, more deferentially, saluted the great man as he walked lightly by Temple Bar, towards Ludgate Hill, for a moment perplexed themselves with the thought, "What stock is up, and what down, on a sudden, to-day, that Longcluse looks so radiant?"

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CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WITHOUT A NAME.

MR. LONGCLUSE had made up his mind to a certain course—a sharp and bold one. At the police office he made inquiry. "He understood a man had been lately dismissed from the force, answering to a certain description, which he gave them ; and he wished to know whether he was rightly informed, because a theft had been that morning committed at his house by a man whose appearance corresponded, and against whom he hoped to have sufficient evidence."

"Yes, a man like that had been dismissed from the detective department within the last fortnight."

"What was his name?" Mr. Longcluse asked.

"Paul Davies, Sir."

"If it should turn out to be the same, I may have a more serious charge to bring against him," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Do you wish to go before his worship, and give an information, Sir?" urged the officer, invitingly.

"Not quite ripe for that yet," said Mr. Longcluse, "but it is likely very soon."

"And what might be the nature of the more serious charge, Sir?" inquired the officer, insinuatingly.

"I mean to give my evidence at the coroner's inquest that will be held to-day, on the Frenchman who was murdered last night at the Saloon Tavern. It is not conclusive—it does not fix anything upon him ; it is merely inferential."

"Connecting him with the murder?" whispered the man, something like reverence mingling with his curiosity, as he discovered the interesting character of his interrogator.

"I can only say possibly connecting him in some way with it. Where does the man live?"

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"He did live in Rosemary Court, but he left that, I think. I'll ask, if you please, Sir. Tompkins—hi! You know where Paul Davies puts up. Left Rosemary Court?"

"Yes, five weeks. He went to Gold Ring Alley, but he's left that a week ago, and I don't know where he is now, but will easy find him. Will it answer at eight this evening, Sir?"

"Quite. I want a servant of mine to have a sight of him," said Longcluse.

"If you like, Sir, to leave your address and a stamp, we'll send you the information by post, and save you calling here."

"Thanks, yes, I'll do that."

So Mr. Longcluse took his leave, and proceeded to the place where the coroner was sitting. Mr. Longcluse was received in that place with distinction. The moneyed man was honoured—eyes were gravely fixed on him, and respectful whispers went about. A seat was procured for him; and his evidence, when he came to give it, was heard with marked attention, and a general hush of expectation.

The reader, with his permission, must now pass away, seaward, from this smoky London, for a few minutes, into a clear air, among the rustling foliage of ancient trees, and the fragrance of hay-fields, and the song of small birds.

On the London and Dover road stands, as you know, the "Royal Oak," still displaying its ancient signboard, where you behold King Charles II sitting with laudable composure, and a crown of Dutch gold on his head, and displaying his finery through an embrasure in the foliage, with an ostentation somewhat inconsiderate, considering the proximity of the halberts of the military emissaries in search of him to the royal features. As you drive towards London, it shows at the left side of the road, a good old substantial inn and posting-house. Its business has dwindled to something very small indeed, for the traffic prefers the rail, and the once bustling line of road is now quiet. The sun had set, but a reflected glow from the sky was still over everything; and by this somewhat lurid light Mr. Truelock, the innkeeper, was observing from the steps the progress of a chaise, with four horses and two postilions, which was driving at a furious pace down the gentle declivity about a quarter of a mile away, from the Dover direction towards the "Royal Oak" and London.

"It's a runaway. Them horses has took head. What do you think, Thomas?" he asked of the old waiter who stood beside him.

"No. See, the post-boys is whipping the hosses. No, Sir, it's a gallop, but no runaway."

"There's luggage a' top?" said the innkeeper.

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"Yes, Sir, there's something," answered Tom.

"I don't see nothing a-followin' them," said Mr. Truelock, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed.

"No—there *is* nothing," said Tom.

"They're in fear o' summat, or they'd never go at that lick," observed Mr. Truelock, who was inwardly conjecturing the likelihood of their pulling up at his door.

"Lawk! *there* was a jerk. They *was* nigh over at the finger-post turn," said Tom, with a grin.

And now the vehicle and the reeking horses were near. The post-boys held up their whips by way of signal to the "Royal Oak" people on the steps, and pulled up the horses with all their force before the door. Trembling, snorting, rolling up wreaths of steam, the exhausted horses stood.

"See to the gentleman, will ye?" cried one of the postilions.

Mr. Truelock, with the old-fashioned politeness of the English innkeeper, had run down in person to the carriage door, which Tom had opened. Master and man were a little shocked to behold inside an old gentleman, with a very brown, or rather a very bilious visage, thin, and with a high nose, who looked, as he lay stiffly back in the corner of the carriage, enveloped in shawls, with a velvet cap on, as if he were either dead or in a fit. His eyes were half open, and nothing but the white balls partly visible. There was a little froth at his lips. His mouth and delicately-formed hands were clenched, and all the furrows and lines of a selfish face fixed, as it seemed, in the lock of death. John Truelock said not a word, but peered at this visitor with a horrible curiosity.

"If he's dead," whispered Tom in his ear, "we don't take in no dead men here. Ye'll have the coroner and his jury in the house, and the place knocked up-side down; and if ye make five pounds one way ye'll lose ten the tother."

"Ye'll have to take him on, I'm thinkin'," said Mr. Truelock, rousing himself, stepping back a little, and addressing the post-boys sturdily. "You've no business bringin' a deceased party to my house. You must go somewhere else, if so be he *is* deceased."

"He's not gone dead so quick as that," said the postilion, dismounting from the near leader, and throwing the bridle to a boy who stood by, as he strutted round bandily to have a peep into the chaise. The postilion on the "wheeler" had turned himself about in the saddle in order to have a peep through the front window of the carriage. The innkeeper returned to the door.

If the old London and Dover road had been what it once was, there would have been a crowd about the carriage by this time. Except, however, two or three servants of the "Royal

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Oak," who had come out to see, no one had yet joined the little group but the boy who was detained, bridle in hand, at the horse's head.

"He'll not be dead yet," repeated the postilion dogmatically.

"What happened him?" asked Mr. Truelock.

"I don't know," answered the post-boy.

"Then how can you say whether he be dead or no?" demanded the innkeeper.

"Fetch me a pint of half-and-half," said the dismounted post-boy, aside, to one of the "Royal Oak" people at his elbow.

"We was just at this side of High Hixton," said his brother in the saddle, "when he knocked at the window with his stick, and I got a cove to hold the bridle, and I came round to the window to him. He had scarce any voice in him, and looked awful bad, and he said he thought he was a-dying. 'And how far on is the next inn?' he asked; and I told him the 'Royal Oak' was two miles; and he said, 'Drive like lightning, and I'll give you half a guinea a-piece'—I hope he's not gone dead—'if you get there in time.'"

By this time their heads were in the carriage again.

"Do you notice a sort of a little jerk in his foot, just the least thing in the world?" inquired the landlord, who had sent for the doctor. "It will be a fit, after all. If he's living, we'll fetch him into the 'ouse."

The doctor's house was just round the corner of the road, where the clump of elms stands, little more than a hundred yards from the sign of the "Royal Oak."

"Who is he?" inquired Mr. Truelock.

"I don't know," answered the postilion.

"What's his name?"

"Don't know that, neither."

"Why, it'll be on that box, won't it?" urged the innkeeper, pointing to the roof, where a portmanteau with a glazed cover was secured.

"Nothing on that but 'R. A.,'" answered the man, who had examined it half an hour before, with the same object.

"Royal Artillery, eh?"

While they were thus conjecturing, the doctor arrived. He stepped into the chaise, felt the old man's hand, tried his pulse, and finally applied the stethoscope.

"It is a nervous seizure. He is in a very exhausted state," said the doctor, stepping out again, and addressing Truelock. "You must get him into bed, and don't let his head down; take off his handkerchief, and open his shirt-collar—do you mind? I had best arrange him myself."

So the forlorn old man, without a servant, without a name, is carried from the chaise, possibly to die in an inn.

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The Rev. Peter Sprott, the rector, passing that way a few minutes later, and hearing what had befallen, went up to the bed-room, where the old gentleman lay in a four-poster, still unconscious.

"Here's a case," said the doctor to his clerical friend. "A nervous attack. He'd be all right in no time, but he's so low. I daresay he crossed the herring-pond to-day, and was ill; he's in such an exhausted state. I should not wonder if he sank; and here we are, without a clue to his name or people. No servant, no name on his trunk; and, certainly, it would be awkward if he died unrecognised, and without a word to apprise his relations."

"Is there no letter in his pockets?"

"Not one," Truelock says.

The rector happened to take up the great-coat of the old gentleman, in which he found a small breast pocket, that had been undiscovered till now, and in this a letter. The envelope was gone, but the letter, in a lady's hand began: "My dearest papa."

"We are all right, by Jove, we're in luck!"

"How does she sign herself?" said the doctor.

"'Alice Arden,' and she dates from 8, Chester Terrace," answered the clergyman.

"We'll telegraph forthwith," said the doctor. "It had best be in your name—the clergyman, you know—to a young lady."

So together they composed the telegram.

"Shall it be *ill* simply, or *dangerously* ill?" inquired the clergyman.

"Dangerously," said the doctor.

"But *dangerously* may terrify her."

"And if we say only *ill*, she mayn't come at all," said the doctor.

So the telegram was placed in Truelock's hands, who went himself with it to the office; and we shall follow it to its destination.

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CHAPTER X.

THE ROYAL OAK.

THREE people were sitting in Lady May Penrose's drawing-room, in Chester Terrace, the windows of which, as all her ladyship's friends are aware, command one of the parks. They were looking westward, where the sky was all a-glow with the fantastic gold and crimson of sunset. It is quite a mistake to fancy that sunset, even in the heart of London—which this hardly could be termed—has no rural melancholy and poetic fascination in it. Should that hour by any accident overtake you, in the very centre of the city, looking, say, from an upper window, or any other elevation toward the western sky beyond stacks of chimneys, roofs, and steeples, even through the smoke of London, you will feel the melancholy and poetry of sunset, in spite of your surroundings.

A little silence had stolen over the party; and young Vivian Darnley, who stole a glance now and then at beautiful Alice Arden, whose large, dark, grey eyes were gazing listlessly towards the splendid mists, that were piled in the west, broke the silence by a remark that, without being very wise, or very new, was yet, he hoped, quite in accord with the looks of the girl, who seemed for a moment saddened.

"I wonder why it is that sunset, which is so beautiful, makes us all sad!"

"It never made me sad," said good Lady May Penrose, comfortably. "There is, I think, something very pleasant in a good sunset; there *must* be, for all the little birds begin to sing in it—it must be cheerful. Don't you think so, Alice?"

Alice was, perhaps, thinking of something quite different, for rather listlessly, and without a change of features, she said, "Oh, yes, very."

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"So, Mr. Darnley, you may sing, 'Oh, leave me to my sorrow!' for we won't mope with you about the sky. It is a very odd taste, that for being dolorous and miserable. I don't understand it—I never could."

Thus rebuked by Lady Penrose, and deserted by Alice, Darnley laughed and said—

"Well, I do seem rather to have put my foot in it—but I did not mean miserable, you know; I meant only that kind of thing that one feels when reading a bit of really good poetry—and most people do not think it a rather pleasant feeling."

"Don't mind that moping creature, Alice; let us talk about something we can all understand. I heard a bit of news to-day—perhaps, Mr. Darnley, you can throw a light upon it. You are a distant relation, I think, of Mr. David Arden."

"Some very remote cousinship, of which I am very proud," answered the young man gaily, with a glance at Alice.

"And what is that—what about uncle David?" inquired the young lady, with animation.

"I heard it from my banker to-day. Your uncle, you know, dear, despises us and our doings, and lives, I understand, very quietly; I mean, he has chosen to live quite out of the world, so we have no chance of hearing anything except by accident, from people we are likely to know. Do you see much of your uncle, my dear?"

"Not a great deal; but I am very fond of him—he is such a good man, or at least, what is better," she laughed, "he has always been so very kind to me."

"You know him, Mr Darnley?" inquired Lady May.

"By Jove, I do!"

"And like him?"

"No one on earth has better reason to like him," answered the young man warmly—"he has been my best friend on earth."

"It is pleasant to know two people who are not ashamed to be grateful," said fat Lady May, with a smile.

The young lady returned her smile very kindly. I don't think you ever beheld a prettier creature than Alice Arden. Vivian Darnley had wasted many a secret hour in sketching that oval face. Those large, soft, grey eyes, and long dark lashes, how difficult they are to express! And the brilliant lips! Could art itself paint anything quite like her? Who could paint those beautiful dimples that made her smiles so soft, or express the little circlet of pearly teeth whose tips were just disclosed? Stealthily he was now, for the thousandth time, studying that bewitching smile again.

"And what is the story about Uncle David?" asked Alice again.

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"Well, what will you say—and you, Mr. Darnley, if it should be a story about a young lady?"

"Do you mean that Uncle David is going to marry? I think it would be an awful pity!" exclaimed Alice.

"Well, dear, to put you out of pain, I'll tell you at once; I only know this—that he is going to provide for her somehow, but whether by adopting her as a child, or taking her for a wife, I can't tell. Only I never saw any one looking archer than Mr. Brounker did to-day when he told me; and I fancied from that it could not be so dull a business as merely making her his daughter."

"And who is the young lady?" asked Alice.

"Did you ever happen to meet anywhere a Miss Grace Maubray?"

"Oh, yes," answered Alice quickly. "She was staying, and her father, Colonel Maubray, at the Wymerings' last autumn. She's quite lovely, I think, and very clever—but I don't know——I think she's a little ill-natured, but very amusing. She seems to have a talent for cutting people up—and a little of that kind of thing, you know, is very well, but one does not care for it *always*. And is she really the young lady?"

"Yes, and—— Dear me! Mr. Darnley, I'm afraid my story has alarmed you."

"Why should it?" laughed Vivian Darnley, partly to cover perhaps, a little confusion.

"I can't tell, I'm sure, but you blushed as much as a man can; and you know you did. I wonder, Alice, what this underplot can be, where all is so romantic. Perhaps, after all, Mr. David Arden is to adopt the young lady, and some one else, to whom he is also kind, is to marry her. Don't you think that would be a very natural arrangement?"

Alice laughed, and Darnley laughed; but he was embarrassed.

"And Colonel Maubray, is he still living?" asked Alice.

"Oh, no, dear; he died ten or eleven months ago. A very foolish man, you know; he wasted a very good property. He was some distant relation, also; Mr. Brounker said your uncle, Mr. David Arden, was very much attached to him—they were schoolfellows, and great friends all their lives."

"I should not wonder," said Alice smiling—and then became silent.

"Do you know the young lady, this fortunate Miss Maubray?" said Lady May, turning to Vivian Darnley again.

"I? Yes—that is, I can't say more than a mere acquaintance—and not an old one. I made her acquaintance at Mr. Arden's house. He is her guardian. I don't know about any other arrangements. I daresay there may be."

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"Well, I know her a little, also," said Lady May. "I thought her pretty—and she sings a little, and she's clever."

"She's all that," said Alice. "Oh, here comes Dick! What do you say, Richard—is not Miss Maubray very pretty? We are making a plot to marry her to Vivian Darnley, and get Uncle David to contribute her *dot*."

"What benevolent people! *You* don't object, I dare say, Vivian."

"I have not been consulted," said he; "and, of course, Uncle David need not be consulted, as he has simply to transfer the proper quantity of stock."

Richard Arden had drawn near Lady May, and said a few words in a low tone, which seemed not unwelcome to her.

"I saw Longcluse this morning. He has not been here, has he?" he added, as a little silence threatened the conversation.

"No, he has not turned up. And what a charming person he is!" exclaimed Lady May.

"I quite agree with you, Lady May," said Arden. "He is, take him on every subject, I think, about the cleverest fellow I ever met—art, literature, games, *chess*, which I take to be a subject by itself. He is very great at chess—for an amateur, I mean—and when I was chess-mad, nearly a year ago and beginning to grow conceited, he opened my eyes, I can tell you; and Airly says he is the best musical critic in England, and can tell you at any hour who is who in the opera, all over Europe; and he really understands, what so few of us here know anything about, foreign politics, and all the people and their stories and scandals he has at his fingers' ends. And he is such good company, when he chooses, and such a gentleman always!"

"He is very agreeable and amusing when he takes the trouble; I always like to listen when Mr. Longcluse talks," said Alice Arden, to the secret satisfaction of her brother, whose enthusiasm was, I think, directed a good deal to her—and to, perhaps, the vexation of other people, whom she did not care at that moment to please.

"An Admirable Crichton!" murmured Vivian Darnley, with a rather hackneyed sneer. "Do you like his style of—*beauty*, I suppose I should call it? It has the merit of being very uncommon, at least, don't you think?"

"Beauty, I think, matters very little. He has no beauty, but his face has what, in a man, I think a great deal better—I mean refinement, and cleverness, and a kind of satire that rather interests one," said Miss Arden, with animation.

Sir Walter Scott, in his "Rob Roy"—thinking, no doubt, of the Diana Vernon of his early days, the then beautiful lady, long afterwards celebrated by Basil Hall as the old Countess Purgstorf (if I rightly remember the title), and recurring to some

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cherished incident, and the thrill of a pride that had ceased to agitate, but was at once pleasant and melancholy to remember —wrote these words: "She proceeded to read the first stanza, which was nearly to the following purpose. [Then follow the verses.] 'There is a great deal of it,' said she, glancing along the paper, and interrupting the sweetest sounds that mortal ears can drink in—those of a youthful poet's verses, namely, read by the lips which are dearest to them." So writes Walter Scott. On the other hand, in certain states, is there a pain intenser than that of listening to the praises of another man from the lips we love?

"Well," said Darnley, "as you say so, I suppose there is all that, though I can't see it. Of course, if he tries to make himself agreeable (which he never does to me), it makes a difference, it affects everything—it affects even his looks. But I should not have thought him good-looking. On the contrary, he appears to me about as ugly a fellow as one could see in a day."

"He's not that," said Alice. "No one could be ugly with so much animation and so much expression."

"You take up the cudgels very prettily, my dear, for Mr. Longcluse," said Lady May. "I'm sure he ought to be extremely obliged to you."

"So he would be," said Richard Arden. "It would upset him for a week, I have no doubt."

There are few things harder to interpret than a blush. At these words the beautiful face of Alice Arden flushed, first with a faint, and then, as will happen, with a brighter crimson. If Lady May had seen it, she would have laughed, probably, and told her how much it became her. But she was, at that moment, going to her chair in the window, and Richard Arden would, of course, accompany her. He did see it, as distinctly as he saw the glow in the sky over the park trees. But, knowing what a slight matter will sometimes make a recoil, and even found an antipathy, he wisely chose to see it not—and chatting gaily, followed Lady May to the window.

But Vivian Darnley, though he said nothing, saw that blush, of which Alice, with a sort of haughty defiance, was conscious. It did not make him like or admire Mr. Longcluse more.

"Well, I suppose he is very charming—I don't know him well enough myself to give an opinion. But he makes his acquaintances rather oddly, doesn't he? I don't think any one will dispute that."

"I don't know really. Lady May introduced him to me, and she seems to like him very much. So far as I can see, people are very well pleased at knowing him, and don't trouble their heads as to how it came about," said Miss Arden.

"No, of course; but people not fortunate enough to come

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within the influence of his fascination, can't help observing. How did he come to know your brother, for instance? Did any one introduce him? Nothing of the kind. Richard's horse was hurt or lame at one of the hunts in Warwickshire, and he lent him a horse, and introduced himself, and they dined together that evening on the way back, and so the thing was done."

"Can there be a better introduction than a kindness?" asked Alice.

"Yes, where it *is* a kindness, I agree; but no one has a right to push his services upon a stranger who does not ask for them."

"I really can't see. Richard need not have taken his horse if he had not liked," she answered.

"And Lady May, who thinks him such a paragon, knows no more about him than any one else. She had her footman behind her—didn't she tell you all about it?"

"I really don't recollect; but does it very much matter?"

"I think it does—that is, it has been a sort of system. He just gave her his arm over a crossing, where she had taken fright, and then pretended to think her great deal more frightened than she really can have been, and made her sit down to recover in a confectioner's shop, and so saw her home, and *that* affair was concluded. I don't say, of course, that he is never introduced in the regular way; but a year or two ago, when he was beginning, he always made his approaches by means of that kind of stratagem; and the fact is, no one knows anything on earth about him; he has emerged, like a figure in a phantasmagoria, from total darkness, and may lose himself in darkness again at any moment."

"I am interested in that man, whoever he is; his entrance, and his probable exit, so nearly resemble mine," said a clear, deep-toned voice close to them; and looking up, Miss Arden saw the pale face and peculiar smile of Mr. Longcluse in the fading twilight.

Mr. Longcluse was greeted by Lady May and by Richard Arden, and then again he drew near Alice, and said, "Do you recollect, Miss Arden, about ten days ago I told you a story that seemed to interest you—the story of a young and eloquent friar, who died of love in his cell in an abbey in the Tyrol, and whose ghost used to be seen pensively leaning on the pulpit from which he used to preach, too much thinking of the one beautiful face among his audience, which had enthralled him. I had left the enamel portrait I told you of at an artist's in Paris, and I wrote for it, thinking you might wish to see it—hoping you might care to see it," he added, in a lower tone, observing that Vivian Darnley, who was not in a happy temper, had, with a sudden

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impulse of disdain, removed himself to another window, there to contemplate the muster of the stars in the darkening sky, at his leisure.

"That was so kind of you, Mr. Longcluse! You have had a great deal of trouble. It *is* such an interesting story!" said Alice.

In his reception, Mr. Longcluse found something that pleased, almost elated him. Had Richard Arden been speaking to her on the subject of their morning's conversation? He thought not. Lady May had mentioned that he had not been with them till just twenty minutes ago, and Arden had told him that he had dined with his uncle David and Mr. Blount, upon the same business on which he had been occupied with both nearly all day. No, he could not have spoken to her. The slight change which made him so tumultuously proud and happy, was entirely spontaneous.

"So it seemed to me—an eccentric and interesting story—but pray do not wound me by speaking of trouble. I only wish you knew half the pleasure it has been to me to get it to show you. May I hold the lamp near for a moment while you look at it?" he said, indicating a tiny lamp which stood on a pier-table, showing a solitary gleam, like a lighthouse, through the gloom; "you could not possibly see it in this faint twilight."

The lady assented. Had Mr. Longcluse ever felt happier?

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CHAPTER XI.

THE TELEGRAM ARRIVES.

MR. LONGCLUSE placed the little oval enamel, set in gold, in Miss Arden's fingers, and held the lamp beside her while she looked.

"How beautiful!—how very interesting!" she exclaimed. "What suffering in those thin, handsome features! What a strange enthusiasm in those large hazel eyes! I could fancy that monk the maddest of lovers, the most chivalric of saints. And did he really suffer that incredible fate? Did he really die of love?"

"So they say. But why incredible? I can quite imagine that wild shipwreck, seeing what a raging sea love is, and how frail even the strongest life."

"Well, I can't say, I am sure. But your own novelists laugh at the idea of any but women—whose business it is, of course, to pay that tribute to their superiors—dying of love. But if any man could die such a death, he must be such as this picture represents. What a wild, agonised picture of passion and asceticism! What suicidal devotion and melancholy rapture! I confess I could almost fall in love with that picture myself."

"And I think, were I he, I could altogether die to earn one such sentence, so spoken," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Could you lend it to me for a very few days?" asked the young lady.

"As many—as long as you please. I am only too happy."

"I should so like to make a large drawing of this in chalks!" said Alice, still gazing on the miniature.

"You draw so beautifully in chalks! Your style is not often found here—your colouring is so fine."

"Do you really think so?"

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"You must know it, Miss Arden. You are too good an artist not to suspect what everyone else must see, the real excellence of your drawings. Your colouring is better understood in France. Your master, I fancy, was a Frenchman?" said Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, he was, and we got on very well together. Some of his young lady pupils were very much afraid of him."

"Your poetry is fired by that picture, Miss Arden. Your copy will be a finer thing than the original," said he.

"I shall aim only at making it a faithful copy; and if I can accomplish anything like that, I shall be only too glad."

"I hope you will allow me to see it?" pleaded Longcluse.

"Oh, certainly," she laughed. "Only I'm a little afraid of you, Mr. Longcluse."

"What can you mean, Miss Arden?"

"I mean, you are so good a critic in art, every one says, that I really *am* afraid of you," answered the young lady, laughing.

"I should be very glad to forfeit any little knowledge I have, if it were attended with such a misfortune," said Longcluse. "But I don't flatter; I tell you truly, a critic has only to admire, when he looks at your drawings; they are quite above the level of an amateur's work."

"Well, whether you mean it or not, I *am* very much flattered," she laughed. "And though wise people say that flattery spoils one, I can't help thinking it very agreeable to be flattered."

At this point of the dialogue Mr. Vivian Darnley—who wished that it should be plain to all, and to one in particular, that he did not care the least what was going on in other parts of the room—began to stumble through the treble of a tune at the piano with his right hand. And whatever other people may have thought of his performance, to Miss Alice Arden it seemed very good music indeed, and inspired her with fresh animation. Such as it was, Mr. Darnley's solo also turned the course of Miss Arden's thoughts from drawing to another art, and she said—

"You, Mr. Longcluse, who know everything about the opera, can you tell me—of course you can—anything about the great basso who is coming?"

"Stentoroni?"

"Yes; the newspapers and critics promise wonders."

"It is nearly two years since I heard him. He was very great, and deserves all they say in 'Robert le Diable.' But there his greatness began and ended. The voice, of course, you had, but everything else was defective. It is plain, however, that the man who could make so fine a study of one opera, could with equal labour make as great a success in others. He has not sung in any opera for more than a year and a half, and has been working diligently; and so everyone is in the dark

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very much, and I am curious to hear the result—and nobody knows more than I have told you. You are sure of a good 'Robert le Diable,' but all the rest is speculation."

"And now, Mr. Longcluse, I shall try your good-nature."

"How?"

"I am going to make Lady May ask you to sing a song."

"Pray don't."

"Why not?"

"I should so much rather you asked me yourself."

"That's very good of you; then I certainly shall. I *do* ask you."

"And I instantly obey. And what shall the song be?" asked he, approaching the piano, to which she also walked.

"Oh, that ghostly one that I liked so much when you sang it here about a week ago," she answered.

"I know it—yes, with pleasure." And he sat down at the piano, and in a clear, rich baritone, sang the following odd song:—

"The autumn leaf was falling
At midnight from the tree,
When at her casement calling,
'I'm here, my love,' says he.
'Come down and mount behind me,
And rest your little head,
And in your white arms wind me,
Before that I be dead.

"'You've stolen my heart by magic,
I've kissed your lips in dreams:
Our wooing wild and tragic
Has been in ghostly scenes.
The wondrous love I bear you
Has made one life of twain,
And it will bless or scare you,
In deathless peace or pain.

"'Our dreamland shall be glowing,
If you my bride will be;
To darkness both are going,
Unless you come with me.
Come now, and mount behind me,
And rest your little head,
And in your white arms wind me,
Before that I be dead.'"

"Why, dear Alice, will you choose that dismal song, when you know that Mr. Longcluse has so many others that are not only charming, but cheery and natural?"

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"It is because it is *un*natural that I like that song so much; the air is so ominous and spectral, and yet so passionate. I think the idea is Icelandic—those ghostly lovers that came in the dark to win their beloved maidens, who as yet knew nothing of their having died, to ride with them over the snowy fields and frozen rivers, to join their friends at a merry-making which they were never to see; but there is something more mysterious even in this lover, for his passion has unearthly beginnings that lose themselves in utter darkness. Thank you very much, Mr. Longcluse. It is so very kind of you! And now, Lady May, isn't it your turn to choose? May she choose, Mr. Longcluse?"

"Any one, if you desire it, may choose anything I possess, and have it," said he, in a low impassioned murmur.

How the young lady would have taken this, I know not, but all were suddenly interrupted. For at this moment a servant entered with a note, which he presented, upon a salver, to Mr. Longcluse.

"Your servant is waiting, Sir, please, for orders in the awl," murmured the man.

"Oh, yes—thanks," said Mr. Longcluse, who saw a shabby letter, with the words "Private" and "Immediate" written in a round, vulgar hand over the address.

"Pray read your note, Mr. Longcluse, and don't mind us," said Lady May.

"Thank you very much. I think I know what this is. I gave some evidence to-day at an inquest," began Mr. Longcluse.

"That wretched Frenchman," interposed Lady May, "Monsieur Lebrun or ——"

"Lebas," said Vivian Darnley.

"Yes, so it was, Lebas; what a frightful thing that was!" continued Lady May, who was always well up in the day's horrors.

"Very melancholy, and very alarming also. It is a selfish way of looking at it, but one can't help thinking it might just as well have happened to any one else who was there. It brings it home to one a little uncomfortably," said Mr. Longcluse, with an uneasy smile and a shrug.

"And you actually gave evidence, Mr. Longcluse?" said Lady May.

"Yes, a little," he answered. "It may lead to something. I hope so. As yet it only indicates a line of inquiry. It will be in the papers, I suppose, in the morning. There will be, I daresay, a pretty full report of that inquest."

"Then you saw something occur that excited your suspicions?" said Lady May.

Mr. Longcluse recounted all he had to tell, and mentioned

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having made inquiries as to the present abode of the man, Paul Davies, at the police office.

"And this note, I daresay, is the one they promised to send me, telling the result of their inquiries," he added.

"Pray open it and see," said Lady May.

He did so. He read it in silence. From his foot to the crown of his head there crept a cold influence as he read. Stream after stream, this *aura* of fear spread upwards to his brain. Pale Mr. Longcluse shrugged and smiled, and smiled and shrugged, as his dark eye ran down the lines, and with a careless finger he turned the page over. He smiled, as prize-fighters smile for the spectators, while every nerve quivered with pain. He looked up, smiling still, and thrust the note into his breast-pocket.

"Well, Mr. Longcluse, a long note it seems to have been," said Lady May, curiously.

"Not very long, but what is as bad, very illegible," said Mr. Longcluse gaily.

"And what about the man—the person the police were to have inquired after?" she persisted.

"I find it is no police information, nothing of the kind," answered Longcluse with the same smile. "It comes by no means from one of that long-headed race of men; on the contrary, poor fellow, I believe he is literally a little mad. I make him a trifling present every Christmas, and that is a very good excuse for his plaguing me all the year round. I was in hopes this letter might turn out an amusing one, but it is not; it is a failure. It is rather sensible, and disgusting."

"Well, then, I must have my song, Mr. Longcluse," said Lady May, who, under cover of music, sometimes talked a little, in gentle murmurs, to that person with whom talk was particularly interesting.

But that song was not to be heard in Lady May's drawing-room that night, for a kindred interruption, though much more serious in its effects upon Mr. Longcluse's companions, occurred. A footman entered, and presented on a salver a large brown envelope to Miss Alice Arden.

"Oh, dear! It is a telegram," exclaimed Miss Arden, who had taken it to the window. Lady May Penrose was beside her by this time. Alice looked on the point of fainting.

"I'm afraid papa is very ill," she whispered, handing the paper, which trembled very much in her hand, to Lady May.

"H'm! Yes—but you may be sure it's exaggerated. Bring some sherry and water, please. You look a little frightened, my dear. Sit down, darling. There now! These messages are always written in a panic. What do you mean to do?"

"I'll go, of course," said Alice.

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"Well, yes—I think you must go. What is the place? Twyford, the 'Royal Oak?' Look out Twyford, please Mr. Darnley—there's a book there. It must be a post-town. It was thoughtful saying it is on the Dover coach road."

Vivian Darnley was gazing in deep concern at Alice. Instantly he began turning over the book, and announced in a few moments more—"It is a post-town—only thirty-six miles from London," said Mr. Darnley.

"Thanks," said Lady May. "Oh, here's the wine—I'm so glad! You must have a little, dear; and you'll take Louisa Diaper with you, of course; and you shall have one of my carriages, and I'll send a servant with you, and he'll arrange everything; and how soon do you wish to go?"

"Immediately, instantly—thanks, darling. I'm *so* much obliged!"

"Will your brother go with you?"

"No, dear. Papa, you know, has not forgiven him, and it is, I think, two years since they met. It would only agitate him."

And with these words she hurried to her room, and in another moment, with the aid of her maid, was completing her hasty preparations.

In wonderfully little time the carriage was at the door. Mr. Longcluse had taken his leave. So had Richard Arden, with the one direction to the servant, "If anything should go *very* wrong, be sure to telegraph for me. Here is my address."

"Put this in your purse, dear," said Lady May. "Your father is so thoughtless, he may not have brought money enough with him; and you will find it is as I say—he'll be a great deal better by the time you get there; and God bless you, my dear."

And she kissed her as heartily as she dared, without communicating the rouge and white powder which aided her complexion.

As Alice ran down, Vivian Darnley awaited her outside the drawing-room door, and ran down with her, and put her into the carriage. He leaned for a moment on the window, and said—

"I hope you didn't mind that nonsense Lady May was talking just now about Miss Grace Maubray. I assure you it is utter folly. I was awfully vexed; but you didn't believe it?"

"I didn't hear her say anything, at least seriously. Wasn't she laughing? I'm in such trouble about that message! I am so longing to be at my journey's end!"

He took her hand and pressed it, and the carriage drove

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away. And standing on the steps, and quite forgetting the footman close behind him, he watched it as it drove rapidly southward, until it was quite out of sight, and then with a great sigh and "God for ever bless you!"—uttered not above his breath—he turned about, and saw those powdered and liveried effigies, and walked up with his head rather high to the drawing-room, where he found Lady May.

"I sha'n't go to the opera to-night; it is out of the question," said she. "But *you* shall. You go to my box, you know; Jephson will put you in there."

It was plain that the good-natured soul was unhappy about Alice, and, Richard Arden having departed, wished to be alone. So Vivian took his leave, and went away—but not to the opera—and sauntered for an hour, instead, in a melancholy romance up and down the terrace, till the moon rose and silvered the trees in the park.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE human mind being, in this respect, of the nature of a kaleidoscope, that the slightest hitch, or jolt, or tremor is enough to change the entire picture that occupies it, it is not to be supposed that the illness of her father, alarming as it was, could occupy Alice Arden's thoughts to the exclusion of every other subject, during every moment of her journey. One picture, a very pretty one, frequently presented itself, and always her heart felt a strange little pain as this pretty phantom appeared. It was the portrait of a young girl, with fair golden hair, a brilliant complexion, and large blue eyes, with something *riant*, triumphant, and arch to the verge of mischief, in her animated and handsome face.

The careless words of good Lady May, this evening, and the very obvious confusion of Vivian Darnley at mention of the name of Grace Maubray, troubled her. What was more likely than that Uncle David, interested in both, should have seriously projected the union which Lady May had gaily suggested? If she—Alice Arden—liked Vivian Darnley, it was not very much, her pride insisted. In her childhood they had been thrown together. He had seemed to like her; but had he ever spoken? Why was he silent? Was she fool enough to like him?—that cautious, selfish young man, who was thinking, she was quite certain now, of a marriage of prudence or ambition with Grace Maubray? It was a cold, cruel, sordid world!

But, after all, why should he have spoken? or why should he have hoped to be heard with favour? She had been to him, thank Heaven, just as any other pleasant, early friend. There was nothing to regret—nothing fairly to blame. It was just that a person whom she had come to regard as a property was

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about to go, and belong quite, to another. It was the foolish little jealousy that everyone feels, and that means nothing. So she told herself; but constantly recurred the same pretty image, and with it the same sudden little pain at her heart.

But now came the other care. As time and space shorten, and the moment of decision draws near, the pain of suspense increases. They were within six miles of Twyford. Her heart was in a wild flutter—now throbbing madly, now it seemed standing still. The carriage window was down. She was looking out on the scenery—strange to her—all bright and serene under a brilliant moon. What message awaited her at the inn to which they were travelling at this swift pace? How frightful it might be!

"Oh, Louisa!" she every now and then imploringly cried to her maid, "how do you think it will be? Oh! how will it be? Do you think he'll be better? Oh! do you think he'll be better? Tell me again about his other illness, and how he recovered? Don't you think he will this time? Oh, Louisa, darling! don't you think so? Tell me—*tell* me you do!"

Thus, in her panic, the poor girl wildly called for help and comfort, until at last the carriage turned a curve in the road at which stood a shadowy clump of elms, and in another moment the driver pulled up under the sign of the "Royal Oak."

"Oh, Louisa! Here it is," cried the young lady, holding her maid's wrist with a trembling grasp.

The inn-door was shut, but there was light in the hall, and light in an upper room.

"Don't knock—only ring the bell. He may be asleep, God grant!" said the young lady.

The door was quickly opened, and a waiter ran down to the carriage window, where he saw a pair of large wild eyes, and a very pale face, and heard the question—"An old gentlemen has been ill here, and a telegram was sent; is he—how is he?"

"He's better, Ma'am," said the man.

With a low, long "O—Oh!" and clasped hands and upturned eyes, she leaned back in the carriage, and a sudden flood of tears relieved her. Yes; he was a great deal better. The attack was quite over; but he had not spoken. He seemed much exhausted; and having swallowed some claret, which the doctor prescribed, he had sunk into a sound and healthy sleep, in which he still lay. A message by telegraph had been sent to announce the good news, but Alice was some way on her journey before it had reached.

Now the young lady got down, and entered the homely old inn, followed by her maid. She could have dropped on her knees in gratitude to her Maker; but true religion, like true

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affection, is shy of demonstrating its fervours where sympathy is doubtful.

Gently, hardly breathing, guided by the "chambermaid," she entered her father's room, and stood at his bedside. There he lay, yellow, lean, the lines of his face in repose still forbidding, the thin lips and thin nose looking almost transparent, and breathing deeply and regularly, as a child in his slumbers. In that face Alice could not discover what any stranger would have seen. She only saw the face of her father. Selfish and capricious as he was, and violent too—a wicked old man, if one could see him justly—he was yet proud of her, and had many schemes and projects afloat in his jaded old brain, of which her beauty was the talisman, of which she suspected nothing, and with which his head was never more busy than at the very moment when he was surprised by the *aura* of his coming fit.

The doctor's conjecture was right. He had crossed the Channel that morning. In his French *coupée*, he had for companion the very man he had most wished and contrived to travel homeward with. This was Lord Wynderbroke.

Lord Wynderbroke was fifty years old and upwards. He was very much taken with Alice, whom he had met pretty often. He was a man who was thought likely to marry His estate was in the nattiest order. He had always been prudent, and cultivated a character. He had, moreover, mortgages over Sir Reginald Arden's estate, the interest of which the baronet was beginning to find it next to impossible to pay. They had been making a little gouty visit to Vichy, and Sir Reginald had taken good care to make the journey homeward with Lord Wynderbroke, who knew that when he pleased he could be an amusing companion, and who also felt that kind of interest in him which everyone experiences in the kindred of the young lady of whom he is enamoured.

The baronet, who tore up or burnt his letters for the most part, had kept this particular one by which his daughter had been traced and summoned to the "Royal Oak." It was, he thought, clever. It was amusing, and had some London gossip. He had read bits of it to Lord Wynderbroke in the *coupée*. Lord Wynderbroke was delighted. When they parted, he had asked leave to pay him a visit at Mortlake.

"Only too happy, if you are not afraid of the old house falling in upon us. Everything *there*, you know, is very much as my grandfather left it. I only use it as a caravanserai, and alight there for a little, on a journey. Everything there is tumbling to pieces. But you won't mind—no more than I do."

So the little visit was settled. The passage was rough. Peer and baronet were ill. They did not care to reunite their fortunes after they touched English ground. As the baronet

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drew near London, for certain reasons he grew timid. He got out with a portmanteau and dressing-case, and an umbrella, at Drowark station, sent his servant on with the rest of the luggage by rail, and himself took a chaise; and, after one change of horses, had reached the "Royal Oak" in the state in which we first saw him.

The doctor had told the people at that inn that he would look in, in the course of the night, some time after one o'clock, being a little uneasy about a possible return of the old man's malady. There was that in the aristocratic looks and belongings of his patient, and in the very fashionable address to which the message to his daughter was transmitted, which induced in the mind of the learned man a suspicion that a "swell" might have accidentally fallen into his hands.

By this time, thanks to the diligence of Louisa Diaper, every one in the house had been made acquainted with the fact that the sick man was no other than Sir Reginald Arden, Bart., and with many other circumstances of splendour, which would not, perhaps, have so well stood the test of inquiry. The doctor and his crony, the rector—simplest of parsons—who had agreed to accompany him in this nocturnal call, being a curious man, as gentlemen inhabiting quiet villages will be—these two gentlemen now heard all this lore in the hall at a quarter past one, and entered the patient's chamber (where they found Miss Arden and her maid) accordingly. In whispers, the doctor made to Miss Arden a most satisfactory report. He made his cautious inspection of the patient, and again had nothing but what was cheery to say.

If the rector had not prided himself upon his manners, and had been content with one bow on withdrawing from the lady's presence, they would not that night have heard the patient's voice — and perhaps, all things considered, so much the better.

"I trust, Madam, in the morning Sir Reginald may be quite himself again. It is pleasant, Madam, to witness slumber so quiet," murmured the clergyman kindly, and in perfect good faith. "It is the slumber of a tranquil mind—a spirit at peace with itself."

Smiling kindly in making the last stiff bow which accompanied these happy words, the good man tilted over a little table behind him, on which stood a decanter of claret, a water caraffe, and two glasses, all of which came to the ground with a crash that wakened the baronet. He sat up straight in his bed and stared round, while the clergyman, in consternation, exclaimed—"Good gracious!"

"Hollo! what is it?" cried the fierce, thin voice of the baronet. "What the devil's all this? Where's Crozier?

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Where's my servant? Will you, will you, some of you, say where the devil I am?" He was screaming all this, and groping and clutching at either side of the bed's head for a bell-rope, intending to rouse the house. "Where's Crozier, I say? Where the devil's my servant? eh? He's gone by rail, ain't he? No one came with me. And where's this? What is it? Are you all tongue-tied?—haven't you a word among you?"

The clergyman had lifted his hands in terror at the harangue of the old man of the "tranquil mind." Alice had taken his thin hand, standing beside him, and was speaking softly in his ear. But his prominent brown eyes were fiercely scanning the strangers, and the hand which clutched hers was trembling with eager fury. "Will some of you say what you mean, or what you are doing, or where I am?" and he screeched another sentence or two, that made the old clergyman very uncomfortable.

"You arrived here, Sir Reginald, about six hours ago—extremely ill, Sir," said the doctor, who had placed himself close to his patient, and spoke with official authority; "but we have got you all right again, we hope; and this is the 'Royal Oak,' the principal hotel of Twyford, on the Dover and London road; and my name is Proby."

"And what's all this?" cried the baronet, snatching up one of the medicine-bottles from the little table by his bed, and plucking out the cork and smelling at the fluid. "By heaven?" he screamed, "this is the very thing. I could not tell what d——d taste was in my mouth, and here it is. Why, my doctor tells me—and he knows his business—it is as much as my life's worth to give me anything like—like that, pah! assafœtida! If my stomach is upset with this filthy stuff, I give myself up! I'm gone. I shall sink, Sir. Was there no one here, in the name of Heaven, with a grain of sense or a particle of pity, to prevent that beast from literally poisoning me? Egad! I'll make my son punish him! I'll make my family hang him if I die!" There was a quaver of misery in his shriek of fury, as if he was on the point of bursting into tears. "Doctor, indeed! who sent for him? I didn't. Who gave him leave to drug me? Upon my soul, I've been poisoned. To think of a creature in my state, dependent on nourishment every hour, having his digestion destroyed! Doctor, indeed! Pay him? Not I, begad," and he clenched his sentence with an ugly expletive.

But all this concluding eloquence was lost upon the doctor, who had mentioned, in a lofty "aside" to Miss Arden, that "unless sent for he should not call again;" and with a marked politeness to her, and no recognition whatever of the baronet, he had taken his departure.

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"I'm not the doctor, Sir Reginald; I'm the clergyman," said the Reverend Peter Sprott, gravely and timidly, for the prominent brown eyes were threatening him.

"Oh, the clergyman! Oh, I see. Will you be so good as to ring the bell, please, and excuse a sick man giving you that trouble. And is there a post-office near this?"

"Yes, Sir—close by."

"This is you, Alice? I'm glad you're here. You must write a letter this moment—a note to your brother. Don't be afraid—I'm better, a good deal—and tell the people, when they come, to get me some strong soup this moment, and—good evening, Sir, or good-night, or morning, or whatever it is," he added, to the clergyman, who was taking his leave. "What o'clock is it?" he asked Alice. "Well, you'll write to your brother to meet me at Mortlake. I have not seen him, now, for how many years? I forget. He's in town, is he? Very good. And tell him it is perhaps the last time, and I expect him. I suppose he'll come. Say at a quarter past nine in the evening. The sooner it's over the better. I expect no good of it; it is only just to try. And I shall leave this early—immediately after breakfast—as quickly as we can. I hate it!"

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CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ROAD.

NEXT morning the baronet was in high good-humour. He has written a little reminder to Lord Wynderbroke. He will expect him at Mortlake the day he named, to dinner. He remembers he promised to stay the night. He can offer him, still, as good a game of piquet as he is likely to find in his club; and he almost feels that he has no excuse but a selfish one, for exacting the performance of a promise which gave him a great deal of pleasure. His daughter, who takes care of her old father, will make their tea and—*voilà tout!*

Sir Reginald was in particularly good spirits as he sent the waiter to the post-office with this little note. He thinks within himself that he never saw Alice in such good looks. His selfish elation waxes quite affectionate, and Alice never remembered him so good-natured. She don't know what to make of it exactly; but it pleases her, and she looks all the more brilliant.

And now these foreign birds, whom a chance storm has thrown upon the hospitality of the "Royal Oak," are up and away again. The old baronet and his pretty daughter, Louisa Diaper sitting behind, in cloaks and rugs, and the footman in front, to watch the old man's signals, are whirling dustily along with a team of four horses; for Sir Reginald's arrangements are never economical, and a pair would have brought them over these short stages and home very nearly as fast. Lady May's carriage pleases the old man, and helps his transitory good-humour: it is so much more luxurious than the jolty hired vehicle in which he had arrived.

Alice is permitted her thoughts to herself. The baronet has taken his into companionship, and is leaning back in his

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corner, with his eyes closed ; and his pursed mouth, with its wonderful involution of wrinkles round it, is working unconsciously ; and his still dark eyebrows, now elevating, now knitting themselves, indicate the same activity of brain.

With a silent look now and then at his face—for she need not ask whether Sir Reginald wants anything, or would like anything changed, for the baronet needs no inquiries of this kind, and makes people speedily acquainted with his wants and fancies—she occupies her place beside him, for the most part looking out listlessly from the window, and thinks of many things. The baronet opens his eyes at last, and says abruptly,

"Charming prospect ! Charming day ! You'll be glad to hear, Alice, I'm not tired ; I'm making my journey wonderfully ! It is so pretty, and the sun so cheery. You are looking so well, it is quite a pleasure to look at you—charming ! You'll come to me at Mortlake for a few days, to take care of me, you know. I shall go on to Buxton in a week or so, and you can return to Lady May to-night, and come to Mortlake shortly ; and your brother, graceless creature ! I suppose, will come to-night. I expect nothing from his visit, absolutely. He has been nothing to me but a curse all his life. I suppose, if there's justice anywhere, he'll have his deserts some day. But for the present I put him aside—I sha'n't speak of him. He disturbs me."

They drove through London over Westminster Bridge, the servant thinking that they were to go to Lady May Penrose's in Chester Terrace. It was the first time that day, since he had talked of his son, that a black shadow crossed Sir Reginald's face. He shrunk back. He drew up his Chinese silk muffler over his chin. He was fearful lest some prowling beak or eagle-eyed Jew should see his face, for Sir Reginald was just then in danger. Glancing askance under the peak of his travelling cap, he saw Talkington, with Wynderbroke on his arm, walking to their club. How free and fearless those happy mortals looked ! How the old man yearned for his chat and his glass of wine at B——'s, and his afternoon whist at W——'s ! How he chafed and blasphemed inwardly at the invisible obstacle that insurmountably interposed, and with what a fiery sting of malice he connected the idea of his son with the fetters that bound him !

"You know that man ?" said Sir Reginald sharply, as he saw Mr. Longcluse raise his hat to her as they passed.

"Yes, I've met him pretty often at Lady May's."

"H'm ! I had not an idea that anyone knew him. He's a man who might be of use to one."

Here followed a silence.

"I thought, papa, you wished to go direct to Mortlake, and I don't think this is the way," suggested Alice.

"Eh ? heigho ! You're right, child ; upon my life, I was not

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thinking," said Sir Reginald, at the same time signalling vehemently to the servant, who, having brought the carriage to a stand-still, came round to the window.

"We don't stop anywhere in town, we go straight to Mortlake Hall. It is beyond Islington. Have you ever been there? Well, you can tell them how to reach it."

And Sir Reginald placed himself again in his corner. They had not started early, and he had frequently interrupted their journey on various whimsical pretexts. He remembered one house, for instance, where there was a stock of the very best port he had ever tasted, and then he stopped and went in, and after a personal interview with the proprietor, had a bottle opened, and took two glasses, and so paid at the rate of half a guinea each for them. It had been an interrupted journey, late begun, and the sun was near its setting by the time they had got a mile beyond the outskirts of Islington, and were drawing near the singular old house where their journey was to end.

Always with a melancholy presentiment, Alice approached Mortlake Hall. But never had she felt it more painfully than now. If there be in such misgivings a prophetic force, was it to be justified by the coming events of Miss Arden's life, which were awfully connected with that scene?

They passed a quaint little village of tall stone houses, among great old trees, with a rural and old-world air, and an ancient inn, with the sign of "Guy of Warwick"—an inn of which we shall see more by-and-by—faded, and like the rest of this little town, standing under the shadow of old trees. They entered the road, dark with double hedge-rows, and with a moss-grown park-wall on the right, in which, in a little time, they reached a great iron gate with fluted pillars. They drove up a broad avenue, flanked with files of gigantic trees, and showing grand old timber also upon the park-like grounds beyond. The dusky light of evening fell upon these objects, and the many windows, the cornices, and the smokeless chimneys of a great old house. You might have fancied yourself two hundred miles away from London.

"You don't stay here to-night, Alice. I wish you to return to Lady May, and give her the note I am going to write. You and she come out to dine here on Friday. If she makes a difficulty, I rely on you to persuade her. I must have someone to meet Mr. Longcluse. I have reasons. Also, I shall ask my brother David, and his ward Miss Maubray. I knew her father: he was a fool, with his head full of romance, and he married a very pretty woman who was a devil, without a shilling on earth. The girl is an orphan, and David is her guardian, and he would like any little attention we can show her. And we shall ask Vivian Darnley also. And that will make a very suitable party."

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Sir Reginald wrote his note, talking at intervals.

"You see, I want Lady May to come here again in a day or two, to stay only for two or three days. She can go into town and remain there all day, if she likes it. But Wynderbroke will be coming, and I should not like him to find us quite deserted; and she said she'd come, and she may as well do it now as another time. David lives so quietly, we are sure of him; and I commit May Penrose to you. You must persuade her to come. It will be cruel to disappoint. Here is her note—I will send the others myself. And now, God bless you, dear Alice!"

"I am so uncomfortable at the idea of leaving you, papa." Her hand was on his arm, and she was looking anxiously into his face.

"So of course you should be; only that I am so perfectly recovered, that I must have a quiet evening with Richard; and I prefer your being in town to-night, and you and May Penrose can come out to-morrow. Good-bye, child, God bless you!"

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CHAPTER XIV.

MR. LONGCLUSE'S BOOT FINDS A TEMPORARY ASYLUM.

IN the papers of that morning had appeared a voluminous report of the proceedings of the coroner's inquest which sat upon the body of the deceased Pierre Lebas. I shall notice but one passage referring to the evidence which, it seems, Mr. Longcluse volunteered. It was given in these terms :—

"At this point of the proceedings, Mr. R. D. Longcluse, who had arrived about half an hour before, expressed a wish to be examined. Mr. Longcluse was accordingly sworn, and deposed that he had known the deceased, Pierre Lebas, when he (Mr. Longcluse) was little more than a boy, in Paris. Lebas at that time let lodgings, which were neat and comfortable, in the Rue Victoire. He was a respectable and obliging man. He had some other occupation besides that of letting lodgings, but he (Mr. Longcluse) could not say what it might be." Then followed particulars with which we are already acquainted; and the report went on to say: "He seemed surprised when witness told him that there might be in the room persons of the worst character; and he then, in considerable alarm, pointed out to him (witness) a man who was and had been following him from place to place, he fancied with a purpose. Witness observed the man and saw him watch deceased, turning his eyes repeatedly upon him. The man had no companions, so far as he could see, and affected to be looking in a different direction. It was sideways and stealthily that he was watching deceased, who had incautiously taken out and counted some of his money in the room. Deceased did not conceal from the witness his apprehensions from this man, and witness advised him again to place his money in the hands of some friend who had a secure pocket, and recommended, in case his friend should object to take so

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much money into his care—Lebas having said he had a large sum about him—under the gaze of the public, that he should make the transfer in the smoking-room, the situation of which he described to him. Mr. Longcluse then proceeded to give an exact description of the man who had been dogging the deceased ; the particulars were as follows :—"

Here I arrest my quotation, for I need not recapitulate the details of the tall man's features, dress, and figure, which are already familiar to the reader.

In a court off High Holborn there was, and perhaps is, a sort of coffee-shop, in the small drawing-rooms of which, thrown into one room, are many small and homely tables, with penny and halfpenny papers, and literature with startling woodcuts. Here working mechanics and others snatch a very early breakfast, and take their dinners, and such as can afford time loiter their half-hour or so over this agreeable literature. One penny morning paper visited that place of refection, for three hours daily, and then flitted away to keep an appointment elsewhere. It was this dull time in that peculiar establishment—namely, about nine o'clock in the morning—and there was but one listless guest in the room. It was the identical tall man in question. His flat feet were planted on the bare floor, and he leaned a shoulder against the window-case, with a plug of tobacco in his jaw, as, at his leisure, he was getting through the coroner's inquest on Pierre Lebas. He was smiling with half-closed eyes and considerable enjoyment, up to the point where Mr. Longcluse's evidence was suddenly directed upon him. There was a twitching scowl, as if from a sudden pain ; but his smile continued from habit, although his face grew paler. This man, whose name was Paul Davies, winked hard with his left eye, as he got on, and read fiercely with his right. His face was whiter now, and his smile less easy. It was a queerish situation, he thought, and might lead to consequences.

There was a little bit of a looking-glass, picked up at some rubbishy auction, as old as the hills, with some tarnished gilding about it, in the narrow bit of wall between the windows. Paul Davies could look at nothing quite straight. He looked now at himself in this glass, but it was from the corners of his eyes, askance, and with his sly, sleepy depression of the eye-lids, as if he had not overmuch confidence even in his own shadow. He folded the morning paper, and laid it, with formal precision, on the table, as if no one had disturbed it ; and taking up the *Halfpenny Illustrated Broadsheet of Fiction*, and with it flourishing in his hand by the corner, he called the waiter over the bannister, and paid his reckoning, and went off swiftly to his garret in another court, a quarter of a mile nearer to Saint

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Paul's—taking an obscure and devious course through back-lanes and sequestered courts.

When he got up to his garret, Mr. Davies locked his door and sat down on the side of his creaking settle-bed, and, in his playful phrase, "put on his considering cap."

"That's a dangerous cove, that Mr. Longcluse. He's done a bold stroke. And now it's him or me, I do suppose—him or me; me or him. Come, Paul, shake up your knowledge-box; I'll not lose this cast simple. He's gave a description of me. The force will know it. And them feet o' mine, they *are* a bit flat: but any chap can make a pair of insteps with a penn'orth o' rags. I wouldn't care tuppence if it wasn't for them pock-marks. There's no managing them. A scar or a wart you may touch over with paint and sollible gutta-percha, or pink wafers and gelatine, but pock-marks is too many for any man."

He was looking with some anxiety in the triangular fragment of looking-glass—balanced on a nail in the window-case—at his features.

"I can take off them whiskers; and the long neck he makes so much of, if it was as long as an oystrich, with fourpenn'orth of cotton waste and a cabbage-net, I'd make a bull of it, and run my shoulders up to my ears. I'll take the whiskers off, anyhow. That's no treason; and he mayn't identify me. If I'm not had up for a fortnight my hair would be grew a bit, and that would be a lift. But a fellow must think twice before he begins disguisin'. Juries smells a rat. Howsomever, a cove may shave, and no harm done; or his hair may grow a bit, and how can he help it? Longcluse knows what he's about. He's a sharp lad, but for all that Paul Davies 'ill sweat him yet."

Mr. Davies turned the button of his old-fashioned window, and let it down. He shut out his two scarlet geraniums, which accompanied him in all his changes from one lodging to another.

"Suppose he tries the larceny—that's another thing he may do, seeing what my lay is. It wouldn't do to lose that thing; no more would it answer to let them find it."

This last idea seemed to cause Paul Davies a good deal of serious uneasiness. He began looking about at the walls, low down near the skirting, and up near the ceiling, tapping now and then with his knuckles, and sounding the plaster as a doctor would the chest of a wheezy patient. He was not satisfied. He scratched his head, and fiddled with his ear, and plucked his short nose dubiously, and winked hard at his geraniums through the window.

Paul Davies knew that the front garret was not let. He opened his door and listened. Then he entered that room. I think he had a notion of changing his lodgings, if only he could

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find what he wanted. That was such a hiding-place as professional seekers were not likely to discover. But he could not satisfy himself.

A thought struck him, however, and he went into the lobby again; he got on a chair and pushed open the skylight, and out went Mr. Davies on the roof. He looked and poked about here. He looked to the neighbouring roofs, lest any eye should be upon him; but there was no one. A maid hanging clothes upon a line, on a sort of balcony, midway down the next house, was singing, "The Ratcatcher's Daughter," he thought rather sweetly—so well, indeed, that he listened for two whole verses—but that did not signify.

Paul Davies kneeled down, and loosed and removed, one after the other, several slates near the lead gutter, between the gables; and, having made a sufficient opening in the roof for his purpose, he returned, let himself down lightly through the skylight, entered his room, and locked himself up. He then unlocked his trunk and took from under his clothes, where it lay, a French boot—the veritable boot of Mr. Longcluse—which, for greater security, he popped under the coarse coverlet of his bed. He next took from his trunk a large piece of paper which, being unfolded at the window, disclosed a rude drawing with a sentence or two underneath, and three signatures, with a date preceding.

Having read this document over twice or thrice, with a rather menacing smile, he rolled it up in brown paper and thrust it into the foot of the boot, which he popped under the coverlet and bolster. He then opened his door wide. Too long a silence might possibly have seemed mysterious, and called up prying eyes, so, while he filled his pipe with tobacco, he whistled, "Villikins and his Dinah" lustily. He was very cautious about this boot and paper. He got on his great-coat and felt hat, and took his pipe and some matches—the enjoying a quiet smoke without troubling others with the perfume was a natural way of accounting for his visit to the roof. He listened. He slipped his boot and its contents into his capacious great-coat pocket, with a rag of old carpet tied round it; and then, whistling still cheerily, he mounted the roof again, and placed the precious parcel within the roof, which he, having some skill as a slater, proceeded carefully and quickly to restore.

Down came Mr. Davies now, and shaved off his whiskers. Then he walked out, with a bundle consisting of the coat, waistcoat, and blue necktie he had worn on the evening of Lebas's murder. He was going to pay a visit to his mother, a venerable greengrocer, who lived near the Tower of London; and on his way he pledged these articles at two distinct and very remote pawnbrokers', intending on his return to release,

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with the proceeds, certain corresponding articles of his wardrobe, now in ward in another establishment. These measures of obliteration he was taking quietly. His visit to his mother, a very honest old woman, who believed him to be the most virtuous, agreeable, and beautiful young man extant, was made with a very particular purpose.

"Well, Ma'am," he said, in reply to the old lady's hospitable greeting, "I won't refuse a pot of half-and-half and a couple of eggs, and I'll go so far as a cut or two of bacon, bein' 'ungry; and I'm a-goin' to write a paper of some consequence, if you'll obleege me with a sheet of foolscap and a pen and ink; and I may as well write it while the things is a-gettin' ready, accordin' to your kind intentions."

And accordingly Mr. Paul Davies sat in silence, looking very important—as he always did when stationery was before him—at a small table, in a dark back room, and slowly penned a couple of pages of foolscap.

"And now," said he, producing the document after his repast, "will you be so good, Ma'am, as to ask Mr. Sildyke and Mrs. Rumble to come down and witness my signing of this, which I mean to leave it in your hands and safe keepin', under lock and key, until I take it away, or otherwise tells you what you must do with it. It is a police paper, Ma'am, and may be wanted any time. But you keep it dark till I tells you."

This settled, Mr. Sildyke and Mrs. Rumble arrived obligingly; and Paul Davies, with an adroit wink at his mother—who was a little shocked and much embarrassed by the ruse, being a truth-loving woman—told them that here was his last will and testament, and he wanted only that they should witness his signature; which, with the date, was duly accomplished. Paul Davies was, indeed, a man of that genius which requires to proceed by stratagem, cherishing an abhorrence of straight lines, and a picturesque love of the curved and angular. So, if Mr. Longcluse was doing his duty at one end of the town, Mr. Davies, at the other, was by no means wanting in activity, or, according to the level of his intellect and experience, in wisdom.

We have recurred to these scenes in which Mr. Paul Davies figures, because it was indispensable to the reader's right understanding of some events that follow. Be so good, then, as to find Sir Reginald exactly where I left him, standing on the steps of Mortlake Hall. His daughter would have stayed, but he would not hear of it. He stood on the steps, and smirked a yellow and hollow farewell, waving his hand as the carriage drove away. Then he turned and entered the lofty hall, in which the light was already failing.

Sir Reginald did not like the trouble of mounting the stairs,

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His bed-room and sitting-room were on a level with the hall. As soon as he came in, the gloom of his old prison-house began to overshadow him, and his momentary cheer and good-humour disappeared.

"Where is Tansey? I suppose she's in her bed, or grumbling in toothache," he snarled to the footman. "And where the devil's Crozier? I have the fewest and the worst servants, I believe, of any man in England."

He poked open the door of his sitting-room with the point of his walking-stick.

"Nothing ready, I dare swear," he quavered, and shot a peevish and fiery glance round it.

Things were not looking quite so badly as he expected. There was just the little bit of expiring fire in the grate which he liked, even in summer. His sealskin slippers were on the hearth-rug, and his easy-chair was pushed into its proper place.

"Ha! Crozier, at last! Here, get off this coat, and these mufflers, and —— I was d——d near dying in that vile chaise. I don't remember how they got me into the inn. There, don't mind condoling. You're privileged, but don't do that. As near dying as possible—rather an awkward business for useless old servants here, if I had. I'll dress in the next room. My son's coming this evening. Admit him, mind. I'll see him. How long is it since we met last? Two years, egad! And Lord Wynderbroke has his dinner here—I don't know what day, but some day very soon—Friday, I think; and don't let the people here go to sleep. Remember!"

And so on, with his old servant, he talked, and sneered, and snarled, and established himself in his sitting-room, with his reviews, and his wine, and his newspapers.

Night fell over dark Mortlake Hall, and over the blazing city of London. Sir Reginald listened, every now and then, for the approach of his son. Talk as he might, he did expect something—and a great deal—from the coming interview. Two years without a home, without an allowance, with no provision except a hundred and fifty pounds a year, might well have tamed that wilful beast!

With the tremor of acute suspense, the old man watched and listened. Was it a good or an ill sign, his being so late?

The city of London, with its still roaring traffic and blaze of gas-lamps, did not contrast more powerfully with the silent shadows of the forest-grounds of Mortlake, than did the drawing-room of Lady May Penrose, brilliant with a profusion of light, and resonant with the gay conversation of inmates, all disposed to enjoy themselves, with the dim and vast room in which Sir Reginald sat silently communing with his own dismal thoughts.

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Nothing so contagious as gaiety. Alice Arden, laughingly, was "making her book" rather prematurely in dozens of pairs of gloves, for the Derby. Lord Wynderbroke was deep in it. So was Vivian Darnley.

"Your brother and I are to take the reins, turn about, Lady May says. He's a crack whip. He's better than I, I think," said Vivian to Alice Arden.

"You mustn't upset us, though. I am so afraid of you crack whips!" said Alice. "Nor let your horses run away with us; I've been twice run away with already."

"I don't the least wonder at Miss Arden's being run away with very often," said Lord Wynderbroke, with all the archness of a polite man of fifty.

"Very prettily said, Wynderbroke," smiled Lady May. "And where is your brother? I thought he'd have turned up to-night," asked she of Alice.

"I quite forgot. He was to see papa this evening. They wanted to talk over something together."

"Oh, I see!" said Lady May, and she became thoughtful.

What was the exact nature of the interest which good Lady May undoubtedly took in Richard Arden? Was it quite so motherly as years might warrant? At that time people laughed over it, and were curious to see the progress of the comedy. Here was light and gaiety — light within, lamps without; spirited talk in young anticipation of coming days of pleasure; and outside the roll of carriage-wheels making a humming bass to this merry treble.

Over the melancholy precincts of Mortlake the voiceless darkness of night descends with unmitigated gloom. The centre—the brain of this dark place—is the house: and in a large dim room, near the smouldering fire, sits the image that haunts rather than inhabits it.

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CHAPTER XV.

FATHER AND SON.

SIR REGINALD ARDEN had fallen into a doze, as he sat by the fire with his *Revue des Deux Mondes*, slipping between his finger and thumb, on his knees. He was recalled by Crozier's voice, and looking up, he saw, standing near the door, as if in some slight hesitation, a figure not seen for two years before.

For a moment Sir Reginald doubted his only half-awakened senses. Was that handsome oval face, with large, soft eyes, with such brilliant lips, and the dark-brown moustache, so fine, and silken, that had never known a razor, an unsubstantial portrait hung in the dim air, or his living son? There were perplexity and surprise in the old man's stare.

"I should have been here before, Sir, but your letter did not reach me until an hour ago," said Richard Arden.

"By heaven! Dick? And so you came! I believe I was asleep. Give me your hand. I hope, Dick, we may yet end this miserable quarrel happily. Father and son can have no real interests apart."

Sir Reginald Arden extended his thin hand, and smiled invitingly but rather darkly on his son. Graceful and easy this young man was, and yet embarrassed, as he placed his hand within his father's.

"You will take something, Dick, won't you?"

"Nothing, Sir, thanks."

Sir Reginald was stealthily reading his face. At last he began circuitously—

"I've a little bit of news to tell you about Alice. How long shall I allow you to guess what it is?"

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"I'm the worst guesser in the world—pray don't wait for me, Sir."

"Well, I have in my desk there—would you mind putting it on the table here?—a letter from Wynderbroke. You know him?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, Wynderbroke writes—the letter arrived only an hour ago—to ask my leave to marry your sister, if she will consent; and he says all he will do, which is very handsome—very generous indeed. Wait a moment. Yes, here it is. Read that."

Richard Arden did read the letter, with open eyes and breathless interest. The old man's eyes were upon him as he did so.

"Well, Richard, what do you think?"

"There can be but one opinion about it. Nothing can be more handsome. Everything suitable. I only hope that Alice will not be foolish."

"She sha'n't be that, I'll take care," said the old man, locking down his desk again upon the letter.

"It might possibly be as well, Sir, to prepare her a little at first. I may possibly be of some little use, and so may Lady May. I only mean that it might hardly be expedient to make it from the first a matter of authority, because she has romantic ideas, and she is spirited."

"I'll sleep upon it. I sha'n't see her again till to-morrow evening. She does not care about anyone in particular, I suppose?"

"Not that I know of," said Richard.

"You'll find it will all be right—it *will*—all right. It *shall* be right," said Sir Reginald. And then there was a silence. He was meditating the other business he had in hand, and again circuitously he proceeded.

"What's going on at the opera? Who is your great danseuse at present?" inquired the baronet, with a glimmer of a leer. "I haven't seen a ballet for more than six years. And why? I needn't tell yon. You know the miserable life I lead. Egad! there are fellows placed everywhere to watch me. There would be an execution in this house this night, if the miserable tables and chairs were not my brother David's property. Upon my life, Craven, my attorney, had to serve two notices on the sheriff in one term, to caution him not to sell your uncle's furniture for my debts. I shouldn't have had a joint-stool to sit down on, if it hadn't been for that. And I had to get out of the railway-carriage, by heaven! for fear of arrest, and come home—if home I can call this ruin—by posting all the way, except a few miles. I did not dare to tell Craven I was coming back. I

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wrote from Twyford, where I—I—took a fancy to sleep last night, to no human being but yourself. My comfort is that they and all the world believe that I'm still in France. It is a pleasant state of things!"

"I am grieved, Sir, to think you suffer so much."

"I know it. I knew it. I know you are, Dick," said the old man eagerly. "And my life is a perfect hell. I can nowhere in England find rest for the sole of my foot. I am suffering perpetually the most miserable mortifications, and the tortures of the damned. I know you are sorry. It can't be pleasant to you to see your father the miserable outcast, and fugitive, and victim he so often is. And I'll say distinctly—I'll say at once—for it was with this one purpose I sent for you—that no son with a particle of human feeling, with a grain of conscience, or an atom of principle, could endure to see it, when he knew that by a stroke of his pen he could undo it all, and restore a miserable parent to life and liberty! Now, Richard, you have my mind. I have concealed nothing, and I'm sure, Dick, I know, I *know* you won't see your father perish by inches, rather than sign the warrant for his liberation. For God's sake, Dick, my boy speak out! Have you the heart to reject your miserable father's petition? Do you wish me to kneel to you? I love you, Dick, although you don't admit it. I'll kneel to you, Dick—I'll kneel to you. I'll go on my knees to you."

His hands were clasped; he made a movement. His great prominent eyes were fixed on Richard Arden's face, which he was reading with a great deal of eagerness, it is true, but also with a dark and narrow shrewdness.

"Good heaven, Sir, don't stir, I implore! If you do, I must leave the room," said Richard, embarrassed to a degree that amounted to agitation. "And I must tell you, Sir—it is very painful, but, I could not help it, necessity drove me to it—if I were ever so desirous, it is out of my power now. I have dealt with my reversion. I have executed a deed."

"You have been with the Jews!" cried the old man, jumping to his feet. "You have been dealing, by way of *post obit*, with my estate!"

Richard Arden looked down. Sir Reginald was as nearly white as his yellow tint would allow; his large eyes were gleaming fire—he looked as if he would have snatched the poker, and brained his son.

"But what could I do, Sir? I had no other resource. I was forbidden your house; I had no money."

"You lie, Sir!" yelled the old man, with a sudden flash, and a hammer of his thin trembling fist on the table. "You had a hundred and fifty pounds a year of your mother's."

"But that, Sir, could not possibly support any one. I was

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compelled to act as I did. You really, Sir, left me no choice."

"Now, now, now, now, now! you're not to run away with the thing, you're not to run away with it; you sha'n't run away with it, Sir. You could have made a submission, you know you could. I was open to be reconciled at any time—always too ready. You had only to do as you ought to have done, and I'd have received you with open arms; you know I would—I *would*—you had only to unite our interests in the estates, and I'd have done everything to make you happy, and you know it. But you have taken the step—you have done it, and it is irrevocable. You have done it, and you've ruined me; and I pray to God you have ruined yourself!"

With every sinew quivering, the old man was pulling the bell-rope violently with his left hand. Over his shoulder, on his son, he glanced almost maniacally. "Turn him out!" he screamed to Crozier, stamping; "put him out by the collar. Shut the door upon him, and lock it; and if he ever dares to call here again, slam it in his face. I have done with him for ever?"

Richard Arden had already left the room, and this closing passage was lost on him. But he heard the old man's voice as he walked along the corridor, and it was still in his ears as he passed the hall-door; and, running down the steps, he jumped into his cab. Crozier held the cab-door open, and wished Mr. Richard a kind good-night. He stood on the steps to see the last of the cab as it drove down the shadowy avenue and was lost in gloom. He sighed heavily. What a broken family it was! He was an old servant, born on their northern estate—loyal, and somewhat rustic—and, certainly, had the baronet been less in want of money, not exactly the servant he would have chosen.

"The old gentleman cannot last long," he said, as he followed the sound of the retreating wheels with his gaze, "and then Master Richard will take his turn, and what one began the other will finish. It is all up with the Ardens. Sir Reginald ruined, Master Harry murdered, and Master David turned tradesman! There's a curse on the old house."

He heard the baronet's tread faintly, pacing the floor in agitation, as he passed his door; and when he reached the housekeeper's room, that old lady, Mrs. Tansey, was alone and all of a tremble, standing at the door. Before her dim staring eyes had risen an oft-remembered scene: the ivy-covered gate-house at Mortlake Hall; the cold moon glittering down through the leafless branches; the grey horse on its side across the gig-shaft, and the two villains—one rifling and the other murdering poor Henry Arden, the baronet's gay and reckless brother.

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"Lord, Mr. Crozier! what's crossed Sir Reginald?" she said huskily, grasping the servant's wrist with her lean hand. "Master Dick, I do suppose. I thought he was to come no more. They quarrel always. I'm like to faint, Mr. Crozier."

"Sit ye down, Mrs. Tansey, Ma'am; you should take just a thimbleful of something. What has frightened you!"

"There's a scritch in Sir Reginald's voice—mercy on us!—when he raises it so; it is the very cry of poor Master Harry—his last cry, when the knife pierced him. I'll never forget it!"

The old woman clasped her fingers over her eyes, and shook her head slowly.

"Well, that's over and ended this many a day, and past cure. We need not fret ourselves no more about it—'tis thirty years since."

"Two-and-twenty the day o' the Longden steeple-chase. I've a right to remember it." She closed her eyes again. "Why can't they keep apart?" she resumed. "If father and son can't look one another in the face without quarrelling, better they should turn their backs on one another for life. Why need they come under one roof? The world's wide enough."

"So it is—and no good meeting and argufying; for Mr. Dick will never open the estate," remarked Mr. Crozier.

"And more shame for him!" said Mrs. Tansey. "He's breaking his father's heart. It troubles him more," she added in a changed tone, "I'm thinking, than ever poor Master Harry's death did. There's none living of his kith or kin cares about it now but Master David. He'll never let it rest while he lives."

"He *may* let it rest, for he'll never make no hand of it," said Crozier. "Would you object, Ma'am, to my making a glass of something hot?—you're gone very pale."

Mrs. Tansey assented, and the conversation grew more comfortable. And so the night closed over the passions and the melancholy of Mortlake Hall.

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CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

A COUPLE of days passed; and now I must ask you to suppose yourself placed, at night, in the centre of a vast heath, undulating here and there like a sea arrested in a ground-swell, lost in a horizon of monotonous darkness all round. Here and there rises a scrubby hillock of furze, black and rough as the head of a monster. The eye aches as it strains to discover objects or measure distances over the blurred and black expanse. Here stand two trees pretty close together—one in thick foliage, a black elm, with a funereal and plume-like stillness, and blotting out many stars with its gigantic canopy; the other, about fifty paces off, a withered and half barkless fir, with one white branch left, stretching forth like the arm of a gibbet. Nearly under this is a flat rock, with one end slanting downwards, and half buried in the ferns and the grass that grow about that spot. One other fir stands a little way off, smaller than these two trees, which in daylight are conspicuous far away as land-marks on a trackless waste. Overhead the stars are blinking, but the desolate landscape lies beneath in shapeless obscurity, like drifts of black mist melting together into one wide vague sea of darkness that forms the horizon. Over this comes, in fitful moanings, a melancholy wind. The eye stretches vainly to define the objects that fancy sometimes suggests, and the ear is strained to discriminate the sounds, real or unreal, that seem to mingle in the uncertain distance.

If you can conjure up all this, and the superstitious freaks that in such a situation imagination will play in even the hardest and coarsest natures, you have a pretty distinct idea of the feelings and surroundings of a tall man who lay that night his length under the blighted tree I have mentioned, stretched

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on its roots, with his chin supported on his hands, and looking vaguely into the darkness. He had been smoking, but his pipe was out now, and he had no occupation but that of forming pictures on the dark back-ground, and listening to the moan and rush of the distant wind, and imagining sometimes a voice shouting, sometimes the drumming of a horse's hoofs approaching over the plain. There was a chill in the air that made this man now and then shiver a little, and get up and take a turn back and forward, and stamp sharply as he did so, to keep the blood stirring in his legs and feet. Then down he would lay again, with his elbows on the ground, and his hands propping his chin. Perhaps he brought his head near the ground, thinking that thus he could hear distant sounds more sharply. He was growing impatient, and well he might.

The moon now began to break through the mist in fierce red over the far horizon. A streak of crimson, that glowed without illuminating anything, showed through the distant cloud close along the level of the heath. Even this was a cheer, like a red ember or two in a pitch-dark room. Very far away he thought now he heard the tread of a horse. One can hear miles away over that level expanse of death-like silence. He pricked his ears, he raised himself on his hands, and listened with open mouth. He lost the sound, but on leaning his head again to the ground, that vast sounding-board carried its vibration once more to his ear. It was the canter of a horse upon the heath. He was doubtful whether it was approaching, for the sound subsided sometimes; but afterwards it was renewed, and gradually he became certain that it was coming nearer. And now, like a huge, red-hot dome of copper, the moon rose above the level strips of cloud that lay upon the horizon of the heath, and objects began to reveal themselves. The stunted fir, that had looked to the fancy of the solitary watcher like a ghostly policeman, with arm and truncheon raised, just starting in pursuit, now showed some lesser branches, and was more satisfactorily a tree; distances became measurable, though not yet accurately, by the eye; and ridges and hillocks caught faintly the dusky light, and threw blurred but deep shadows backward.

The tread of the horse approaching had become a gallop as the light improved, and horse and horseman were soon visible. Paul Davies stood erect, and took up a position a few steps in advance of the blighted tree at whose foot he had been stretched. The figure, seen against the dusky glare of the moon, would have answered well enough for one of those highwaymen who in old times made the heath famous. His low-crowned felt hat, his short coat with a cape to it, and the leather casings, which looked like jack-boots, gave this horse-

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man, seen in dark outline against the glow, a character not unpicturesque. With a sudden strain of the bridle, the gaunt rider pulled up before the man who awaited him.

"What are you doing there?" said the horseman roughly.

"Counting the stars," answered he.

Thus the signs and countersigns were exchanged, and the stranger said—

"You're alone, Paul Davies, I take it."

"No company but ourselves, mate," answered Davies.

"You're up to half a dozen dodges, Paul, and knows how to lime a twig; that's your little game, you know. This here tree is clean enough, but that 'ere has a hatful o' leaves on it."

"I didn't put them there," said Paul, a little sulkily.

"Well, no. I do suppose a sight o' you wouldn't exactly put a tree in leaf, or a rose-bush in blossom; nor even make wegitables grow. More like to blast 'em, like that rum un over your head."

"What's up?" asked the ex-detective.

"Jest this—there's leaves enough for a bird to roost there, so this won't do. Now, then, move on you with me."

As the gaunt rider thus spoke, his long red beard was blowing this way and that in the breeze; and he turned his horse, and walked him towards that lonely tree in which, as he lay gazing on its black outline, Paul had fancied the shape of a phantom policeman.

"I don't care a cuss," said Davies. "I'm half sorry I came a leg to meet yer."

"Growlin', eh?" said the horseman.

"I wish you was as cold as me, and you'd growl a bit, maybe, yourself," said Paul. "I'm jolly cold."

"Cold, are ye?"

"Cold as a lock-up."

"Why didn't ye fetch a line o' the old author with you?" asked the rider—meaning brandy.

"I had a pipe or two."

"Who'd a-guessed we was to have a night like this in summer-time?"

"I do believe it freezes all the year round in this queer place."

"Would ye like a drop of the South-Sea mountain (gin)?" said the stranger, producing a flask from his pocket, which Paul Davies took with a great deal of good-will, much to the donor's content, for he wished to find that gentleman in good-humour in the conversation that was to follow.

"Drink what's there, mate. D'ye like it?"

"It ain't to be by no means sneezed at," said Paul Davies.

The horseman looked back over his shoulder. Paul Davies

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remarked that his shoulders were round enough to amount almost to a deformity. He and his companion were now a long way from the tree whose foliage he feared might afford cover to some eavesdropper.

"This tree will answer. I suppose you like a post to clap your back to while we are palaverin'," said the rider. "Make a finish of it, Mr. Davies," he continued, as that person presented the half-emptied flask to his hand. "I'm as hot as steam, myself, and I'd rather have a smoke by-and-by."

He touched the bridle here, and the horse stood still, and the rider patted his reeking neck, as he stooped with a shake of his ears and a snort, and began to sniff the scant herbage at his feet.

"I don't mind if I have another pull," said Paul, replenishing the goblet that fitted over the bottom of the flask.

"Fill it again, and no heel-taps," said his companion.

Mr. Davies sat down, with his mug in his hand, on the ground, and his back against the tree. Had there been a donkey near, to personate the immortal Dapple, you might have fancied, in that uncertain gloom, the Knight and Squire of La Mancha overtaken by darkness, and making one of their adventurous bivouacs under the boughs of the tree.

"What you saw in the papers three days ago did give you a twist, I take it?" observed the gentleman on horseback, with a grin that made the red bristles on his upper lip curl upwards and twist like worms.

"I can't tumble to a right guess what you means," said Mr. Davies.

"Come, Paul, that won't never do. You read every line of that there inquest on the French cove at the Saloon, and you have by rote every word Mr. Longcluse said. It must be a queer turning of the tables, for a clever chap like you to have to look slippy, for fear other dogs should lag you."

"'Tain't me that 'ill be looking slippy, as you and me well knows; and it's jest because you knows it well you're here. I suppose it ain't for love of *me* quite?" sneered Paul Davies.

"I don't care a rush for Mr. Longcluse, no more nor I care for you; and I see he's goin' where he pleases. He made a speech in yesterday's paper, at the meetin' at the Surrey Gardens. He was canvassin' for Parliament down in Derbyshire a week ago; and he printed a letter to the electors only yesterday. He don't care two pins for you."

"A good many rows o' pins, I'm thinkin'," sneered Mr. Davies.

"Thinkin' won't make a loaf, Mr. Davies. Many a man has bin too clever, and *thought* himself into the block-house. You're making too fine a game, Mr. Davies; a playin' a bit too much

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with edged tools, and fiddlin' a bit too freely with fire. You'll burn your fingers, and cut 'em too, do ye mind? unless you be advised, and close the game where you stand to win, as I rather think you do now."

"So do I, mate," said Paul Davies, who could play at brag as well as his neighbour.

"I'm on another lay, a safer one by a long sight. My maxim is the same as yours, 'Grab all you can;' but *I* do it safe, d'ye see? You are in a fair way to end your days on the twister."

"Not if I knows it," said Paul Davies. "I'm afeared o' no man livin'. Who can say black's the white o' my eye? Do ye take me for a child? What do ye take me for?"

"I take you for the man that robbed and done for the French cove in the Saloon. That's the child I take ye for," answered the horseman cynically.

"You lie! You don't! You know I han't a pig of his money, and never hurt a hair of his head. You say that to rile me, jest."

"Why should I care a cuss whether you're riled or no? Do you think I want to get anything out o' yer? I knows everything as well as you do yourself. You take me for a queer gill, I'm thinking; that's not my lay. I wouldn't wait here while you'd walk round my hoss to have every secret you ever know'd."

"A queer gill, mayhap. I think I know you," said Mr. Davies, archly.

"You do, do ye? Well, come, who do you take me for?" said the stranger, turning towards him, and sitting erect in the saddle, with his hand on his thigh, to afford him the amplest view of his face and figure.

"Then I take you for Mr. Longcluse," said Paul Davies, with a wag of his head.

"For Mr. Longcluse!" echoed the horseman, with a boisterous laugh. "Well, *there's* a guess to tumble to! The worst guess I ever heer'd made. Did you ever see him? Why, there's not two bones in our two bodies the same length, and not two inches of our two faces alike. There's a guess for a detective! Be my soul, it's well for you it ain't him, for I think he'd a shot ye!"

The rider lifted his hand from his coat-pocket as he said this, but there was no weapon in it. Mistaking his intention, however, Paul Davies skipped behind the tree, and levelled a revolver at him.

"Down with that, you fool!" cried the horseman. "There's nothing here." And he gave his horse the spur, and made him plunge to a little distance, as he held up his right hand. "But I'm not such a fool as to meet a cove like you without the lead

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towels, too, in case you should try that dodge." And dipping his hand swiftly into his pocket again, he also showed in the air the glimmering barrels of a pistol. "If you must be pullin' out your barkers every minute, and can't talk like a man, where's the good of coming all this way to palaver with a cove. It ain't not tuppence to me. Crack away if you likes it, and see who shoots best; or, if you likes it better, I don't mind if I get down and try who can hit hardest t'other way, and you'll find my fist tastes very strong of the hammer."

"I thought you were up for mischief," said Davies, "and I won't be polished off simple, that's all. It's best to keep as we are, and no nearer; we can hear one another well enough where we stand."

"It's a bargain," said the stranger, "and I don't care a cuss who you take me for. I'm not Mr. Longcluse; but you're welcome, if it pleases you, to give me his name, and I wish I could have the old bloke's tin as easy. Now here's my little game, and I don't find it a bad one. When two gentlemen—we'll say, for instance, you and Mr. Longcluse—differs in opinion (you says he did a certain thing, and he says he didn't, or goes the whole hog and says *you* did it, and not him), it's plain, if the matter is to be settled amigable, it's best to have a man as knows what he's about, and can find out the cove as threatens the rich fellow, and deal with him handsome, according to circumstances. My terms is moderate. I takes five shillins in the pound, and not a pig under; and that puts you and I in the same boat, d'ye see? Well, I gets all I can out of him, and no harm can happen me, for I'm but a cove a-carryin' of messages betwixt you, and the more I gets for you the better for me. I settled many a business amigable the last five years that would never have bin settled without me. I'm well knowing to some of the swellest lawyers in town, and whenever they has a dilikite case, like a gentleman threatened with informations or the like, they sends for me, and I arranges it amigable, to the satisfacshing of both parties. It's the only way to settle sich affairs with good profit and no risk. I have spoke to Mr. Longcluse. He was all for having your four bones in the block-house, and yourself on the twister; and he's not a cove to be bilked out of his tin. But he would not like the bother of your cross-charge, either, and I think I could make all square between ye. What do you say?"

"How can I tell that you ever set eyes on Mr. Longcluse?" said Davies, more satisfied as the conference proceeded that he had misdirected his first guess at the identity of the horseman. "How can I tell you're not just a-gettin' all you can out o' me, to make what you can of it on your own account in that market?"

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"That's true, you can't tell, mate."

"And what do I know about you? What's your name?" pursued Paul Davies.

"I forgot my name, I left it at home in the cupboard; and you know nothing about me, that's true, excepting what I told you, and you'll hear no more."

"I'm too old a bird for that; you're a born genius, only spoilt in the baking. I'm thinking, mate, I may as well paddle my own canoe, and sell my own secret on my own account. What can you do for me that I can't do as well for myself?"

"You don't think that, Paul. You dare not show to Mr. Longcluse, and you know he's in a wax; and who can you send to him? You'll make nothing o' that brag. Where's the good of talking like a blast to a chap like me? Don't you suppose I take all that at its vally? I tell you what, if it ain't settled now, you'll see me no more, for I'll not undertake it." He pulled up his horse's head, preparatory to starting.

"Well, what's up now?—what's the hurry?" demanded Mr. Davies.

"Why, if this here meetin' won't lead to business, the sooner we two parts and gets home again, the less time wasted," answered the cavalier, with his hand on the crupper of the saddle, as he turned to speak.

Each seemed to wait for the other to add something.

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CHAPTER XVII.

MR. LONGCLUSE AT MORTLAKE HALL.

"IF you let me go this time, Mr. Wheeler, you'll not catch me a-walking out here again," said Mr. Davies sourly. "If there's business to be done, now's the time."

"Well, I can't make it no plainer—'tis as clear as mud in a wine-glass," said the mounted man gaily, and again he shook the bridle and hitched himself in the saddle, and the horse stirred uneasily, as he added, "Have you any more to say?"

"Well, supposin' I say ay, how soon will it be settled?" said Paul Davies, beginning to think better of it.

"These things doesn't take long with a rich cove like Mr. Longcluse. It's where they has to scrape it up, by beggin' here and borrowin' there, and sellin' this and spoutin' that—there's a wait always. But a chap with no end o' tin—that has only to wish and have—that's your sort. He swears a bit, and threatens, and stamps, and loses his temper summat, ye see; and if I was the prencipal, like you are in this 'ere case, and the police convenient, or a poker in his fist, he might make a row. But seein' I'm only a messenger like, it don't come to nothin'. He claps his hand in his pocket, and outs with the rino, and there's all; and jest a bit of paper to sign. But I won't stay here no longer. I'm getting a bit cold myself; so it's on or off *now*. Go yourself to Longcluse, if you like, and see if you don't catch it. The least you get will be seven-penn'orth, for extortin' money by threatenin' a prosecution, if he don't hang you for the murder of the Saloon cove. How would you like that?"

"It ain't the physic that suits my complaint, guvnor. But I have him there. I have the statement wrote, in sure hands, and other hevidence, as he may suppose, and dated, and signed by espectable people; and I know his dodge. He thinks he came

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out first with his charge against me, but he's out there ; and if he *will* have it, and I split, he'd best look slippy."

"And how much do you want? Mind, I'll funk him all I can, though he's a wideawake chap ; for it's my game to get every pig I can out of him."

"I'll take two thousand pounds, and go to Canada or to New York, my passage and expenses being paid, and sign anything in reason he wants ; and that's the shortest chalk I'll offer."

"Don't you wish you may get it? *I* do, I know, but I'm thinking you might jest as well look for the naytional debt."

"What's your name?" again asked Davies, a little abruptly.

"My name fell out o' window and was broke, last Tuesday mornin'. But call me Tom Wheeler, if you can't talk without calling me something."

"Well, Tom, that's the figure," said Davies.

"If you want to deal, speak now," said Wheeler. "If I'm to stand between you, I must have a power to close on the best offer I'm like to get. I won't do nothing in the matter elseways."

With this fresh exhortation, the conference on details proceeded ; and when at last it closed, with something like a definite understanding, Tom Wheeler said, — "Mind, Paul Davies, I comes from no one, and I goes to no one ; and I never seed you in all my days."

"And where are you going?"

"A bit nearer the moon," said the mysterious Mr. Wheeler, lifting his hand and pointing towards the red disk, with one of his bearded grins. And wheeling his horse suddenly, away he rode at a canter, right toward the red moon, against which for a few moments the figure of the retreating horse and man showed black and sharp, as if cut out of cardboard.

Paul Davies looked after him with his left eye screwed close, as was his custom, in shrewd rumination. Before the horseman had got very far, the moon passed under the edge of a thick cloud, and the waste was once more enveloped in total darkness. In this absolute obscurity the retreating figure was instantaneously swallowed, so that the shrewd ex-detective, who had learned by rote every article of his dress, and every button on it, and could have sworn to every mark on his horse at York Fair, had no chance of discovering in the ultimate line of his retreat, any clue to his destination. He had simply emerged from darkness, and darkness had swallowed him again.

We must now see how Sir Reginald's little dinner-party, not a score of miles away, went off only two days later. He was fortunate, seeing he had bidden his guests upon very short notice, not one disappointed.

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I daresay that Lady May — whose toilet, considering how quiet everything was, had been made elaborately—missed a face that would have brightened all the rooms for her. But the interview between Richard Arden and his father had not, as we know, ended in reconciliation, and Lady May's hopes were disappointed, and her toilet labour in vain.

When Lady May entered the room with Alice, she saw standing on the hearth-rug, at the far end of the handsome room, a tall and very good-looking man of sixty or upwards, chatting with Sir Reginald, one of whose feet was in a slipper, and who was sitting in an easy-chair. A little bit of fire burned in the grate, for the day had been chill and showery. This tall man, with white silken hair, and a countenance kind, frank, and thoughtful, with a little sadness in it, was, she had no doubt, David Arden, whom she had last seen with silken brown locks, and the cheerful aspect of early manhood.

Sir Reginald stood up, with an uncomfortable effort, and, smiling, pointed to his slippers in excuse for his limping gait, as he shuffled forth across the carpet to meet her, with a good-humoured shrug.

"Wasn't it good of her to come?" said Alice.

"She's better than good," said Sir Reginald, with his thin, yellow smile, extending his hand, and leading her to a chair; "it is visiting the sick and the halt, and doing real good, for it is a pleasure to see her—a pleasure bestowed on a miserable soul who has very few pleasures left;" and with his other thin hand he patted gently the fingers of her fat hand. "Here is my brother David," continued the baronet. "He says you will hardly know him."

"She'll hardly believe it. She was very young when she last saw me, and the last ten years have made some changes," said Uncle David, laughing gently.

At the baronet's allusion to that most difficult subject, the lapse of time, Lady May winced and simpered uneasily; but she expanded gratefully as David Arden disposed of it so adroitly.

"We'll not speak of years of change. I knew you instantly," said Lady May happily. "And you have been to Vichy, Reginald. What stay do you make here?"

"None, almost; my crippled foot keeps me always on a journey. It seems a paradox, but so it is. I'm ordered to visit Buxton for a week or so, and then I go, for change of air, to Yorkshire."

As Alice entered, she saw the pretty face, the original of the brilliant portrait which had haunted her on her night journey to Twyford, and she heard a very silvery voice chatting gaily. Mr. Longcluse was leaning on the end of the sofa on which Grace

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Maubray sat ; and Vivian Darnley, it seemed in high spirits, was standing and laughing nearly before her. Alice Arden walked quickly over to welcome her handsome guest. With a misgiving and a strange pain at her heart, she saw how much more beautiful this young lady had grown. Smiling radiantly, with her hand extended, she greeted and kissed her fair kinswoman ; and, after a few words, sat down for a little beside her ; and asked Mr. Longcluse how he did ; and finally spoke to Vivian Darnley, and then returned to her conventional dialogue of welcome and politeness with her cousin—*how* cousin, she could not easily have explained.

The young ladies seemed so completely taken up with one another that, after a little waiting, the gentlemen fell into a desultory talk, and grew gradually nearer to the window. They were talking now of dogs and horses, and Mr. Longcluse was stealing rapidly into the good graces of the young man.

"When we come up after dinner, you must tell me who these people are," said Grace Maubray, who did not care very much what she said. "That young man is a Mr. Vivian, ain't he?"

"No—Darnley," whispered Alice ; "Vivian is his Christian name."

"Very romantic names ; and, if he really means half he says, he is a very romantic person." She laughed.

"What has he been saying?" Alice wondered. But, after all, it was possible to be romantic on almost any subject.

"And the other?"

"He's a Mr. Longcluse," answered Alice.

"He's rather clever," said the young lady, with a grave decision that amused Alice.

"Do you think so? Well, so do I ; that is, I know he can interest one. He has been almost everywhere, and he tells things rather pleasantly."

Before they could go any further, Vivian Darnley, turning from the window toward the two young ladies, said—"I've just been saying that we must try to persuade Lady May to get up that party to the Derby,"

"I can place a drag at her disposal," said Mr. Longcluse.

"And a splendid team—I saw them," threw in Darnley.

"There's nothing I should like so much," said Alice. "I've never been to the Derby. What do you say, Grace? Can you manage Uncle David?"

"I'll try," said the young lady gaily.

"We must all set upon Lady May," said Alice. "She is so good-natured, she can't resist us."

"Suppose we begin now?" suggested Darnley.

"Hadn't we better wait till we have her quite to ourselves? Who knows what your papa and your uncle might say?" said

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Grace Maubray, turning to Alice. "I vote for saying nothing to them until Lady May has settled, and then they must only submit."

"I agree with you quite," said Alice laughing.

"Sage advice!" said Mr. Longcluse, with a smile; "and there's time enough to choose a favourable moment. It comes off exactly ten days from this."

"Oh, anything might be done in ten days," said Grace. "I'm sorry it is so far away."

"Yes, a great deal might be done in ten days; and a great deal might happen in ten days," said Longcluse, listlessly looking down at the floor—"a great deal might happen."

He thought he saw Miss Arden's eye turned upon him, curiously and quickly, as he uttered this common-place speech, which was yet a little odd.

"In this busy world, Miss Arden, there is no such thing as quiet, and no one acts without imposing on other people the necessity for action," said Mr. Longcluse; "and I believe that often the greatest changes in life are the least anticipated by those who seem to bring them about spontaneously."

At this moment, dinner being announced, the little party transferred itself to the dining-room, and Miss Arden found herself between Mr. Longcluse and Uncle David.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PARTY IN THE DINING-ROOM.

AND now, all being seated, began the talk and business of dinner.

"I believe," said Mr. Longcluse, with a laugh. "I am growing metaphysical."

"Well, shall I confess, Mr. Longcluse, you do sometimes say things that are, I fear, a little too wise for my poor comprehension?"

"I don't express them; it is my fault," he answered, in a very low tone. "You have *mind*, Miss Arden, for anything. There is no one it is so delightful to converse with, owing in part to that very faculty—I mean quick apprehension. But I know my own defects. I know how imperfectly I often express myself. By-the-way, you seemed to wish to have that curious little wild Bohemian air I sang the other night, 'The Wanderer's Bride'—the song about the white lily, you know. I ventured to get a friend, who really is a very good musician, to make a setting of it, which I so very much hope you will like. I brought it with me. You will think me very presumptuous, but I hoped so much you might be tempted to try it."

When Mr. Longcluse spoke to Alice, it was always in a tone so very deferential, that it was next to impossible that a very young girl should not be flattered by it—considering, especially, that the man was reputed clever, had seen the world, and had met with a certain success, and that by no means of a kind often obtained, or ever quite despised. There was also a directness in his eulogy which was unusual, and which spoken with a different manner would have been embarrassing, if not offensive. But in Mr. Longcluse's manner, when he spoke such phrases, there appeared a real humility, and even sadness, that the bold-

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ness of the sentiment was lost in the sincerity and dejection of the speaker, which seemed to place him on a sudden at the immeasurable distance of a melancholy worship.

"I am so much obliged!" said Alice. "I did wish so much to have it when you sang it. It may not do for my voice at all, but I longed to try it. When a song is sung so as to move one, it is sure to be looked out and learned, without any thought wasted on voice, or skill, or natural fitness. It is, I suppose, like the vanity that makes one person dress after another. Still, I do wish to sing that song, and I am so much obliged!"

From the other side her uncle said very softly—"What do you think of my ward, Grace Maubray?"

"Oughtn't I to ask, rather, what you think of her?" she laughed archly.

"Oh! I see," he answered, with a pleasant and honest smile; "you have the gift of seeing as far as other clever people into a millstone. But, no—though perhaps I ought to thank you for giving me credit for so much romance and good taste—I don't think I shall ever introduce you to an aunt. You must guess again, if you will have a matrimonial explanation; though I don't say there is any such design. And perhaps, if there were, the best way to promote it would be to leave the intended hero and heroine very much to themselves. They are both very good-looking."

"Who?" asked Alice, although she knew very well whom he meant.

"I mean that pretty creature over there, Grace Maubray, and Vivian Darnley," said he quietly.

She smiled, looking very much pleased and very arch.

With how Spartan a completeness women can hide the shootings and quiverings of mental pain, and of bodily pain too, when the motive is sufficient! Under this latter they are often clamorous, to be sure; but the demonstration expresses not want of patience, but the feminine yearning for compassion.

"I fancy nothing would please the young rogue Vivian better. I wish I were half so sure of her. You girls are so unaccountable, so fanciful, and—don't be angry—so uncertain."

"Well, I suppose, as you say, we must only have patience, and leave the matter in the hands of Time, who settles most things pretty well."

She raised her eyes, and fancied she saw Grace Maubray at the same moment withdraw hers from her face. Lady May was talking from the end of the table with Mr. Longcluse.

"Your neighbour who is talking to Lady May is a Mr. Longcluse?"

"Yes."

"He is a City notability; but oddly, I never happened to see

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him till this evening. Do you think there is something curious in his appearance?"

"Yes, a little, perhaps. Don't you."

"So odd that he makes my blood run cold," said Uncle David, with a shrug and a little laugh. "Seriously, I mean unpleasantly odd. What is Lady May talking about? Yes—I thought so—that horrid murder at the 'Saloon Tavern.' For so good-natured a person, she has the most bloodthirsty tastes I know of; she's always deep in some horror."

"My brother Dick told me that Mr. Longcluse made a speech there."

"Yes, so I heard; and I think he said what is true enough. London is growing more and more insecure; and that certainly was a most audacious murder. People make money a little faster, that is true; but what is the good of money, if their lives are not their own? It is quite true that there are streets in London, which I remember as safe as this room, through which no one suspected of having five pounds in his pocket could now walk without a likelihood of being garotted."

"How dreadful!" said Alice, and Uncle David laughed a little at her horror.

"It is too true, my dear. But, to pass to pleasanter subjects, when do you mean to choose among the young fellows, and present me to a new nephew?" said Uncle David.

"Do you fancy I would tell anyone if I knew?" she answered, laughing. "How is it that you men, who are always accusing us weak women of thinking of nothing else, can never get the subject of matrimony out of your heads? Now, uncle, as you and I may talk confidentially, and at our ease, I'll tell you two things. I like my present spinster life very well—I should like it better, I think, if it were in the country; but town or country, I don't think I should ever like a married life. I don't think I'm fit for command."

"Command! I thought the prayer-book said something about obeying, on the contrary," said Uncle David.

"You know what I mean. I'm not fit to rule a household; and I am afraid I am a little idle, and I should not like to have it to do—and so I could never do it well."

"Nevertheless, when the right man comes, he need but beckon with his finger, and away you go, Miss Alice, and undertake it all."

"So we are whistled away, like poodles for a walk, and that kind of thing! Well, I suppose, uncle, you are right, though I can't see that I'm quite so docile a creature. But if my poor sex is so willing to be won, I don't know how you are to excuse your solitary state, considering how very little trouble it would have taken to make some poor creature happy."

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"A very fair retort!" laughed Uncle David. And he added, in a changed tone, for a sudden recollection of his own early fortunes crossed him—"But even when the right man does come, it does not always follow, Miss Alice, that he dares make the sign; fate often interposes years, and in them death may come, and so the whole card-castle falls."

"I've had a long talk," he resumed, "with Richard; he has made me promises, and I hope he will be a better boy for the future. He has been getting himself into money troubles, and acquiring—I'm afraid I should say cultivating—a taste for play. I know you have heard something of this before; I told you myself. But he has made me promises, and I hope, for your sake, he'll keep them; because, you know, I and your father can't last for ever, and he ought to take care of you; and how can he do that, if he's not fit to take care of himself? But I believe there is no use in thinking too much about what is to come. One has enough to do in the present. I think poor Lady May has been disappointed," he said, with a very cautious smile, his eye having glanced for a moment on her; "she looks a little forlorn, I think."

"Does she? And why?"

"Well, they say she would not object to be a little more nearly related to you than she is."

"You can't mean papa—or *yourself!*"

"Oh, dear, no!" he answered, laughing. "I mean that she misses Dick a good deal."

"Oh, dear! uncle, you can't be serious!"

"It might be a very serious affair for her; but I don't know that he could do a wiser thing. The old quarrel is still raging, he tells me, and that he can't appear in this house."

"It is a great pity," said she.

"Pity! Not at all. They never could agree; and it is much better for Dick they should not—on the terms Reginald proposes, at least. I see Lady May trying to induce you to make her the sign at which ladies rise, and leave us poor fellows to shift for ourselves."

"Ungallant old man! I really believe she is."

And in a moment more the ladies were floating from the room, Vivian Darnley standing at the door. Somehow he could not catch Alice's eye as they passed; she was smiling an answer to some gabble of Lady May's. Grace gave him a very kind look with her fine eyes as she went by; and so the young man, who had followed them up the massive stairs with his gaze, closed the door and sat down again, before his claret glass, and his little broken cluster of grapes, and half-dozen distracted bits of candied fruit, and sighed deeply.

"That murder in the City that you were speaking of just now

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to Lady May is a serious business for men who walk the streets, as I do sometimes, with money in their pockets," said David Arden, addressing Mr. Longcluse.

"So it struck me—one feels that instinctively. When I saw that poor little good-natured fellow dead, and thought how easily I might have walked in there myself, with the assassin behind me, it seemed to me simply the turn of a die that the lot had not fallen upon me," said Longcluse.

"He was robbed, too, wasn't he?" croaked Sir Reginald, who was growing tired; and with his fatigue came evidences of his temper.

"Oh, yes," said David; "nothing left in his pockets."

"And Laroque, a watchmaker, a relation of his, said he had cheques about him, and foreign money," said Longcluse; "but, of course, the cheques were not presented, and foreign money is not easily traced in a big town like London. I made him a present of ten pounds to stake on the game; I could not learn that he did stake it, and I suppose the poor fellow intended applying it in some more prudent way. But my present was in gold, and that, of course, the robber applied without apprehension."

"Now, you fellows who have a stake in the City, it is a scandal your permitting such a state of things to continue," said Sir Reginald; "because, though your philanthropy may not be very diffuse, each of you cares most tenderly for one individual at least in the human race—I mean *self*—and whatever you may think of personal morality, and even life—for you don't seem to me to think a great deal of grinding operatives in the cranks of your mills, or blowing them up by bursting steam-boilers, to say nothing of all the people you poison with adulterated food, or with strychnine in beer, or with arsenic in candles, or pretty green papers for bed-rooms—or smash or burn alive on railways—yet you should, on selfish grounds, set your faces against a system of assassination for pocket-books and purses, the sort of things precisely you have always about you. Don't you see? And it's inconsistent besides, because, as I said, although you care little for life—other people's, I mean—in the abstract, yet you care a great deal for property. I think it's your idol, by Jove! and worshipping money—positively *worshipping* it, as you do, it seems a scandalous inconsistency that you should—of course, I don't mean you two individually," he said, perhaps recollecting that he might be going a little too fast; "you never, of course, fancied *that*. I mean, of course, the class of men we have all heard of, or seen—but I do say, with that sort of adoration for money and property, I can't understand their allowing their pockets to be profaned and their purses made away with."

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Sir Reginald, having thus delivered himself with considerable asperity, poured some claret into his glass, and pushed the jugs on to his brother, and then, closing his eyes, composed himself either to listen or to sleep.

"City or country, East End or West End, I fancy we are all equally anxious to keep other people's hands out of our pockets," said David Arden; "and I quite agree with Mr. Longcluse in all he is reported to have said with respect to our police system."

"But is it so certain that the man was robbed?" said Vivian Darnley.

"Everything he had about him was taken," said Mr. Longcluse.

"But they pretend to rob men sometimes, when they murder them, only to conceal the real motive," persisted Vivian Darnley.

"Yes, that's quite true; but then there must be *some* motive," said Mr. Longcluse, with something a little supercilious in his smile: "and it isn't easy to conceive a motive for murdering a poor little good-natured letter of lodgings, a person past the time of life when jealousy could have anything to do with it, and a most inoffensive and civil creature. I confess, if I were obliged to seek a motive other than the obvious one, for the crime, I should be utterly puzzled."

"When I was travelling in Prussia," said Vivian Darnley, "I saw two people in different prisons—one a woman, the other a middle-aged man—both for murder. They had been found guilty, and had been kept there only to get a confession from them before execution. They won't put culprits to death there, you know, unless they have first admitted their guilt; and one of these had actually confessed. Well, each had borne an unexceptionable character up to the time when suspicion was accidentally aroused, and then it turned out that they had been poisoning and otherwise making away with people, at the rate of two or three a year, for half their lives. Now, don't you see, these masked assassins, having, as it appeared, absolutely no intelligible motive, either of passion or of interest, to commit these murders, could have had no inducement, as the woman had actually confessed, except a sort of lust of murder. I suppose it is a sort of madness, but these people were not otherwise mad; and it is quite possible that the same sort of thing may be going on in other places. People say that the police would have got a clue to the mystery by means of the foreign coin and the bank-notes, if they had not been destroyed."

"But there are traces of organisation," said Mr. Longcluse. "In a crowded place like that, such things could hardly be managed without it, and insanity such as you describe is very rare; and you'll hardly get people to believe in a swell-mob of

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madmen, committing murder in concert simply for the pleasure of homicide. They will all lean to a belief in the coarse but intelligible motive of the highwayman."

"I saw in the newspapers," said David Arden, "some evidence of yours, Mr. Longcluse, which seemed rather to indicate a particular man as the murderer."

"I have my eye upon him," said Longcluse. "There are suspicious circumstances. The case in a little time may begin to clear; at present the police are only groping."

"That's satisfactory; and those fellows are paid so handsomely for groping," said Sir Reginald, opening his eyes suddenly. "I believe that we are the worst-governed and the worst-managed people on earth, and that our merchants and tradespeople are rich simply by flukes—simply by a concurrence of lucky circumstances, with which they have no more to do than Prester John or the Man in the Moon. Take a little claret, Mr. Longcluse, and send it on."

"No more, thanks."

And all the guests being of the same mind, they marched up the broad stairs to the ladies.

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CHAPTER XIX.

IN MRS. TANSEY'S ROOM.

THERE were sounds of music and laughter faintly audible through the drawing-room door. The music ceased as the door opened, and the gentlemen entered an atmosphere of brilliant light, and fragrant with the pleasant aroma of tea.

"Pray, Miss Arden, don't let us interrupt you," said Mr. Longcluse. "I thought I heard singing as we came up the stairs." He had come to the piano, and was now at her side.

She did not sing or play, but Vivian Darnley thought that her conversation with Longcluse, as, with one knee on his chair, he leaned over the back of it and talked, seemed more interesting than usual.

"I say, Reginald," said David Arden softly to his brother, "I must run down and pay Martha Tansey my usual visit. She's in her room, I suppose. I'll steal away and return quietly."

And so he was gone. He closed the door softly behind him, and slowly descended the wide staircase, with many vague conjectures and images revolving in his mind. He paused at the great window on the landing, and looked out upon the solemn and familiar landscape. A brilliant moon was high in the sky, and the stars glimmered brightly. His hand was on the window as he looked out, thinking.

Uncle David was a man impulsive, prompt, sanguine—a temperament, in short, which, directed by an able intellect, would have made a good general. When an idea had got into his head, he could not rest until he had worked it out. On the whole, throughout his life these fits of sudden and feverish concentration had been effective, and aided his fortunes. It is, perhaps, an unbusiness-like temperament; but commercial habits and example had failed to control that natural ardour, and when once inflamed, it governed his actions implicitly.

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An idea, very vague, very little the product of reason, had now taken possession of his brain, and he relied upon it as an intuition. He had been thinking over it. It first warmed, then simmered, then, as it were, boiled. The process had been one of an hour and more, as he sat at his brother's table and took his share in the conversation. When the steam got up and the pressure rose to the point of action, forth went Uncle David to have his talk with his early friend Tansey. He stopped, as I have said, at the great window on the staircase, and looked out and up. The moon was splendid; the stars were glimmering brightly; they looked down like a thousand eyes set upon him, to watch the prowess and perseverance of the man on whom fate had imposed a mission.

Some idea like this seized him, for, like many men of a similar temperament, he had an odd and unconfessed vein of poetry in his nature. He had looked out and up in a listless abstraction, and the dark heaven above him, brilliant with its eternal lights, had for a moment withdrawn and elevated his thoughts as if he had entered a cathedral.

"What specks and shadows we are, and how eternal is duty! And if we are in another place to last like those unfailing lights—to become happy or wretched, and, in either state, indestructible for ever—what signify the labour and troubles of life, compared with that by which our everlasting fate is fixed? God help us! Am I consulting revenge or conscience in pursuing this barren inquiry? Do I mistake for the sublime impulse of conscience a vulgar thirst for blood? I think not. I never harboured malice; I hate punishing people. But murder is a crime against God himself, respecting which he imposes duties upon man, and seconds them by all the instincts of affection. Dare I neglect them, then, in the case of poor loving Harry, my brother?"

The drawing-room door had been opened a little, the night being sultry, and through it now came the clear tones of a well-taught baritone. It was singing a slow and impassioned air, and its tones, though sweet, chilled him with a strange pain. It seemed like instinct that told him it was the stranger's voice. One moment's thought would have proved it equally. There was no one else present to suspect but Vivian Darnley, and he was no musician; but to David Arden it seemed that if a hundred people were there he should have felt it all the same, and intuitively recognised it as Longcluse's voice.

"What is it in that voice which is so hateful? What is it in that passion which sounds insincere? What gives to those sweet tones a latent discord, that creeps so coldly through my nerves?"

So thought David Arden, as, with one hand still upon the

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window-sash, he listened and turned toward the open door, with a frown akin to one of pain.

Spell-bound, he listened till the song was over, and sighed and shook his ears with a sort of shudder when the music ceased.

"I don't know why I stayed to listen. Face—voice—what is the agency about that fellow? I daresay I'm a fool, but I can't help it, and I must bring the idea to the test."

He descended the stairs slowly, crossed the hall, and walked thoughtfully down the passage leading to the housekeeper's room. At this hour the old woman had it usually to herself. He knocked at the housekeeper's door, and recognised the familiar voice that answered.

"How do you do, Martha?" said he, striding cheerily into the room.

"Ah! Master David? So it is, sure!"

"Ay, sure and sure, Martha," said he, taking the old woman's hand, with his kind smile. "And how are you, Martha? Tell me how you are."

"I won't say much. I'm not so canty as you'll mind me. I'm an old wife now, Master David, and not much for this world, I'm thinking'," she answered dolorously.

"You may outlive much younger people, Martha; we are all in the hands of God," said David, smiling. "It seems to me but yesterday that I and poor Harry used to run in here to you from our play in the grounds, and you had always a bit of something for us hungry fellows to eat, come when we might."

"Ah, ha! Yes, ye were hungry fellows then—spirin' up, fine tall lads. Reginald was never like ye; he was seven years older than you. And hungry? Yes! The cold turkey and ham, ye mind—by Jen! I *have* seen ye eat hearty; and pan-cakes—ye liked them best of all. And it went a' into a good skin. I will say—you and Master Harry (God be wi' him!) a fine, handsome pair o' lads ye were. And you're a handsome fellow still, Master David, and might have married well, no doubt; but man proposes and God disposes, and time and tide 'll wait for no man, and what's one man's meat's another man's poison. Who knows and all may be for the best? And that Mr. Longcluse is dining here to-day?" she added, not very coherently, and with a sudden gloom.

"Yes, Martha, that Mr. Longcluse is dining here to-day; and Master Dick tells me you did not fall in love with him at first sight, when they paid you a visit here. Is that true?"

"I don't know. I don't know what. The sight of him—or the sound of his voice, I don't know which—gave me a turn," said the old woman.

"Well, Martha, I don't like his face, either. He gave me,

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also, what you call a turn. He's very pale, and I felt as if I had been frightened by him when I was a child; and yet he must be some five and twenty years younger than I am, and I'm almost certain I never saw him before. So I say it must be something that's no' canny as you used to say. What do you think, Martha?"

"Ye may be funnin', Master David. Ye were always a canty lad. But it's o'er true. I can't bring to mind what it is—I can't tell—but something in that man's face gev me a sten. I conceited I was just goin' to swound; and he looked sa straight at me, like a ghost."

"Master Richard says you looked very hard at Mr. Longcluse; you had both a good stare at each other," said Uncle David. "He thought there was going to be a recognition."

"Did I? Well, no: I don't know him, I *think*. 'Tis all a jummlement, like. I couldn't bring nout to mind."

"I know, Martha, you liked poor Harry well," said David Arden, not with a smile, but with a very sad countenance.

"That I did," said Mrs. Tansey.

"And I think you like me, Martha?"

"Ye're not far wrong there, Master David."

"And for both our sakes—for mine and his, for the dead no less than the living—I am sure you won't allow any thought of trouble, or nervousness, or fear of lawyers' browbeating, or that sort of thing, to deter you from saying, wherever and whenever justice may require it, everything you know or suspect respecting that dreadful occurrence."

"The death o' Master Harry, ye mean!" exclaimed Mrs. Tansey sternly, drawing herself up on a sudden, with a pale frown, and looking full at him. "*Me* to hide or hold back aught that could bring the truth to light! Oh! Master David, do you know what ye're sayin'?"

"Perfectly," said he, with a melancholy smile; "and I am glad it vexes you, Martha, because I need no answer on that point more than your honest voice and face."

"Keep back aught, man!" she repeated, striking her hand on the table. "Why, lad, I'd lose that old hand under the chopper for one gliff o' the truth into that damned story. Why, lawk! where's yer head, boy? Wasn't I maist killed myself, for sake o' him that night?"

"Ay, Martha, brave girl, I'm satisfied; and I ask your pardon for the question. But years bring alteration, you know; and I'm changed in mind myself in many ways I never could have believed. And everyone doesn't see with me that it is our duty to explore a crime like that, to track the villain, if we can, and bring him to justice. *You* do, Martha; but there are many in whose veins poor Harry's blood is running,

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who don't feel like you. Master Richard said that the gentleman looked as if he did not know what to make of you; 'and, by Jove!' said he, '*I* didn't either—Martha stared so.'"

"I couldn't help. 'Twas scarce civil; but truly I couldn't, Sir," said Martha Tansey, who had by this time recovered her equanimity. "He did remind me of summat."

"We will talk of that by-and-by, Martha; we will try to recall it. What I want you first to tell me is exactly your recollection of the lamentable occurrence of that night. I have a full note of it at home; but I have not looked at it for years, and I want my recollection confirmed to-night, that you and I may talk over some possibilities which I should like to examine with your help."

"I can talk of it now," said the old woman; "but for many a year after it happened I dare not. I could not sleep for many a night after I told it to anyone. But now I can bear it. So, Master David, you may ask what you please."

"First let me hear your recollection of what happened," said David Arden.

"Ay, Master David, that I will. Sit ye down, for my old bones won't carry me standing no time now, and sit I must. Right well ye're lookin', and right glad am I to see it, Master David; and ye were always a handsome laddie. God bless ye, and God be wi' the old times! And poor Master Harry—poor laddie!—I liked him well. You two looked beautiful, walkin' up to t' house together—two conny, handsome boys ye were."

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CHAPTER XX.

MRS. TANSEY'S STORY.

"THE sun don't touch these windows till nigh night-fall. In the short days o' winter, the last sunbeam at the settin' just glints along the wall, and touches a sprig or two o' them scarlet geraniums on the windastone. 'Tis a cold room, Master David. In summer evenins, like this, ye have just a chilly flush o' the sun' settin', and, before it's well on the windas, the bats and beetles is abroad, and the moth is flittin', and the gloamin' fa's," said the old woman. "The windas looks to the west, but also a bit to the north, ye'll mind, and that's the cause o't. I don't complain. I ha' suffered it these thirty years and more, and 'tain't worth while, for the few years that's left, makin' a blub and a blither about it. I'm an old wife now, Master David, and there can't be many more years for me left aboon the grass, sa I e'en let be and taks the world easy, ye see; and that's the reason I aye keep a bit o' wood burnin' on the hearth—it keeps the life in my old bones—and I hope it ain't too warm for you, Master David?"

"Not a bit, Martha. This side of the house is cool. I remember that our room, when we were boys, looked out from it, high up, you recollect, and it never was hot."

"That's it, ye were in the top o' the house; and poor Harry, wi' his picturs o' horses and dogs hangin' up on the wa's. Lawk! it seems but last week. How the years flits! I often thinks of him. See what a moon there is to-night. 'Twas just such a moon that night, only frostier, ye see—the same clear sky and bright moon; 'twould make ye wink to look at. Ye're not too hot wi' that bit o' wood lightin' in the grate?"

"I like the fire, Martha, and I like the moon, and I like your company best of all."

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The truth was, he did like the flicker of the wood fire. The flame was cheery, and took off something of the dismal shadow that stole over everything whenever he applied his affectionate mind to the horrors of the dreadful night on which he was now ruminating. One of the window-shutters was open, and the chill brilliancy of the moon, and the deep blue sky, were serenely visible over the black foreground of trees. The wavering of the redder light of the fire, as its reflection spread and faded upon the wainscot, was warm and pleasant; and, had their talk been of less ghastly things, would have brightened their thoughts with a sense of comfort.

"I have not very long to stay, Martha," said David Arden, looking at his watch, "so tell me your recollection as accurately as you can. Let me hear *that* first; and then I want to ask you for some particular information, which I am sure you can give me."

"Why not? Who should I give it sooner to? Will ye take a cup o' coffee? No. Well, a glass o' curaçoa? No. And what will ye take?"

"You forget that I have taken everything, and come to you with all my wants supplied. So now, dear Martha, let me hear it all."

"I'll tell ye all about it. I was younger and stronger, mind, than I am now, by twenty years and more. 'Tis a short time to look back on, but a good while passing, and leaves many a gap and change, and many a scar and wrinkle."

There was a palpable tremble always in Mrs. Tansey's voice, in the thin hand she extended towards him, and in the head from which her old eyes glittered glassily on him.

"The road is very lonely by night—the loneliest road in all England. When it passes ten o'clock, you might listen till cock-crow for a footfall. Well, I, and Thomas Ridley, and Anne Haslett, was all the people at Mortlake just then, the family being in the North, except Master Harry. He went to a race across country, that was run that day; and he told me, laughing, he would not ask me to throw an old shoe after him, as he stood sure to win two thousand pounds. And away he went, little thinking, him and me, how our next meetin' would be. At that time old Tom Clinton—ye'll mind Clinton?"

"To be sure I do," acquiesced David Arden.

"Well, Tom was in the gatehouse then; after he died, his daughter's husband got it, ye know. And when he had outstayed his time by two hours—for he was going northwards in the morning, and told me he'd be surely back before ten—I began to grow frightened, and I put on my bonnet and cloak, and down I runs to the gatehouse, and knocks up Tom Clinton. It was nigh twelve o'clock then. When Tom came to the door,

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having dressed in haste, I said, 'Tom, which way will Master Harry return? he's not been since.' And says Tom, 'If he's comin' straight from the course, he'll come down from the country; but if he's dinin' instead in London, he'll come up the Islington way.' 'Well,' said I, 'go you, Tom, to the turn o' the road, and look and listen for sight or sound, and bring me word.' I don't know what was frightenin' me. He was often later, and I never minded; but something that night was on my mind, like a warning, for I couldn't get the fear out o' my heart. Well, who comes ridin' back but Dick Wallock, the groom, that had drove away with him in the gig in the mornin'; and glad I was to see his face at the gate. It was bright moonlight, and says I, 'Dick, how is Master Harry? Is all well with him?' So he tells me, ay, all was well, and he goin' to drive the gig out himself from town. He was at a place—*you'll* mind the name of it—where it turned out they played cards and dice, and won and lost like—like fools, or worse, as some o' them no doubt was. 'Well,' says I, 'go you up, as he told you, with the horse, and I'll stay here till he comes back, if it wasn't till daybreak.' For all the time, ye see, my heart misgave me that there was summat bad to happen; and when Tom Clinton came back, says I, 'Tom, you go in, and get to your room, and let me sit down in your kitchen; and I'll let him in when he comes, for I can't go up to the house, nor close an eye, till he comes.' Well, it was a full hour after, and I was sittin' in the kitchen window that looks out on the road, starin' wide awake, and lookin', now one way and now another, up and down, when I hears the clink of a footfall on the stones, and a tall, ill-favoured man walks slowly by, and turns his face toward the window as he passed."

"You saw him distinctly, then?" said David.

"As plain as ever I saw you. An ill-favoured fellow in a light drab great coat wi' a cape to it. He looked white wi' fear, and wild big eyes, and a high hooked nose—a tall chap wi' his hands in his pockets, and a low-crowned hat on. He went on slow, till a whistle sounded, and then he ran down the road a bit toward the signal."

"That was toward the Islington side?"

"Ay, Sir, and I grew more uneasy. I was scared wi' the sight o' such a man at that time o' night, in that lonesome place, and the whistlin' and runnin'."

"Did you see the same man again that night?" asked David.

"Yes, 'twas the same I saw afterwards—Lord ha' mercy on us! I saw him again, at his murderin' work. Oh, Master David! it makes my brain wild, and my skin creep, to think o' that sight."

"I did wrong to interrupt you; tell it your own way, Martha,

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and I can afterwards ask you the questions that lie near my heart," said Mr. Arden.

"'Tis easy told, Sir; the candle was burnt down almost in the socket, and I went to look out another—but before I could find one, it went out. 'Twas but a stump I found and lighted, after I saw that fellow in the light drab surtout go by. I wished to let them know, if they had any ill design, there was folks awake in the lodge. But he was gone by before I found the matches, and now that he was comin' again, the candle went out—things goes so cross. It was to be, ye see. Well, while I was rummagin' about, looking for a candle, I heard the sound of a horse trotting hard, and wheels rollin' along; so says I, 'Thank God!" for then I was sure it must be Harry, poor lad. So I claps on my bonnet, and out wi' me, wi' t' key. I thought I heard voices, as the hoofs and wheels came clinkin' up to the gate; but I could not be quite sure. I was huffed wi' Master Harry for the long wait he gev me, and the fright, and I took my time comin' round the corner of the gatehouse. And thinks I to myself, he'll be offerin' me a seat in the gig up to the house, but I won't take it. God forgi'e me for them angry thoughts to the poor laddie that I was never to have a word wi' more! When I came to the gate there was never a call, and nothing but voices talking and gaspin' like, under their breath a'most, and a queer scufflin' sound, that I could not make head nor tail on. So I unlocked the wicket, and out wi' me, and, Lord ha' mercy on us, what a sight for me! The gig was there, with its shafts on the ground, and its back cocked up, and the iron-grey flat on his side, lashin' and scramblin', poor brute, and two villains in the gig, both pullin' at poor Master Harry, one robbin', and t'other murderin' him. I took one o' them—a short, thick fellow—by the skirt o' his coat, to drag him out, and I screamed for Tom Clinton to come out. The short fellow turned, and struck at me wi' somethin'; but, lucky for me, 'appen, the lashin' horse that minute took me on the foot, and brought me down. But up I scrambles wi' a stone in my hand, and I shied it, the best I could, at the head o' the villain that was killin' Master Harry. But what can a woman do? It did not go nigh him, I'm thinkin'. I was, all the time, calling on Tom to come, and cryin' 'Murder!" that you'd think my throat'd split. That bloody wretch in the gig had got poor Master Harry's head back over the edge of it, and his knee to his chest, a-strivin' to break his neck across the back-rails; and poor dear lad, Master Harry, he just scritched, 'Yelland Mace! for God's sake!" They were the last words I ever heard from him, and I'll never forget that horrid scritch, nor the face of the villain that was over him, like a beast over its prey. He was tuggin' at his throat, like you'd be tryin' to tear up a tree by the roots—you never see such a face. His

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teeth was set, and the froth comin' through, and his black eyebrows screwed together, you'd think they'd crack the thin hooked nose of him between them, and he pantin' like a wild beast. He looked like a madman, I tell you ; 'twas bright moonlight, and the trees bare, and the shadows of the branches was switchin' across his face."

"You saw that face distinctly?" asked David Arden.

"As clear as yours this minute."

"Now tell me—and think first—was he a bit like that Mr. Longcluse whose appearance startled you the other evening?" asked Mr. Arden, in a very low tone, with his eyes fixed on her intensely.

"No, no, no! not a bit. He had a small mouth and white teeth, and a great beak of a nose. No, no, no! not he. I saw him strike somethin' that shone—a knife or a dagger—into the poor lad's throat, and he struck it down at my head, as you know, and I mind nothin' after that. I'll carry the scar o' that murderer's blow to my grave. There's the whole story, and God forgi'e ye for asking me, for it gi'es me t' creepins for a week after; and I didn't conceit 'twould 'a' made me sa excited, Sir, or I would not 'a' bargained to tell it to-night—not that I blame ye, Master David, for I thought, myself, that I could bear it better—and I do believe, as I have gone so far in it, 'tis better to make one job of it, and a finish. So ye'll ask me any question ye like, and I'll make the best answer I can; only, Master David, ye'll not be o'er long about it?"

"You are a good creature, Martha. I am sorry to pain you, but I pain myself, and you know why I ask these questions."

"Ay, Sir, and I'd rather hear ye ask them than see you sit as easy under all that as some does, that owed the poor fellow as much love as ever you did, and were as near akin."

"I am puzzled, Martha, and hitherto I have been baffled, but I won't give it up yet. You say that the wretch who struck you was a singular-looking man, at least as you describe him. I know, Martha, I can rely upon your caution—you will not repeat to any one what passes in our interview." He lowered his voice. "You do not think that this Mr. Longcluse—a rich gentleman, you know, and a person who thinks he's of some consequence, a person whom we must not look at, you know, as if he had two heads—you really don't think that this Mr. Longcluse has any resemblance to the villain whom you saw stab my brother, and who struck you?"

"Not he—no more than I have. No, no, Mr. Longcluse is quite another sort of face; but for all that, when he came in here, and I saw him before me, his face and his speech reminded me of that night."

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"How was that, Martha? Did he resemble the other man—the man who was aiding?"

"That fellow was hanged, ye'll mind, Master David."

"Yes, but a likeness might have struck and startled you."

"No, Sir—no, Master David, not him; surely not him. I can't bring it to mind, but it frightens me. It *is* queer, Sir. All I can say for certain is this, Master David. The minute I heard his voice, and got sight of his face, like that," and she dropped her hand on the table, "the thought of that awful night came back, bright and cold, Sir, and them black shadows—'twas all about me, I can't tell how, and I hope I may never see him again."

"Do you think there was another man by, besides the two villains in the gig?" suggested David Arden.

"Not a living soul except them and myself. Poor Master Harry said to Tom Clinton, ye'll mind, for he lived half-an-hour after, and spoke a little, though faint and with great labour, and says he, 'There were two: Yelland Mace killed me, and Tom Todry took the money.' Tom Clinton heard him say that, and swore to it before the justice o' peace, and after, on the trial. No, no, there wasn't a soul there but they two villains, and the poor dear lad they murdered, and me and Tom Clinton, that might as well 'a' bin in York for any good we did. Oh, no, Heaven forbid I should be so unmannerly as to compare a gentleman like Mr. Longcluse to such folk as that! Oh, lawk, no, Sir! But there's something, there's a look—or a sound in his voice—I can't get round it quite—but it reminds me of something about that night, with a start like, I can't tell how—something unlucky and awful—and I would not see him again for a deal."

"Well, Martha, a thousand thanks. I'm puzzled, as I said. Perhaps it is only something strange in his face that caused that odd misgiving. For *I* who saw but one of the wretches engaged in the crime, the man who was convicted, who certainly did not in the slightest degree resemble Mr. Longcluse, experienced the same unpleasant sensation on first seeing him. I don't know how it is, Martha, but the idea clings to me, as it does to you. Some light may come. Something may turn up. I can't get it out of my mind that somehow—it may be circuitously—he has, at least, got the thread in his fingers that may lead us right. Good-night, Martha. I have got the Bible with large print you wished for; I hope you will like the binding. And now, God bless you! It is time I should bid them good-night up-stairs. Farewell, my good old friend." And, so saying, he shook her hard and shrivelled hand.

His steps echoed along the long tiled passage, with its one dim light, and his mind was still haunted by its one obscure idea.

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"It is strange," he thought, "that Martha and I—the only two living persons, I believe, who care still for poor Harry, and feel alike respecting the expiation that is due to his memory—should both have been struck with the same odd feeling on seeing Longcluse. From that white sinister face, it seems to me, I know not why, will shine the light that will yet clear all up."

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CHAPTER XXI.

A WALK BY MOONLIGHT.

WHILE Martha Tansey was telling her grisly story in the housekeeper's room, and David Arden listening to the oft-told tale, for the sake of the possible new lights which the narration might throw upon his present theory, the little party in the drawing-room had their music and their talk. Mr. Longcluse sang the song which, standing beside Uncle David on the landing, near the great window on the staircase, we have faintly heard; and then he sang that other song, of the goblin wooer, at Alice's desire.

"Was the poor girl fool enough to accept his invitation?" inquired Miss Maubray.

"That I really can't say," laughed Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes, indeed, poor thing! I so hope she didn't," said Lady May.

"It's very likely she did," interposed Sir Reginald, opening his eyes—every one thought he was dozing—"nothing more foolish, and therefore, nothing more likely. Besides, if she didn't, she probably did worse. Better to go straight to the ——"

"Oh, dear Reginald!" exclaimed Lady May.

"Than by a tedious circumbendibus. I suppose her parents highly disapproved of the goblin; wasn't that alone an excellent reason for going away with him?"

And Sir Reginald closed his eyes again.

"Perhaps," said Miss Maubray aside to Vivian Darnley, "that romantic young lady may have had a cross papa, and thought that she could not change very much for the worse."

"Shall I tell that to Sir Reginald?—it would amuse him," inquired Darnley.

"Not as my remark; but I make you a present of it."

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"Thanks; but that, even with your permission, would be a plagiarism, and robbing you of his applause."

Vivian Darnley was very inattentive to his own nonsense. He was talking very much at random, for his mind, and occasionally his eyes, were otherwise occupied.

Alice Arden was sitting near the piano, and talking to Mr. Longcluse.

"Is that meant to be a ghost, I wonder, in our sense, like the ghost of Wilhelm in the ballad of Leonora? or is the lover a demon?"

"A demon, surely," answered Longcluse, "a spirit appointed to her destruction. In an old ghostly writer there is a Latin sentence, *Unicuique nascenti, adest dæmon vitæ mystagogus*, which I will translate, 'There is present at the birth of every human being a demon, who is the conductor of his life.' Be it fortunate, or be it direful, to this supernatural influence he owes it all. So they thought; and to families such a demon is allotted also, and they prosper or wane as his function is ordained. I wonder whether such demons ever enter into human beings, and, in the shape of living men, haunt, plague, and ruin their predestinated victims."

This sort of mysticism for a time they talked, and then wandered away to other themes, and the talk grew general; and Mr. Longcluse, with a pang, discovered that it was late. He had something on his mind that night. He had an undivulged use, also, to which to apply David Arden. As the hour drew near it weighed more and more heavily at his heart. That hour must be observed; he wished to be away before it arrived. There was still ample time; but Lady May was now talking of going, and he made up his mind to say farewell.

Lingeringly Mr. Longcluse took his leave. But go he must; and so, a last touch of the hand, a last look, and the parting is over. Down-stairs he runs; his groom and his brougham are at the door. What a glorious moon! The white light upon all things around is absolutely dazzling. How sharp and black the shadows! How light and filmy rises the old house! How black the nooks of the thick ivy! Every drop of dew that hangs upon its leaves, or on the drooping stalks of the neglected grass, is transmuted into a diamond. As he stands for an instant upon the broad platform of the steps, he looks round him with a deep sigh, and with a strange smile of rapture. The man standing with the open door of the brougham in his hand caught his eye.

"Go you down as far as the little church, before you reach the 'Guy of Warwick,' in the village, quite close to this—you know it—and wait there for me. I shall walk."

The man touched his hat, shut the door, and mounted the

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box beside the driver, and away went the brougham. Mr. Longcluse lit a cigarette, and slowly walked down the broad avenue after the vehicle. By the time he had got about half-way, he heard the iron gates swing together, the sound of the wheels was lost in distance, and the feeling of seclusion returned. In the same vague intoxication of poetry and romance, he paused and looked round again, and sighed. The trunk of a great tree overthrown in the last year's autumnal gales, with some of its boughs lopped off, lay on the grass at the edge of the avenue. There remained a little of his cigarette to smoke, and the temptation of this natural seat was irresistible; so he took it, and smoked, and gazed, and dreamed, and sometimes, as he took the cigarette from his lips, he sighed—never was man in a more romantic vein. He looked back on the noble front of the picturesque old house. The cold moonlight gleamed on most of the window-panes; but from a few tall windows glowed faintly the warmer light of candles. If anyone had ever felt the piercing storms of life, the treachery of his species, and the mendacity of the illusions that surround us, Longcluse was that man. He had accepted the conditions of life, and was a man of the world; but no boy of eighteen was ever more in love than he at this moment.

Gazing back at the dim glow that flushed through the tall window-blinds of the distant drawing-room, his fancy weaving all those airy dreams that passion lives in, this pale, solitary man—whom no one quite knew, who trusted no one, who had his peculiar passions, his sorrows, his fears, and strange remembrances; everything connected with his origin, vicissitudes, and character, except this one wild hope, locked up, as it were, in an iron casket, and buried in a grave fathoms deep—was now floated back, he knew not how, to that time of sweet perturbation and agonising hope at which the youth of Shakespeare's time were wont to sigh like a furnace, and indite woeful ballads to their mistress's eyebrows. Now he saw lights in an upper room. Imagination and conjecture were in a moment at work. No servant's apartment, its dimensions were too handsome; and had not Sir Reginald mentioned that his room was upon a level with the hall? Just at this moment Lady May's carriage drove down the avenue and past him. Yes, she had run up direct to her room on bidding Lady May good-night. How he drank in these rosy lights through his dark eyes! and how their tremble seemed to quicken the pulsations of his heart! Gradually his thoughts saddened, and his face grew dark.

"Two doors in life—only in this life, if all bishops and curates speak truth—one or other shut for ever in the next. The gate to heaven, the gate to hell. Heaven! *Facilis descensus.* Life is such a sophism. Yet even those canting dogs in the pulpit

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can't bark away the truth. God sees not with our eyes! Revealed religion—Mahomet, Moses, Mormon, Borgia! What is the first lesson inscribed by his Maker on every man's heart, instinct, intellect? I read the mandate thus: 'Take the best care you can of number one.' Bah! 'It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.'"

Uncle David's carriage now drove by.

"There goes that sharp girl—pretty, vain—and they're all vain; they ought to be vain; they could not please if they were not. Vain she is—devoured, mind, soul, passion, by vanity. Yes, and power—the lust of power, conquest, acquisition. She's greedy and crafty, I daresay. Oh! Alice, who was ever quite like you? The most beautiful, the best, my darling! Oh! enchantress, work the miracle, and make this forlorn man what he might be!"

It passed like a magic-lantern picture, and was gone. The distant clang of the iron gate was heard again, the avenue was deserted and silent, and Longcluse once more alone in his dream. He was looking towards the house, sometimes breaking into a few murmured words, sometimes smoking, and just as his cigarette was out he saw a figure approaching. It was Uncle David, who was walking down the avenue. It so happened that his mind was at that moment busy with Mr. Longcluse, and it was with an odd little shock, therefore, that he saw the very man—whom he fancied by that time to be at least two miles away—rise up in his path, and stand before him, smiling, in the moonlight.

"Oh!—Mr. Longcluse?" exclaimed David Arden, coming suddenly to a halt.

"So it is," said Longcluse, with a little laugh. "You are surprised to find me here, and I fancied I had seen your carriage go on."

"So you did; it is waiting near the gate for me. Can I give you a seat into town?"

"Thanks," said Longcluse, smiling; "mine is waiting for me a little further on."

Longcluse walked slowly on toward the gate, with David Arden at his side.

"My ward, Miss Maubray, has gone on with Lady May, and Darnley went with them. So I'm not such a brute as I should be if I were making a young lady wait while I was enjoying the moonlight."

"It was this wonderful moon that led me, also, into this night-ramble on foot," said Mr. Longcluse; "I found the temptation absolutely irresistible."

As they thus talked, Mr. Longcluse had formed the resolution of choosing that moment for a confidence which, considering

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how slender was his acquaintance with Mr. David Arden, was, to say the least, a little bold and odd. They had not very far to walk before reaching the gate, so, a little abruptly turning the course of their talk, Mr. Longcluse said, with a chilly little laugh, and a smile more pallid than ever in the moonlight—

"By-the-bye, we were talking of that shocking occurrence in the Saloon Tavern; and connected with it, I have had two threatening letters."

"Indeed!" said David Arden.

"Fact, I assure you," said Mr. Longcluse, with a shrug and another cold little laugh.

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CHAPTER XXII.

MR. LONGCLUSE MAKES AN ODD CONFIDENCE.

DAVID ARDEN looked at Mr. Longcluse with a sudden glance, that was, for a moment, shrinking and sharp. This confidence connected with such a scene chimed in, with a harmony that was full of pain, with the utterly vague suspicions that had somehow got into his imagination.

"Yes, and I have been a little puzzled," continued Longcluse. "They say the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client; but there are other things besides law to which the spirit of the canon more strongly still applies. I think you could give me just the kind of advice I need, if you were not to think my asking it too great a liberty. I should not dream of doing so if the matter were simply a private one, and began and ended in myself; but you will see in a moment that public interests of some value are involved, and I am a little doubtful whether the course I am taking is in all respects the right one. I have had two threatening letters; would you mind glancing at them? The moon is so brilliant, one has no difficulty in reading. This is the first. And may I ask you, kindly, until I shall have determined, I hope, with your aid, upon a course, to treat the matter as quite between ourselves? I have mentioned it to but one other person."

"Certainly," said David, "you have a right to your own terms."

He took the letter and stopped short where he was, unfolding it. The light was quite sufficient, and he read the odd and menacing letter which Mr. Longcluse had received a few evenings before, as we know, at Lady May's. It was to the following effect:

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"SIR,—The unfortunate situation in which you stand, the proof being so, as you must suppose, makes it necessary for you to act considerately, and no nonsense can be permitted by your well wishers. The poor man has his conscience all one as as the rich, and must be cautious as we'l as him. I can not put myself in no dainger for you, Sir, nor won't hold back the truth, so welp me. I have heerd tell of your boote bin took away. I would be happy to lend an and, Sir, to recover that property. How all will end otherwise I regrett. Knowing well who it will be that takes so mutch consern for your safcty, you cannot doubt who I am, and if you wishes to meat me quiet to consult, you need only to name the place and time in the times newspaper, which I sees it every day. It must be put part in one days times, for the daite, saying a friend will show on sich a night, and in next days times for the place, saying the dogs will meet at sich and sich a place, and it shall hev the attenshen of your

FAST FREND."

"That's a cool letter, upon my word," said David Arden. "Have you an idea who wrote it?"

"Yes, a very good guess. I'll tell you all that if you allow me, just now. I should say, indeed, an absolute certainty, for I have had another this afternoon with the name of the writer signed, and he turns out to be the very man whom I suspected. Here it is."

David Arden's curiosity was piqued. He took the last note and read as follows :—

"SIR,—My last Letter must have came to Hand, and you been in reseet of it since the 11th instant, has took no Notice thereoff, I have No wish for justice, as you may Suppose, and has no Fealing against you Mr. Longcluse Persanelly and to shew you plainly that Such is the case, I will meet you for an intervue if such is your Wishes in your Own house, if you should Rayther than name another place. I do not objeck To one frend been Present providing such Be not a lawyer. The subjek been Dellicat, I will Attend any hour and Place you appoint. If you should faile I must put my Proofs in the hands of the police, for I will take it for a sure sine of guilt if you fail after this to appoint for a meating.

"I remain, Sir, Your obedient servent,

"PAUL DAVIES.

"No. 2 Rosemary Court."

"Well, that's pretty frank," said Longcluse, observing that he had read to the end.

"Extremely. What do you suppose his object to be—to extort money?"

"Possibly; but he may have another object. In any case, he wants to make money by this move."

"Very audacious, then. He must know, if he is fit for his

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trade, how much risk there is in it; and his signing his name and address to his letter, and seeking an interview with a witness by seems to me utterly infatuated," said David Arden, with his eye upon Mr. Longcluse.

"So it does, except upon one supposition; I mean that the man believes his story," said Mr. Longcluse, walking beside him, for they had resumed their march towards the gate.

"Really! believes that you committed the murder?" said Uncle David, again coming to a halt and looking full at him.

"I can't quite account for it otherwise," said Longcluse; "and I think the right course is for me to meet him. But I have no intimacies in London, and that is my difficulty."

"How? Why don't you arrest him?" said David Arden.

David Arden had seldom felt so oddly. A quarter-of-an-hour since, he expected to have been seated in his carriage with his ward and Vivian Darnley, driving into town in quiet humdrum fashion, by this time. How like a dream was the actual scene! Here he was, standing on the grass among the noble timber, under the moonlight, with the pale face beside him which had begun to haunt him so oddly. The strange smile of his mysterious companion, the cold tone that jarred sweetly, somehow, on his ear, lending a sinister eccentricity to the extraordinary confession he was making.

In this situation, which had come about almost unaccountably, there was a strange feeling of unreality. Was this man, from whom he had felt an indescribable repulsion, now by his side, and drawing him, in this solitude, into a mysterious confidence? and had not this confidence an unacountable though distant relation to the vague suspicions that had touched his mind? With a little effort he resumed,—

"I beg pardon, but if the case were mine I should put the letters at once into the hands of the police and prosecute him."

"Precisely my own first impulse. But the letters are more cautiously framed than you might at first sight suppose. I should be placed in an awkward position were my prosecution to fail. *I* am obliged to think of this because, although I am nothing to the public, I am a good deal to myself. But I've resolved to take a course not less bold, though less public. I am determined to meet him face to face with an unexceptionable witness present, and to discover distinctly whether he acts from fraud or delusion, and then to proceed accordingly. I have communicated with him."

"Oh, really!"

"Yes, I was clear I ought to meet him, but I would consent to nothing with an air of concealment."

"I think you were right, Sir."

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"He wanted our meeting by night on board a Thames boat; then in a dilapidated house in Southwark; then in a deserted house that is to be let in Thames Street; but I named my own house, in Bolton Street, at half-past twelve to-night."

"Then you really wish to see him. I suppose you have thought it well over; but I am always for taking such miscreants promptly by the throat. However, as you say, cases differ, and I daresay you are well advised."

"And now may I venture a request, which, were it not for two facts within my knowledge, I should not presume to make? But I venture it to you, who take so special an interest in this case, because you have already taken trouble and, like myself, contributed money to aid the chances of discovery; and because only this evening you said you would bestow more labour, more time, and more money with pleasure to procure the least chance of an additional light upon it: now it strikes me as just possible that the writer of those letters may be, to some extent, honest. Though utterly mistaken about me, still he may have evidence to give, be it worth much or little; and so, Mr. Arden, having the pleasure of being known to some members of your family, although till to-night by name only to you, I beg as a great kindness to a man in a difficulty, and possibly in the interests of the public, that you will be so good as to accompany me, and be present at the interview, that cannot be so well conducted before any other witness whom I can take with me."

David Arden paused for a moment, but independently quite of his interest in this case: he felt a strange curiosity about this pale man, whose eyes from under their oblique brows gleamed back the cold moonlight; while a smile, the character of which a little puzzled him, curled his nostril and his thin lip, and showed the glittering edge of his teeth. Did it look like treachery? or was it defiance, or derision? It was a face, thus seen, so cadaverous and Mephistophelian, that an artist would have given something for a minute to fix a note of it in white and black.

David Arden was not to be disturbed in a practical matter by a pictorial effect, however, and in another moment he said—

"Yes, Mr. Longcluse, as you desire it I will accompany you, and see this fellow, and hear what he has to say. *Certainly.*"

"That's very kind—only what I should have expected, also, from your public spirit. I'm extremely obliged."

They resumed their walk towards the gate.

"I shall get into my brougham and call at home, to tell them

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not to expect me for an hour or so. And what is the number of your house?"

He told him; and David Arden having offered to take him, in his carriage, to the place where his own awaited him, which however he declined, they parted for a little time, and Mr. Arden's brougham quickly disappeared under the shadow of the tall trees that lined the curving road.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING.

AS David Arden drove towards town, his confusion rather increased. Why should Mr. Longcluse select him for this confidence? There were men in the City whom he must know, if not intimately, at least much better than he knew him. It was a very strange occurrence; and was not Mr. Longcluse's manner, also, strange? Was he not, somehow, very oddly cool under a charge of murder? There was something, it seemed, indefinably incongruous in the nature of his story, his request, and his manner.

It was five or ten minutes before the appointed time when David Arden and Longcluse met in the latter gentleman's "study" in Bolton Street. There was a slight, odd flutter at Longcluse's heart, although his pale face betrayed no sign of agitation, as the shuffling tread of a heavy foot was heard on the doorsteps, followed by a faint knock, like that of a tremulous postman. It was the preconcerted summons of Mr. Paul Davies.

Longcluse smiled at David Arden and raised his finger, as he lightly drew near the room door, with an air of warning. He wished to remind his companion that he was to receive their visitor alone. Mr. Arden nodded, and Mr. Longcluse withdrew. In a minute more the servant opened the study-door, and said—"Mr. Davies, Sir."

And the tall ex-detective entered, and looked with a silky simper stealthily to the right and to the left from the corners of his eyes, and glided in, shutting the door behind him.

Uncle David received this man without even a nod. He eyed him sternly, from his chair at the end of the table.

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"Sit in that chair, please," said he, pointing to a seat at the other end.

The ex-policeman made his best bow, and turning out his toes very much, he shuffled with his habitual sly smirk on, to the chair, in which he seated himself, and with his big red hands on the table began turning, and twisting, and twiddling a short pencil, which was a good deal bitten at the uncut end, between his fingers and thumbs.

"You came here to see Mr. Longcluse?" asked David Arden.

"A few words of business at his desire. Sir, I ask your parding, I came, Sir, by his wishes, not mine, which has brought me here at his request."

"And who am I, do you suppose?"

The man, still smiling, looked at him shrewdly. "Well, I don't know, I'm sure; I may 'a' seen you."

"Did you ever see that gentleman?" said David Arden, as Mr. Longcluse entered the room.

The ex-detective looked also shrewdly at Longcluse, but without any light of recognition. "I may have seen him, Sir. Yes, I saw him in Saint George's, Hanover Square, the day Lord Charles Dillingsworth married Miss Wygram, the *hairess*. I saw him at Sydenham the second week in February last when the Freemasons' dinner was there; and I saw him on the night of the match between Hood and Markham, at the Saloon Tavern."

"Do you know my name?" said David Arden.

"Well, no, I don't at present remember."

"Do you know that gentleman's name!"

"His name?"

"Ay, his name."

"Well, no; I may have heard it, and I may bring it to mind, by-and-by."

Longcluse smiled and shrugged, looking at Mr. Arden, and he said to the man—

"So you don't know *that* gentleman's name, nor mine?"

The man looked at each, hard and a little anxiously, like a person who feels that he may be making a very serious mistake; but after a pause he said decisively—"No, I don't at present. I say I don't know your names, either of you gentlemen, and I *don't*."

The two gentlemen exchanged glances.

"Is either of us as tall as Mr. Longcluse?" asked David Arden, standing up.

The man stood up also, to make his inspection.

"You're both," he said, after a pause, "much about his height."

"Is either of us like him?"

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"No," answered Davies, after a pause.

"Did you write these letters?" asked Mr. Longcluse laughing.

"Well, I did, or I didn't, and what's that to you?"

"Something, as you shall know presently."

"I think you're trying it on. I reckon this is a bit of a plant. I don't care a scratch o' that pencil if it be. I wrote them letters, and I said nothin' but what's true, and I'll go with you now to the station if you like, and tell all I knows."

The fellow seemed nettled, and laughed viciously a little, and swaggered at the close of his speech. The faintest flush imaginable tinged Longcluse's forehead, as he shot a searching glance at him.

"No, we don't want that," said he; "but you may be of more use in another way, although just now you are in the wrong box, and have mistaken your man, for *I* am Mr. Longcluse. You have been misinformed, you see, as to the indentity of the person you suspect; but some person you have, no doubt, in your mind, and possibly a case worth sifting, although you have been deceived as to his name. Describe the appearance of the man you supposed to be Mr. Longcluse. You may be frank with me; I mean you no harm."

"I defy any man to harm me, Sir, if you please, so long as I do my dooty," said Paul Davies. "Mr. Longcluse, if that be his name, the man I mean, he's about your height, with round shoulders and red hair, and talks with a north-country twang on his tongue; he's a bit rougher, and a swaggering' cove, and a yard o' red beard over his waistcoat, and bigger hands a deal than you, and broader feet."

"And have you a case against him?"

"Partly, but it ain't, Sir, if you please, by no means so complete as would answer as yet. If I was sure you were really Mr. Longcluse, I could say more, for I partly guess who this other gent is—a most respectable party. I think I do know you, Sir, by appearance; if you had your 'at on, Sir, I could say to a certainty. But I think, Sir, if you please, I'm not very far wrong when I say that I would identify you for Mr. David Arden."

"So I am; that is quite true."

"Thank you, Sir, I am obleeged; that's very quietin' to my mind, Sir, having full confidence in your character; and if you, Sir, please to tell me *that* gentleman is undoubtingly Mr. Longcluse, the propperieter of this house, I must 'a' been let into a mistake; I don't think they was agreenin' of me, but it was a mistake, if you please, Sir, if you say so."

"This is Mr. Longcluse—I know of no other—and he resides in this house," said David Arden. "But if you have information

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to give respecting that red-bearded fellow, there is no reason why you should not give it forthwith to the police."

"Parding me, Sir, if you please, Mr. Arden. There is, I would say, strong reasons for a poor man in raythér anxious circumstances, like myself, Sir, 'aving an affectionate mother to, in a measure, support, and been himself unfortunately raythér hard up, he can't answer it nohow to his conscience if he lets a hoppertunity like the present pass him and his aged mother by unimproved. There been a reward offered, Sir, I naturally wish, Sir, if you please, to earn it myself by valuable evidence leading to the conviction of the guilty cove; and if I was to tell all I knows and 'av' made out by my own hindustry to the force, Sir, other persons would, don't you conceive, Sir, draw the reward, and me and my mother should go without. If I could get a hinterview with the man I 'av' bin a-gettin' things together for, I'd lead him, I 'av' no doubt, to make such hadmissions as would clench the prosecution, and vendicate justice."

"I see what you mean," said David Arden.

"And fair enough, I think," added Longcluse.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. LONGCLUSE FOLLOWS A SHADOW.

THE ex-detective cleared his voice, shook his head, and smirked.

"A hinterview, gentlemen," said he, "is worth much in the hands of a persuasive party. I have hanged several obnoxious characters, and let others in for penal for life, by means of a hinterview. You remember Spikes, gentlemen, as got into difficulties for breaking Mr. Winterbotham's desk? Spikes would have frusterated justice, if it wasn't for me. It was done in one hinterview. Says I, 'Mr. Spikes, you have a wife and five children.'"

The recollection of Mr. Paul Davies' diplomacy was so gratifying to that smiling gentleman, that he could not forbear winking at his auditors as he proceeded.

"'And my belief is, Mr. Spikes, Sir,'" he continued, "'that it was all the hinfluence of Tom Sprowles. It was Sprowles persuaded yer—it was him as got the whole thing up. That's my belief; and you did not want to do it, no-wise, and only consented to force the henges in the belief that Sprowles wanted to read the papers, and no more. I have a bad opinion of Sprowles,' says I, 'for deceiving you, I may say innocently;' and talking this way, you conceive, I got it all out of him, and he's under penal for life. Whenever you want to get round a man, and to turn him inside out, your way is to sympath*ise* with him. If I had but an hinterview with that man, I know enough to draw it out of him, every bit. It's all done by sympath*ising*."

"But do you think you can discover the man?" asked Mr. Arden.

"I'm sure to make him out, if you please, Sir; I'll find out all about him. I'd a found out the facks long ago, but for the mistake, which it occurred most unlucky. I saw him twice

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sence, and I know well where to look for him ; and I'll have it all right before long, I'm thinkin'."

"That will do, then, for the present," said Mr. Longcluse. "You have said all you have to say, and you see into what a serious mistake you have blundered ; but I sha'n't give you any trouble about it—it is too ridiculous. Good-night. Mr. Davies."

"No mistake of mine, Sir, please. Misinformed, Sir, you will kindly remark—misinformed, if you please—misinformed, as may occur to the sharpest party going. Good-night, gentlemen ; I takes my leave without no unpleasant feelin', and good wishes for your 'ealth and 'appiness, both, gentlemen." And blandly, and with a sly sleepy smile, this insinuating person withdrew.

"It is the reward he is thinking of," said Longcluse.

"Yes, he won't spare himself ; you mentioned that your own suspicions respecting him were but vague," said David Arden.

"I merely stated what I saw to the coroner, and it was answered that he was watching the Frenchman Lebas, because the detective police, before Paul Davies' dismissal, had received orders to keep an eye on all foreigners ; and he hoped to conciliate the authorities, and get a pension, by collecting and furnishing information. The police did not seem to think his dogging and watching the unfortunate little fellow really meant more than this."

"Very likely. It is a very odd affair. I wonder who that fellow is whom he described. He did not give a hint as to the circumstances which excited his suspicions."

"It *is* strange. But that man, Paul Davies, kept his eye upon Lebas from the motive I mentioned, and this circumstance may have led to his seeing more of the matter than, with the reward in his mind, he cares to make known at present. I think I did right in meeting him face to face."

"Quite right, Sir."

"It has been always a rule with me to go straight at everything. I think the best diplomacy is directness, and that the truest caution lies in courage."

"Precisely my opinion, Mr. Longcluse," said Uncle David, looking on him with eyes of approbation. He was near adding something hearty in the spirit of our ancestors' saying, "I hope you and I, Sir, may be better acquainted ;" but something in the look and peculiar face of this unknown Mr. Longcluse chilled him, and he only said—

"As you say, Mr. Longcluse, courage is safety, and honesty the best policy. Good-night, Sir."

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Arden. Might I ask one more favour, that you will endorse on each of these threatening letters a memorandum of the facts of this strange interview?—

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I mean a sentence or two, which may at any time confound this fellow, should he turn out to be a villain."

"Certainly," said Mr. Arden thoughtfully, and he sat down again, and wrote a few lines on the back of each, which, having signed, he handed them to Mr. Longcluse, with the question, "Will that answer?"

"Perfectly, thank you very much; it is indeed impossible for me to thank you as I ought and wish to," said Mr. Longcluse with effusion, extending his hand at the same time; but Mr. Arden took it without much warmth, and said, in comparison a little drily—

"No need to thank me, Mr. Longcluse; as you said at first, there are motives quite sufficient, of a kind for which you can owe me, personally, no thanks whatever, to induce the very slight trouble of coming here."

"Well, Mr. Arden, I *am* very *much* obliged to you, notwithstanding;" and so he gratefully saw him to the door, and smiled and bowed him off, and stood for a moment as his carriage whirled down the short street.

"He does not like me—nor I, perhaps, him. Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, very softly and reservedly, looking down on the flags. "What an odd thing it is! Those instincts and antipathies, they are very odd." All this, except the faint laughter, was in thought.

Mr. Longcluse stepped back. He was negatively happy—he was rid of an anxiety. He was positively happy—he had been better received by Miss Arden, this evening, than he had ever been before. So he went to his bed with a light heart, and a head full of dreams.

All the next day, one beautiful image haunted Longcluse's imagination. He was delayed in town; he had to consult about operations in foreign stocks; he had many words to say, directions to modify, and calls to make on this man and that. He had hoped to be at Mortlake Hall at three o'clock. But it was past six before he could disentangle himself from the tenacious meshes of his business. Never had he thought it so irksome. Was he not rich enough—too rich? Why should he longer submit to a servitude so wearisome? It was high time he should begin to enjoy his days in the sunshine of his gold and the companionship of his beautiful idol. But "man proposes," says the ancient saw, "and God disposes."

It was just seven o'clock when Mr. Longcluse descended at the steps of old Mortlake Hall.

Sir Reginald, who is writhing under a letter from the attorney of the millionaire mortgagee of his Yorkshire estate, making an alternative offer, either to call in the principal sum or to allow it to stand out on larger interest, had begged of Mr.

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Longcluse, last night, to give him a few words of counsel some day. He had, in a quiet talk the evening before, taken the man of huge investments rather into his confidence.

"I don't know, Mr.—a—Mr. Longcluse, whether you are aware how cruelly my property is tied up," he said, as he talked in a low tone with him, in a corner of the drawing-room. "A life estate, and my son, who declines bearing any part of the burden of his own extravagance, will do nothing to facilitate my efforts to pay his debts for him; and I declare solemnly, if they raise the interest on this very oppressive mortgage, I don't know how on earth I can pay my insurances. I don't see how I am to do it. I should be so extremely obliged to you, Mr. Longcluse, if you would, with your vast experience and knowledge in all—all financial matters, give me any advice that strikes you—if you could, with perfect convenience, afford so much time. I don't really know what rate of interest is usual. I only know this, that interest, as a rule, has been steadily declining ever since I can remember—perpetually declining; I mean, of course, upon perfect security like this; and now this confounded harpy wants, after ten years, to *raise* it! I believe they want to drive me out of the world, among them! and they well know the cruelty of it, for I have never been able to pay them a single half-year punctually. Will you take some tea?"

So Longcluse had promised his advice very gladly next day; and now he asked for Sir Reginald. Sir Reginald was very particularly engaged at this moment on business; Mr. Arden was with him at present; but if Mr. Longcluse would wait for a few minutes, Sir Reginald would be most happy to see him. So there was to be a little wait. How could he better pass the interval than in Miss Arden's company?

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CHAPTER XXV.

A TETE-A-TETE.

UP to the drawing-room went Mr. Longcluse, and there he found Miss Arden finishing a drawing. He fancied a very slight flush on her cheek as he entered. Was there really a heightening of that beautiful tint as she smiled? How lovely her long lashes, and her even little teeth, and the lustrous darkness of her eyes, in that subdued light!

"I so wanted advice, Mr. Longcluse, and you have come in so fortunately! I am not satisfied with my sky and mountains, and the foreground where the light touches that withered branch is a horrible failure. In nature, it looked quite beautiful. I remember it so well. It looked on fire, almost. This is Saxteen Castle, near Golden Friars, and that is a bit of the lake and those are the fells. I sketched it in pencil, and trusted to memory for colouring. It was just at the most picturesque moment, when the sun was going down between the two mountains that overhang the little town on the west."

"Sunset is very well expressed. You indicated all those long shadows, Miss Arden, in pencil, and I envy your perspective, and I think your colouring so extremely good! The distances are admirably marked. Try a little cadmium, burnt sienna, and lake for the intense touches of light in the foreground, on that barkless branch. Your own eye will best regulate the proportions. I am one of those vandals who prefer colour a little too bold and overdone to any timidity in that respect. Exuberance in a beginner is always, in my mind, an augury of excellence. It is so easy to moderate afterwards."

"Yes, I daresay; I'm very glad you advise that, because I always thought so myself; but I was half afraid to act on it. I

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think that is about the tint—a little more yellow, perhaps. Yes; how does it look now?—what do you think?"

"Now judge yourself, Miss Arden. Do not those three sharp little touches of reflected fire light up the whole drawing? I say it is admirable. It is really quite a beautiful little drawing."

"I'm growing so vain! you will quite spoil me, Mr. Longcluse."

"Truth will never spoil any one. Praise is very delightful. I have not had much of it in my day, but I think it makes one better as well as happier; and to speak simple truth of you, Miss Arden, is inevitably to praise you."

"Those are compliments, Mr. Longcluse, and they bewilder me—anything one does not know how to answer; so I would rather you pointed me out four or five faults in my drawing, and I should be very well content if you said no more. I believe you know the scenery of Golden Friars."

"I do. Beautiful, and so romantic, and full of legends! the whole place with its belongings is a poem."

"So I think. And the hotel—the inn I prefer calling it—the 'George and Dragon,' is so picturesque and delightfully old, and so comfortable! Our head-quarters were there for two or three weeks. And did you see Childe Waylin's Leap?"

"Yes, an awful scene; what a terrible precipice! I saw it to great advantage from a boat, while a thunderstorm was glaring and pealing over its summit. You know the legend, of course?"

"No, I did not hear it."

"Oh, it is a very striking one, and won't take many words to tell. Shall I tell it?"

"Pray do," said Alice, with her bright look of expectation.

He smiled sadly. Perhaps the story returned with an allegoric melancholy to his mind. With a sigh and a smile he continued—

"Childe Waylin fell in love with a phantom lady, and walked day and night along the fells—people thought in solitude, really lured on by the beautiful apparition, which, as his love increased, grew less frequent, more distant and fainter, until at last, in the despair of his wild pursuit, he threw himself over that terrible precipice, and so perished. I have faith in instinct—faith in passion, which is but a form of instinct. I am sure he did wisely."

"I sha'n't dispute it; it is not a case likely to happen often. These phantom ladies seem to have given up practice of late years, or else people have become proof against their wiles, and neither follow, nor adore, nor lament them."

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"I don't think these phantom ladies are at all out of date," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Well, men have grown wiser, at all events."

"No wiser, no happier; in such a case there is no room for what the world calls wisdom. Passion is absolute, and as for happiness, that or despair hangs on the turn of a die."

"I have made that shadow a little more purple—do you think it an improvement?"

"Yes, certainly. How well it throws out that bit of the ruin that catches the sunlight! You have made a very poetical sketch; you have given not merely the outlines, but the character of that singular place—the *genus loci* is there."

Just as Mr. Longcluse had finished this complimentary criticism, the door opened, and rather unexpectedly Richard Arden entered the room. Very decidedly *de trop* at that moment, his friend thought Mr. Arden. Longcluse meant again to have turned the current of their talk into the channel he liked best, and here was interruption. But was not Richard Arden his sworn brother, and was he not sure to make an excuse of some sort, and take his leave, and thus restore him to his *tête-à-tête*.

But was there—or was it fancy—a change scarcely perceptible, but unpleasant, in the manner of this sworn brother? Was it not very provoking, and a little odd, that he did not go away, but stayed on and on, till at length a servant came in with a message from Sir Reginald to Mr. Longcluse, to say that he would be very happy to see him whenever he chose to come to his room? Mr. Longcluse was profoundly vexed. Richard Arden, however, had resumed his old manner pretty nearly. Was the interruption he had persisted in designed, or only accidental? Could he suppose Richard Arden so stupid? He took his leave smiling, but with an uncomfortable misgiving at his heart.

Richard Arden now proceeded in his own way, with some colouring and enormous suppression at discretion, to give his sister such an account as he thought would best answer of the interview he had just had with his father. Honestly related, what occurred between them was as follows:—

Richard Arden had come on summons from his father. Without a special call, he never appeared at Mortlake while his father was there, and never in his absence but with an understanding that Sir Reginald was to hear nothing of it. He sat for a considerable time in the apartment that opened from his father's dressing-room. He heard the baronet's peevish voice ordering Crozier about. Something was dropped and broken, and the same voice was heard in angrier alto. Richard Arden looked out of the window and waited uncomfortably. He hated

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his father's pleadings with him, and he did not know for what purpose he had appointed this interview.

The door opened, and Sir Reginald entered, limping a little, for his gout had returned slightly. He was leaning on a stick. His thin, dark face and prominent eyes looked angry, and he turned about and poked his dressing-room door shut with the point of his stick, before taking any notice of his son.

"Sit down, if you please, in that chair," he said, pointing to the particular seat he meant him to occupy with two vicious little pokes, as if he were running a small-sword through it. "I wrote to ask you to come, Sir, merely to say a word respecting your sister, for whom, if not for other members of your family, you still retain, I suppose, some consideration and natural affection."

Here was a pause which Richard Arden did not very well know what to do with. However, as his father's fierce eyes were interrogating him, he murmured—

"Certainly, Sir."

"Yes, and under that impression I showed you Lord Wynderbroke's letter. He is to dine here to-morrow at a quarter to eight—please to recollect—precisely. Do you hear?"

"I do, Sir, everything."

"You must meet him. Let us not appear more divided than we are. You know Wynderbroke—he's peculiar. Why the devil shouldn't we appear united? I don't say *be* united, for you won't. But there is something owed to decency. I suppose you admit that? And before people, confound you, Sir, can't we appear affectionate? He's a quiet man, Wynderbroke, and makes a great deal of these domestic sentiments. So you'll please to show some respect and affection while he's present, and I mean to show some affection for you; and after that, Sir, you may go to the devil for me! I hope you understand?"

"Perfectly, Sir."

"As to Wynderbroke, the thing is settled—it is *there*." He pointed to his desk. "What I told you before, I tell you now—you must see that your sister doesn't make a fool of herself. I have nothing more to say to you at present—unless you have something to say to me?"

This latter part of the sentence had something sharp and interrogative in it. There was just a chance, it seemed to imply, that his son might have something to say upon the one point that lay near the old man's heart.

"Nothing, Sir," said Richard, rising.

"No, no; so I supposed. You may go, Sir—nothing."

Of this interview, one word of the real purport of which he could not tell to his sister, he gave her an account very slight indeed, but rather pleasant.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GARDEN AT MORTLAKE.

ALICE leaned back in her chair, smiling, and very much pleased.

"So my father seems disposed to relent ever so little—and ever so little, you know, is better than nothing," said Richard Arden.

"I'm so glad, Dick, that he wishes you to take your dinner with us to-morrow; it is a very good sign. It would be so delightful if you could be at home with us, as you used to be."

"You are a good little soul, Alice—a dear little thing! This is very pretty," he said, looking at her drawing. "What is it?"

"The ruined castle near the northern end of the lake at Golden Friars. Mr. Longcluse says it is pretty good. Is he to dine here, do you know?"

"No—I don't know—I hope not," said Richard shortly.

"Hope not! why?" said she. "I thought you liked him extremely."

"I thought he was very well for a sort of outdoor acquaintance for *men;* but I don't even know *that*, now. There's no use in speaking to Lady May, but I warn you—you had better drop him. There is very little known about him, but there is a great deal that is not pleasant *said*."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"But you used to speak so highly of him. I'm so surprised!"

"I did not know half what people said of him. I've heard a great deal since."

"But is it true?" asked Alice.

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"It is nothing to me whether it is true or not. It is enough if a man is talked about uncomfortably, to make it unpleasant to know him. We owe nothing to Mr. Longcluse; there is no reason why you should have an acquaintance that is not desirable. *I* mean to drop him quietly, and you *can't* know him, really you *mustn't*, Alice."

"I don't know. It seems to me very hard," said Miss Alice spiritedly. "It is not many days since you spoke of him so highly; and I was quite pained when you came in just now. I don't know whether he perceived it, but I think he must. I only know that I thought you were so cold and strange to him, your manner so unlike what it always was before. I thought you had been quarrelling. I fancied he was vexed, and I felt quite sorry; and I don't think what you say, Richard, is manly, or like yourself. You used to praise him so, and fight his battles; and he is, though very distinguished in some ways, rather a stranger in London; and people, you told me, envy him, and try in a cowardly way to injure him; and what more easy than to hint discreditable things of people? and you did not believe a word of those reports when last you spoke of him; and considering that he had no people to stand by him in London, or to take his part, and that he may never even hear the things that are said by low people about him, don't you think it would be cowardly of us, and positively base to treat him so?"

"Upon my word, Miss Alice, that is very good oratory indeed! I don't think I ever heard you so eloquent before, at least upon the wrongs of one of my sex."

"Now, Dick, that sneer won't do. There may possibly be reasons why it would have been wiser never to have made Mr. Longcluse's acquaintance; I can't say. Those reasons, however, you treated very lightly indeed a little time ago—you know you did—and now, upon no better, you say you are going to cut him. *I* can't bring myself to do any such thing. He is always looking in at Lady May's, and I can't help meeting him unless I am to cut her also. Now don't you see how odious I should appear, and how impossible it is?"

"I won't argue it now, dear Alice; there is quite time enough. I shall come an hour before dinner, to-morrow, and we can have a quiet talk; and I am quite sure I shall convince you. Mind, I don't say we should insult him," he laughed. "I only say this, and I'll maintain it—and I'll show you why—that he is not a desirable acquaintance. We have taken him up very foolishly, and we *must* drop him And now, darling, good-bye."

He kissed her—she kissed him. She looked grave for a moment after, after he had run down the stairs. He has quarrelled with Mr. Longcluse about something, she thought, as she stood at the window with the tip of her finger to her lip,

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looking at her brother as he mounted the showy horse which had cantered with him up and down Rotten Row for two hours or more, before he had ridden out to Mortlake. She saw him now ride away.

It was near eight o'clock, and all this time Mr. Longcluse had been in confidence with Sir Reginald about his miserable mortgage. Mr. Longcluse was cautious; but there floated in his mind certain possible contingencies, under which he might perhaps make the financial adjustment, which Sir Reginald desired, very easy indeed to the worthy baronet.

It was the tempting hour of evening when the birds begin to sing, and the level beams from the west glorify all objects. Alice put on her hat and ran out to the old gardens of Mortlake. They are enclosed in a grey wall, and lie one above the other in three terraces, with tall standard fruit trees, so old that their fruit was now dwarfed in size to half its earlier bearings, standing high with a dark and sylvan luxuriance, and at this moment, sheltering among their sunlit leaves, nestle and flutter the small birds whose whistlings cheer and sadden the evening air. Every tree and bush that bore fruit, in this old garden, had grown quite beyond the common stature of its kind, and a good gardener would have cut them all down fifty years ago. But there was a kind of sylvan and stately beauty in those wonderful lofty pear-trees, with their dense dark foliage, and in the standard cherries so tall and prim, and something homely and comfortable in the great straggling apples and plums, dappled with grey lichens and tufted with moss. There were flowers as well as fruits, of all sorts, in this garden. All its arrangements were out of date. There was an air, not actually of neglect—for it was weeded, and the walks were trim and gravelled—but of carelessness and rusticity, not unpleasant, in the place. Trees were allowed to straggle and spread, and rise aloft in the air, just as they pleased. Tall roses climbed the walls about the door, and clustered in nodding masses overhead; and no end of pretty annuals and other flowers, quite out of fashion, crowded the dishevelled currant bushes, and the forest of raspberries. Here and there were very tall myrtles, and the quince, and obsolete medlars, were discoverable among the other fruit-trees. The summits of the walls were in some places crowned, to the scandal of all decent gardening, with ivy, and a carved shaft in the centre of each garden supported a sun-dial as old as the Hall itself.

There are fancies, as well as likings and lovings. Where there is a real worship, however cautiously masked—and Mr. Longcluse was by no means so—it is never a mystery to a clever girl. And such adoration, although it be not at all reciprocated, is sometimes hard to part with. There is something of the

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nature of compassion, with a little gratitude, perhaps, mingling in the pang which a gentle lady feels at having to discharge for ever an honest love and a true servant, and send him away to solitary suffering for her sake. Some little pang of reproach of this sensitive kind had, perhaps, armed her against her brother's sudden sentence of exclusion pronounced against Mr. Longcluse.

The evening sunlight travelled over the ivy on the discoloured wall, and glittered on the leaves of the tall fruit-trees, in whose thick foliage the birds were still singing their vespers. Walking down the broad walk towards the garden-door, she felt the saddening influence of the hour returning; and as she reached the door, overclustered with roses, it opened, and Mr. Longcluse stood in the shadow before her.

Miss Arden, thus surprised in the midst of thoughts which at that moment happened to be employed about him, showed for a second, as she suddenly stopped, something in her beautiful face almost amounting to embarrassment.

"I was called away so suddenly to see Sir Reginald, that I went without saying good-bye; so I ran up to the drawing-room, and the servant told me I should probably find you here; and, really without reflecting—I act, I'm afraid, so much from impulse that I might appear very impertinent—I ventured to follow. What a beautiful evening! How charming the light! You, who are such an artist, and understand the poetry of colour so, must admire this cloister-like garden, so beautifully illuminated."

Was Mr. Longcluse also a very little embarrassed as he descanted thus on light and colour?

"It is a very old garden and does very little credit, I'm afraid, to our care; but I greatly prefer it to our formal gardens and all their finery, in Yorkshire."

She moved her hand as if she expected Mr. Longcluse to take it and his leave, for it was high time her visitor should "order his wings and be off the west," in which quarter, as we know, lay Mr. Longcluse's habitation. He had stepped in, however, and the door closed softly before the light evening breeze that swung it gently. She was standing under the wild canopy of roses, and he under the sterner arch of grooved and fluted stone that overhung the doorway.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

WINGED WORDS.

"I WAS afraid I had vexed your brother somehow," said Mr. Longcluse—"I thought he seemed to meet me a little formally. I should be so sorry if I had annoyed him by any accident!"

He paused, and Miss Arden said, half laughing—"Oh, don't you know, Mr. Longcluse, that people are out of spirits sometimes, and now and then a little offended with all the world? It is nothing, of course."

"What a fib!" whispered conscience in the young lady's pretty ear, while she smiled and blushed.

Again she raised her hand a little, expecting Mr. Longcluse's farewell. But she looked a great deal too beautiful for a farewell. Mr. Longcluse could not deny himself a minute more, and he said, "It is a year, Miss Arden, since I first saw you."

"Is it really? I daresay."

"Yes, at Lady May Penrose's. Yes, I remember it distinctly—so distinctly that I shall never forget any circumstance connected with it. It is exactly a year and four days. You smile, Miss Arden, because for you the event can have had no interest; for me it is different—how different I will not say."

Miss Arden coloured and then grew pale. She was very much embarrassed. She was about to say a word to end the interview, and go. Perhaps Mr. Longcluse was, as he said, impulsive—too precipitate and impetuous. He raised his hand entreatingly,—

"Oh, Miss Arden, pray, only a word!—I must speak it. Ever since then—ever since that hour—I have been the slave of a single thought; I have worshipped before one beautiful image, with an impious adoration, for there is nothing—no sacrifice, no crime—I would shrink from for your sake. You can make of me what you will; all I possess, all my future, every thought and

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feeling and dream—all are yours. No, no ; don't interrupt the few half desperate words I have to speak, they may move you to pity. Never before, in a life of terrible vicissitude, of much suffering, of many dangers, have I seen the human being who could move me as you have done. I did not believe my seared heart capable of passion. And I stand now aghast at what I have spoken. I stand at the brink of a worse death, by the word that trembles on your lips, than the cannon's mouth could give me. I see I have spoken rashly—I see it in your face—oh, Heaven ! I see what you would say."

His hands were clasped in desperate supplication, as he continued ; and the fitful breeze shook the roses above them, and the fading leaves fell softly in a shower about his feet.

"No, don't speak—your silence is sacred. I sha'n't misinterpret—I conjure you, don't answer ! Forget that I have spoken. Oh ! let it, in mercy, be all forgotten, and let us meet again as if there never had been this moment of madness, and in pity—as you look for mercy—forget it and forgive it !"

He waited for no answer : he was gone : the door closed as it was before. Another breath of wind ruffled the roses, and a few more sere leaves fell where he had just been standing. She drew a long breath, like one awaking from a vision. She was trembling slightly. Never before had she seen such agony in a human face ! All had happened so suddenly. It was an effort to believe it real. It seemed as if she could see nothing while he spoke, but that intense, pale face. She heard nothing but his deep and thrilling words. Now it seemed as if flowers, and trees, and wall, and roses, all emerged suddenly again from mist, and as if all the birds had resumed their singing after a silence.

"Forget it—forgive it ! Let it, as you look for mercy, be all forgotten. Let us meet again as if it never was." This strange petition still rang in the ears of the astonished girl.

She was still too much flurried by the shock of this wild and sudden outbreak of passion, and appeal to mercy, quite to see her true course in the odd combination that had arisen. She was a little angry, and a little flattered. There was a confusion of resentment and compassion. What business had this Mr. Longcluse to treat her to those heroics ! What right had he to presume that he would be listened to ? How dared he ask her to treat all that had happened as if it had never been ? How dared he seek to found on this unwarrantable liberty relations of mystery between them ? How dared he fancy that she would consent to play at this game of deception with him ?

Mingled with these angry thoughts, however, were the recollections of his homage, his tone of melancholy deference ever since she had know him, and his admiration.

Underlying all his trifling talk, there had always been toward

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her a respect which flattered her, which could not have been exceeded had she been an empress in her own right. No, if he had said more than he had any right to suppose would be listened to, the extravagance was due to no want of respect for her, but to the vehemence of passion.

He was driving now into town, at a great pace. His cogitations were still more perturbed. Had he, by one frantic precipitation, murdered his best hopes?

One consolation at least he had. Being a man, not without reason, prone to suspicion, he had a deep conviction that, for some reason, Richard Arden was opposed to his suit, and had already begun to work upon Miss Arden's mind to his prejudice. His best chance, then, he still thought, was to anticipate that danger by a declaration. If that declaration could only be forgiven, and the little scene at old Mortlake garden door sponged out, might not his chances stand better far than before? Would not the past, though never spoken of, give meaning, fire, and melancholy to things else insignificant, and keep him always before her, and her alone, be his demeanour and language ever so reserved and cold, as an impassioned lover? Did not his knowledge of human nature assure him that these relations of mystery would, more than any other, favour his fortunes?

"That she should consign what has passed, in a few impetuous moments, to oblivion and silence, is no unreasonable prayer, and one as easy to grant as to will it. She will think it over, and, for my part, I will meet her as if nothing had ever happened to change our trifling but friendly relations. I wish I knew what Richard Arden was about. I soon shall. Yes, I shall—I soon shall."

An opportunity seemed to offer sooner even than he had hoped; for as he drove towards St. James's Street, passing one of Richard Arden's clubs, he saw that young gentleman ascending the steps with Lord Wynderbroke.

Longcluse stopped his brougham, jumped out, and overtook Richard Arden in the hall, where he stood, taking his letters from the hall-porter.

"How d'ye do, again? I sha'n't detain you a minute. I have had a long talk with your father about business," said Longcluse, seizing the topic most likely to secure a few minutes, and speaking very low. "You can bring me into a room here, and I'll tell you all that is necessary in two minutes."

"Certainly," said Richard, yielding to his curiosity. "I have only two or three minutes. I dine here with a friend, who is at this moment ordering dinner; so, you see, I am rather hurried."

He opened a door, and looking in said—

"Yes, we shall be quite to ourselves here."

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Longcluse shut the door. There was no one to overhear them.

Richard Arden sat down on a sofa, and Mr. Longcluse threw himself into a chair.

"And what did he say?" asked Richard.

"They want to raise his interest on the Yorkshire estate; and he says you won't help him; but that of course is your affair, and I declined, point-blank, to intervene in it. And before I go further, it strikes me, as it did to-day at Mortlake, that your manner to me has undergone a slight change."

"Has it? I did not mean it, I assure you," said Richard Arden, with a little laugh.

"Oh! yes, Arden, it *has*, and you must know it, and—pardon me—you must *intend* it also; and now I want to know what I have done, or how I have hurt you, or who has been telling lies of me?"

"Nothing of all these, that I know of," said Richard, with a cold little laugh.

"Well, of course, if you prefer it, you may decline an explanation. I must however, remind you, because it concerns my happiness, and possibly other interests dearer to me than my life, too nearly to be trifled with, that you heard all I said respecting your sister with the friendliest approbation and encouragement. You knew as much and as little about me then as you do now. I am not conscious of having said or done anything to warrant the slightest change in your feelings or opinion; and in your manner there *is* a change, and a very decided change, and I tell you frankly I can't understand it."

Thus directly challenged, Richard Arden looked at him hard for a moment. He was balancing in his mind whether he should evade or accept the crisis. He preferred the latter.

"Well, I can only say I did not intend to convey anything by my manner; but, as you know, when there is anything in one's mind it is not always easy to prevent its affecting, as you say, one's manner. I am not sorry you have asked me, because I spoke without reflection the other day. No one should answer, I really think, for any one else, in ever so small a matter, in this world."

"But you didn't—you spoke only for yourself. You simply promised me your friendship, your kind offices—you said, in fact, all I could have hoped for."

"Yes, perhaps—yes, I may, I suppose I did. But don't you see, dear Longcluse, things may come to mind, on thinking over."

"*What* things?" demanded Longcluse quickly, with a sudden energy that called a flush to his temples; and fire gleamed for a moment from his deep-set, gloomy eyes.

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"What things? Why, young ladies are not always the most intelligible problems on earth. I think you ought to know that; and really I do think, in such matters, it is far better that they should be left to themselves as much as possible; and I think, besides, that there are some difficulties that did not strike us. I mean, that I now see that there really are great difficulties—insuperable difficulties."

"Can you define them?" said Longcluse coldly.

"I don't want to vex you, Longcluse, and I don't want to quarrel."

"That's extremely kind of you."

"I don't know whether you are serious, but it is quite true. I don't wish any unpleasantness between us. I don't think I need say more than that; having thought it over, I don't see how it could ever be."

"Will you give me your reasons?"

"I really don't see that I can add anything in particular to what I have said."

"I think, Mr. Arden, considering all that has passed between us on this subject, that you are *bound* to let me know your reasons for so marked a change of opinion."

"I can't agree with you, Mr. Longcluse. I don't see in the least why I need tell you my particular reasons for the opinion I have expressed. My sister can act for herself, and I certainly shall not account to you for my reasons or opinions in the matter."

Mr. Longcluse's pale face grew whiter, and his brows knit, as he fixed a momentary stare on the young man; but he mastered his anger, and said in a cold tone—

"We disagree totally upon that point, and I rather think the time will come when you *must* explain."

"I have no more to say upon the subject, Sir, except this," said Arden, very tartly, "that it is certain your hopes can never lead to anything, and that I object to your continuing your visits at Mortlake."

"Why, the house does not belong to you—it belongs to Sir Reginald Arden, who objects to your visits and receives mine. Your ideas seem a little confused," and he laughed gently and coldly.

"Very much the reverse, Sir. I object to my sister being exposed to the least chance of annoyance from your visits. I protest against it, and you will be so good as to understand that I distinctly forbid them."

"The young lady's father, I presume, will hardly ask your advice in the matter, and *I* certainly shall not ask your leave. I shall call when I please, so long as I am received at Mortlake, and shall direct my own conduct, without troubling you

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for counsel in my affairs." Mr. Longcluse laughed again icily.

"And so shall I, mine," said Arden sharply.

"You have no right to treat anyone so," said Longcluse angrily—"as if one had broken his honour, or committed a crime."

"A crime!" repeated Richard Arden. "Oh! *That*, indeed, would pretty well end all relations."

"Yes, as, perhaps, you shall find," answered Longcluse, with sudden and oracular ferocity.

Each gentleman had gone a little farther than he had at first intended. Richard Arden had a proud and fierce temper when it was roused. He was near saying what would have amounted to insult. It was a chance opening of the door that prevented it. Both gentlemen had stood up.

"Please, Sir, have you done with the room, Sir?" asked the man.

"Yes," said Longcluse, and laughed again as he turned on his heel.

"Because three gentlemen want the room, if it's not engaged, Sir. And Lord Wynderbroke is waiting for you, please, Mr. Arden."

So with a little toss of his head, which he held unusually high, and a flushed and "glooming" countenance, Richard Arden marched a little swaggeringly forth, to his dinner *tête-à-tête* with Lord Wynderbroke.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

STORIES ABOUT MR. LONGCLUSE.

THE irritation of this unpleasant interview soon subsided, but Mr. Longcluse's anxiety rather increased.

Next day early in the afternoon he drove to Lady May's and she received him just as usual. He learned from her, without appearing to seek the information, that Alice Arden was still at Mortlake. His visit was one of but two or three minutes. He jumped into a hansom and drove out to Mortlake. He knocked. Man of the world as he was, his heart beat faster.

"Is Miss Arden at home?"

"No, Sir."

"Not at home?"

"Miss Arden is gone out, Sir."

"Oh! perhaps in the garden?"

"No, Sir; she has gone out, and won't be back for some time."

The man spoke with the promptitude and decision of a servant instructed to deny his mistress to the visitor. He had not a card; he would call again another day.

He heard the piano faintly, and, he thought, Alice's voice 'so; and certainly he saw Vivian Darnley in the drawing-room indow, as his cab turned away from the door. With a swelling heart he drove into town. The portcullis, then, had fallen; access was denied him; and he should see her no more!

Good Heaven! what had he done? He walked distractedly, for a while, up and down his study. Should he employ Lady May's intervention, and tell her the whole story? Good-natured Lady May! Perhaps she would undertake his cause, and plead for his re-admission. But was even that so certain? How could he tell what view she might take of the matter? And

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were she to intercede for him ever so vehemently, how could he tell that she had any chance of prevailing?

No; on the whole it was better to be his own advocate. He would sit down then and there, and write to the offended or alarmed lady, and lay his piteous case before her in his own words and rely on her compassion, without an intervenient.

How many letters he began, how many he even finished, and rejected, I need not tire you by telling. Some were composed in the first, others in the third person. Not one satisfied him. Here was the man of a million and more, who would dash off a note to his stock-broker, to buy or sell a hundred thousand pounds' worth of stock—who would draft a resolution of the bank of which he was the chairman, directing an operation which would make men open their eyes, without the tremor of a nerve or the hesitation of a moment—unmanned, helpless, distracted in the endeavour to write a note to a young and inexperienced girl!

O beautiful sex! what a triumph is here! O Love! what fools will you not make of us poor masculine wiseacres! The letter he dispatched was in these terms. I daresay he had torn better ones to pieces:—

"DEAR MISS ARDEN,—I had hoped that my profound contrition might have atoned for a momentary indiscretion—the declaration, though in terms the most respectful, of feelings which I had not self-command sufficient to suppress, and which had for nearly a year remained concealed in my own breast. I am sure, Miss Arden, that you are incapable of a gratuitous cruelty. Have I not sworn that one word to recall the remembrance of that, to me, all but fatal madness shall never escape my lips, in your presence? May I not entreat that you will forget it, that you will forbear to pass upon me the agonising sentence of exclusion? You shall never again have to complain of my uttering one word that the merest acquaintance, who is permitted the happiness of conversing with you, might not employ. You shall never regret your forbearance. I shall never cease to bless you for it; and whatever decision you arrive at, it shall be respected by me as sacred law. I shall never cease to reverence and bless the hand that spares or—afflicts me. May I be permitted this one melancholy hope, may I be allowed to interpret your omitting to answer this miserable letter as a concession of its prayer? Unless forbidden, I will endeavour to construe your silence as oblivion.

"I have the honour to remain, dear Miss Arden, with deep compunction and respect, but not altogether without hope in your mercy,

"Yours the most unhappy and distracted man in England,

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

Mr. Longcluse sealed this letter in its envelope, and addressed it. He would have liked to send it that moment, by his servant,

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but an odd shyness prevented. He did not wish his servants to conjure and put their heads together over it; he could not endure the idea; so with his own hand he dropped it in the post. Somewhat in the style of the old novel was this composition of Mr. Longcluse's—a little theatrical, and, one would have fancied, even affected; yet never was man more desperately sincere.

Night came, and brought no reply. Was no news good news, or would the morning bring, perhaps from Richard Arden, a withering answer? Morning came, and no answer: what was he to conjecture?

That day, in Grosvenor Square, he passed Richard Arden, who looked steadily and sternly a little to his right, and *cut* him.

It was a marked and decided cut. His ears tingled as if he had received a slap in the face. So things had assumed a very decided attitude indeed! Longcluse felt very oddly enraged, at first; then anxious. It was insulting that Richard Arden should have taken the initiative in dissolving relations. But had he not been himself studiously impertinent to Arden, in that brief colloquy of yesterday? He ought to have been prepared for this. Without explanation, and the shaking of hands, it was impossible that relations of amity should have been resumed between them. But Longcluse had been entirely absorbed by a threatened alienation that affected him much more nearly. There was a thesis for conjecture in the situation, which made him still more anxious. A very little time would probably clear all up.

He was walking homeward, saying to himself as he went, "No, I shall find no answer; I should be a fool to fancy anything else;" and yet walking all the more quickly, as he approached his house, in the hope of the very letter which he affected, to himself, to have quite rejected as an impossibility. Some letters had come, but none from Mortlake. His letter to Alice was still unanswered. He was now in the agony of suspense and distraction.

The same evening Richard Arden was talking about him, as he leaned with his elbow on the mantelpiece at Mortlake. He and Alice were alone in the drawing-room, awaiting the arrival of the little dinner-party. This, as you know, was to include Lord Wynderbroke, before whose advances, in Richard Arden's vision, Mr. Longcluse had waned, and even become an embarrassment and a nuisance.

"It is easier to cut him than to explain," thought Richard Arden. "It bores one so inexpressibly, giving reasons for what one does, and I'm so glad he has saved me the trouble by his vulgar impertinence."

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They had talked for some time, Alice chiefly a listener. How was she affected toward Mr. Longcluse? He was agreeable; he flattered her; he was passionately in love with her. All but this latter condition she liked very well; but this was embarrassing, and quite impracticable. Who knows what that tiny spark we term a fancy, a whim, a *penchant* might have grown to, had it not been blown away by this untimely gust? But, for my part, I don't think it ever would have grown to a matter of the heart. There was something in the way. A fancy is one thing, and passion quite another. Pique is a common state of mind, and comes and goes, and comes again, in many a courtship. But a liking that has once entered the heart cannot be torn out in a hasty moment, and takes a long time, and many a struggle, to kill.

She was a little sorry, just then, to lose him so inevitably. Perhaps his letter, to which he had trusted to move her, had rendered the return of old relations impossible. In this letter she felt herself the owner of a secret—a secret which she could not keep without a sort of understanding growing up between them—which therefore she had no idea of keeping.

She was resolved to tell it. The letter she had locked, in marked isolation, as if no property of hers, but simply a document that was in her keeping, in the pretty ormolu casket that stood on the drawing-room chimney-piece. She had intended showing it, and telling the story of the scene in the garden, to Richard. But he was speaking with a mysterious asperity of Mr. Longcluse, which made her hesitate. A very little thing, it seemed to her, might suffice to make a very violent quarrel out of a coldness. Instinctively, therefore, she refrained, and listened to Richard while, with his arm touching the casket on the chimney-piece, he descanted on the writer of the unknown letter.

She experienced an odd feeling of insecurity as, in the course of his talk, his fingers began to trifle with the pretty fingers that stood out in relief upon the casket; for she knew that the ordeal of the pistol, discountenanced in England, was still in force on the Continent, and Mr. Longcluse's ideas were all Continental; and how near were those fingers to the letter which might suffice to explode the dangerous element that had already accumulated!

"He has talked of us to his low companions; he chooses to associate with usurers and worse people; and he has been speaking of us in the most insolent terms."

"Really!" said Alice. Her large eyes looked larger as they fixed on him.

"Yes, and I'll tell you how I heard it. You must know, dear Alice, that I happened to want a little money; and when one

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does, the usual course is to borrow it. So I paid a visit to my harpy—and a harpy in need is a harpy indeed. Being hard up, he fleeced me ; and the gentleman, I suppose, thinking he might be familiar, told me he was on confidential terms with Mr. Longcluse and wished me a good deal of joy. 'Of what?' I ventured to ask, for he had just hit me rather hard. 'Of your chance,' or, as he called it *chanshe*, he said, with a delightfully arch leer. I thought he meant I had backed the right horse for the Derby, but it turned out he meant our chance of inducing Mr. Longcluse to make up his mind to marry you. I was very near knocking him down ; but a man who has one's bill for three hundred pounds must be respected. So I merely ventured to ask on whose authority he congratulated me, when it appeared it was on Mr. Longcluse's own, who, it seems, had said a great deal more, equally intolerable. In plain, coarse terms, he says that, being poor, we have conspired with you to secure him, Mr. Longcluse, for your husband. As to the fact of his having actually conveyed that, and to more people than one, there is and can be no doubt whatever. I can imagine, considering all things, nothing more vulgar, audacious, and cowardly."

A blush of anger glowed in Alice's face. Richard Arden liked the proud fire that gleamed from her dark grey eyes. It satisfied him that his words were not lost.

"I lighted on a man who knew more about him than I had learned before," resumed Richard Arden. "He was suspected at Berlin of having been engaged in a conspiracy to pigeon Dacre and Wilmot, who were travelling. He did not appear, but he is said to have supplied the money, and had a lion's share of the spoil. There is no good in repeating these things generally, you know, because they are so hard to prove ; and a fellow like that is dangerous. They say he is very litigious."

"Upon my word, if your information is at all to be relied on, it is plain we *have* made a great mistake. It is a disappointing world, but I could not have fancied him doing anything so low; and I must say for him that he was gentlemanlike and quiet, and very unlike the person he appears to be. I think I never heard of anything so outrageous ! Vivian Darnley told me that he was a great duellist, and thought to be a very quarrelsome, dangerous companion abroad. But he had only heard this, and what you tell me is so much worse, so mean, so utterly intolerable !"

"Oh ! There's worse than that," said Richard, with a faint sinister smile.

"What?" said she, returning it with an almost frightened gaze.

"There was a very beautiful girl at the opera in Vienna ; her

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name was Piccardi, a daughter of a good old Roman family. You can't imagine how admired she was! And she was thought to be on the point of marrying Count Baddenoff; Mr. Longcluse, it seems, chose to be in love with her; he was not then anything like so rich as he became afterwards—and this poor girl was killed."

"Good heavens! Richard—what can you mean?"

"I mean that she was assassinated, and that from that day Mr. Longcluse was never received in society in Vienna, and had to leave it."

"You ought to tell May Penrose," said she, after a silence of dismay.

"Not for the world," said Richard; "she talks enough for six—and where's the good? She'll only take up the cudgels for him, and we shall be in the centre of a pretty row."

"Well, if you think it best ——" she began.

"Certainly," said he. And a silence followed.

"Here is a carriage at the door," said Richard Arden. "Let us dismiss Longcluse, and look a little more like ourselves."

That evening there came letters as usual to Mr. Longcluse, and among others a note from Lady Mary Penrose, reminding him of her little garden-party at Richmond next day.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, starting up and reading the cards on his chimney, "I thought it was the day after. It was very good-natured, poor old thing, her reminding me. I shall see Alice Arden there. Not one line does she vouchsafe. But is not she right? I think the more highly of her for not writing. I don't think she ought to write. Oh, Heaven grant she may meet me as usual? Does she mean it? If she did not, would she not have got her brother to write, or have written herself a cold line, to end our acquaintance?"

So he tried to comfort himself, and to keep alive his dying hope by these artificial stimulants.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

NEXT morning Mr. Longcluse rose with a sense of something before him.

"So I shall see her to-day! If she's the girl I've thought her, she will meet me as usual. That frantic scene, in which I risked all on the turn of a die, will be forgotten. Hasty words, or precipitate letters, are passed over every day; the man who commits such follies, under a transitory insanity, is allowed the privilege of recalling them. There were no witnesses present to make forgiveness difficult. It all lies with her own good sense, and a heart proud but gentle. Let but those mad words be sponged out, and I am happy. Alice, if you forgive me, I forgive your brother, and take his name from where it is, and write it in my heart. Oh, beautiful Alice! will you belie your looks? Oh, clear bright mind! will you be clouded and perverted? Oh, gentle heart! can you be merciless?"

Mr. Longcluse made his simple morning toilet very carefully. A very plain man, extremely ugly some pronounce him; yet his figure is good, his get-up unexceptionable, and altogether he is a most gentlemanlike man to look upon, and in his movements and attitudes, quite unstudied, there is an undefinable grace. His accent is a little foreign—the slightest thing in the world, and Lady May Penrose declares it is so very pretty. Then he is so agreeable, when he pleases; and he is so very rich!

Some people wonder why he does not withdraw from all speculations, retire upon his enormous wealth, and with his elegant tastes, and the art of being magnificent without glare, even gorgeous without vulgarity—for has he not shown this refined talent in the service of others, who have taken him into council?—he could eclipse all the world in splendid elegance,

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and make his way, *force d'argent*, to the pinnacle of half the world's ambition. Were those stories true that Richard Arden told his sister on the night before?

I don't think that Richard Arden stuck at trifles, where he had an object to gain, and I don't believe a word of his story of Mr. Longcluse's insulting talk. It was not his way to boast and vapour; and he had a secret contempt for many of the Jewish and other agents whom he chose to employ. But undoubtedly Mr. Longcluse had the reputation among his discounting admirers of being a dangerous man to quarrel with; and also it was true that he had fought three or four savage duels in the course of his Continental life. There were other stories, unauthenticated, unpleasant. There were whispered with sneers by Mr. Longcluse's enemies. But there's a divinity doth hedge a King Crœsus, and his character bore a charmed life, among the missiles that would have laid that of many a punier man in the dust.

With an agitated heart, Mr. Longcluse approached the pretty little place known as Raleigh Court, to which he had been invited. Through the quaint, old-fashioned gate-way, under the embowering branches of tall trees, he drove up a short, broad avenue, clumped at each side with old timber, to the open hall-door of the pretty Elizabethan house. Carriages of all sorts were discernible under the branches, assembled at the further side to the right of the hall-door, over the wide steps of which was spread a scarlet cloth. Croquet parties were already visible on the shorn grass, under boughs that spread high in the air, and cast a pleasant shadow on the sward. Groups were strolling among the flower-beds—some walking in, some emerging from the open door—and the scene presented the usual variety of dress, and somewhat listless to-ing and fro-ing.

Did anyone, of all the guests of Lady May, mask so profound an agitation, under the conventional smile, as that which beat at Walter Longcluse's heart? Two or three people whom he knew, he met and talked to—some for a minute, others for a longer time—as he drew near the steps. His eye all the time was busy in the search after one pretty figure, the least glimpse of which he would have recognised with the thrill of a sure intuition, far or near. He would have liked to ask the friends he met whether the Ardens were here. But what would have been easy to him a week before, was now an effort for which he could not find courage.

He entered the hall, quaint and lofty, rising to the entire height of the house, with two galleries, one above the other, surrounding it on three sides. Ancestors of the late Mr. Penrose, who had left all this and a great deal more to his sorrowing relict, stood on the panelled walls at full length—

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some in ruffs and trunk-hose, others in perukes and cut-velvet, one with a bâton in his hand, and three with falcon on fist—all stately and gentlemanlike, according to their several periods; with corresponding ladies, some stiff and pallid, who figured in the days of the virgin queen, and others in the graceful *déshabille* of Sir Peter Lely. This quaint oak hall was now resonant with the buzz and clack of modern gossip, prose, and flirtation, and a great deal crowded, notwithstanding its commodious proportions. Lady May was still receiving her company near the doorway of the first drawing-room, and her kindly voice was audible from within as the visitor approached. Mr. Longcluse was very graciously received.

"I want you so particularly, to introduce you to Lady Hummington. She is such a charming person. She is so thoroughly up in German literature. She's a great deal too learned for me, but you and she will understand one another so perfectly, and you will be quite charmed with her. Mr. Addlings, did you happen to see Lady Hummington, or have you any idea where she's gone?"

"I shall go and look for her, with pleasure. Is not she the tall lady with grey hair? Shall I tell her you want to say a word to her?"

"You're very kind, but I'll not mind, thank you very much. It is so provoking, Mr. Longcluse! you would have been perfectly charmed with her."

"I shall be more fortunate, by-and-by, perhaps," said Mr. Longcluse. "Are any of our friends from Mortlake here?" he added, looking a little fixedly in her eyes, for he was thinking whether Alice had betrayed his secret, and was trying to read an answer there.

Lady May answered quite promptly—

"Oh, yes, Alice is here, and her brother. He went out that way with some friends," she said, indicating with a little nod a door which, from a second hall, opened on a terrace. "I asked him to show them the three fountains. You must see them also; they are in the Dutch garden; they were put up in the reign of George the First.—How d'ye do, Mrs. Frumply? How d'ye do, Miss Frumply?"

"What a charming house!" exclaims Mrs. Frumply, "and what a day! We were saying, Arabella and I, as we drove out, that you must really have an influence with the clerk of the weather, ha, ha, ha! didn't we, Arabella? So charming!"

Lady May laughed affably, and said—"Won't you and your daughter go in and take some tea? Mr. (she was going to call on Longcluse, but he had glided away)—Oh, Mr. Darnley!"

And the introduction was made, and Vivian Darnley, with Mrs. Frumply on his arm, attended by her daughter Arabella,

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did as he was commanded and got tea for that simpering lady, and fruit and Naples biscuits, and plum-cake, and was rewarded with the original joke about the clerk of the weather.

Mr. Longcluse, in the meantime, had passed the door indicated by Lady May, and stood upon the short terrace that overlooked the pretty flower-garden cut out in grotesque patterns, so that looking down upon its masses of crimson, blue, and yellow, as he leaned on the balustrade, it showed beneath his eye like a wide deep-piled carpet, on the green ground of which were walking groups of people, the brilliant hues of the ladies' dresses rivalling the splendour of the verbenas, and making altogether a very gay picture.

The usual paucity of male attendance made Mr. Longcluse's task of observation easy. He was looking for Richard Arden's well-known figure among the groups, thinking that probably Alice was not far off. But he was not there, nor was Alice; and Walter Longcluse, gloomy and lonely in this gay crowd, descended the steps at the end of this terrace, and sauntered round again to the front of the house, now and then passing some one he knew, with an exchange of a smile or a bow, and then lost again in the Vanity Fair of strange faces and voices.

Now he is at the hall door—he mounts the steps. Suddenly, as he stands upon the level platform at top, he finds himself within four feet of Richard Arden. He looks on him as he might on the carved pilaster, at the side of the hall door; no one could have guessed, by his inflexible but unaffected glance, that he and Mr. Arden had ever been acquainted. The younger man showed something in his countenance, a sudden hauteur, a little elevation of the chin, a certain sternness, more melodramatic, though less effective, than the simple blank of Mr. Longcluse's glance.

That gentleman looked about coolly. He was in search of Miss Arden, but he did not see her. He entered the hall again, and Richard Arden a little awkwardly resumed his conversation, which had suddenly subsided into silence on Longcluse's appearance.

By this time Lady May was more at ease, having received all her company that were reasonably punctual, and in the hall Longcluse now encountered her.

"Have you seen Mr. Arden?" she inquired of him.

"Yes, he's at the door, at the steps."

"Would you mind telling him kindly that I want to say a word to him?"

"Certainly, most happy," said Longcluse, without any distinct plan as to how he was to execute her awkward commission.

"Thank you very much. But, oh! dear, here is Lady

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Hummington, and she wishes so much to know you ; I'll send some one else. I must introduce you, come with me—Lady Hummington, I want to introduce my friend, Mr. Longcluse." So Mr. Longcluse was presented to Lady Hummington, who was very lean, and a "blue," and most fatiguingly well up in archæology, and all new books on dry and difficult subjects. So that Mr. Longcluse felt that he was, in *Joe Willett's* phrase, "tackled" by a giant, and was driven to hideous exertions of attention and memory to hold his own. When Lady Hummington, to whom it was plain kind Lady May, with an unconscious cruelty, had been describing Mr. Longcluse's accomplishments and acquirements, had taken some tea and other refection, and when Mr. Longcluse's kindness "had her wants supplied," and she, like Scott's "old man" in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," "was gratified," she proposed visiting the music-room, where she had heard a clever organist play, on a harmonium, three distinct tunes at the same time, which being composed on certain principles, that she explained with much animation and precision, harmonised very prettily.

So this clever woman directed, and Mr. Longcluse led, the way to the music-room.

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CHAPTER XXX.

HE SEES HER.

MR. LONGCLUSE'S attention was beginning to wander a little, and his eyes were now busy in search of some one whom he had not found; and knowing that the duration of people's stay at a garden-party is always uncertain, and that some of those gaily-plumed birds who make the flutter, and chirping, and brilliancy of the scene, hardly alight before they take wing again, he began to fear that Alice Arden had gone.

"Just like my luck!" he thought bitterly; "and if she is gone, when shall I have an opportunity of seeing her again?"

Lady Hummington's well-informed conversation had been, unheeded, accompanying the ruminations and distractions of this "passionate pilgrim;" and as they approached the door of the music-room, the little crush there brought the learned lady's lips so near to his ear, that with a little start he heard the words—"All strictly arithmetical, you know, and adjusted by the relative frequency of vibrations. That theory, I am sure, you approve, Mr. Longcluse."

To which the distracted lover made answer, "I quite agree with you, Lady Hummington."

The music-room at Raleigh Court is an apartment of no great size, and therefore when, with Lady Hummington on his arm, he entered, it was at no great distance that he saw Miss Arden standing near the window, and talking with an elderly gentleman, whose appearance he did not know, but who seemed to be extremely interested in her conversation. She saw him, he had not a doubt, for she turned a little quickly, and looked ever so little more directly out at the window, and a very slight tinge flushed her cheek. It was quite plain, he thought, and a dreadful pang stole through his breast, that she

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did not choose to see him—quite plain that she did see him—and he thought, from a subtle scrutiny of her beautiful features, quite plain also that it gave her pain to meet without acknowledging him.

Lady Hummington was conversing with volubility; but the air felt icy, and there was a strange trembling at his heart, and this, in many respects, hard man of the world, felt that the tears were on the point of welling from his eyes. The struggle was but for a few moments, and he seemed quite himself again. Lady Hummington wished to go to the end of the room where the piano was, and the harmonium on which the organist had performed his feat of the three tunes. That artist was taking his departure, having a musical assignation of some kind to keep. But to oblige Lady Hummington, who had heard of Thalberg's doing something of the kind, he sat down and played an elaborate piece of music on the piano with his thumbs only. This charming effort over, and applauded, the performer took his departure. And Lady Hummington said—

"I am told, Mr. Longcluse, that you are a very good musician."

"A very indifferent performer, Lady Hummington."

"Lady May Penrose tells a very different tale."

"Lady May Penrose is too kind to be critical," said Longcluse; and as he maintained this dialogue, his eye was observing every movement of Alice Arden. She seemed, however, to have quite made up her mind to stand her ground. There was a strange interest, to him, even in being in the same room with her. Perhaps Miss Arden saw that Mr. Longcluse's movements were dependent upon those of the lady whom he accompanied, and might have thought that, the musician having departed, their stay in that room would not be very long.

"I should be so glad to hear you sing, Mr. Longcluse," pursued Lady Hummington. "You have been in the East, I think; have you any of the Hindostanee songs? There are some, I have read, that embody the theories of the Brahmin philosophy."

"Long-winded songs, I fancy," said Mr. Longcluse, laughing; "it is a very voluminous philosophy, but the truth is, I've got a little cold, and I should not like to make a bad impression so early."

"But surely there are some simple little things, without very much compass, that would not distress you. How pretty those old English songs are that they are collecting and publishing now! I mean songs of Shakespeare's time—Ben Jonson's, Beaumont and Fletcher's, and Massinger's, you know. Some of them are so extremely pretty!"

"Oh! yes, I'll sing you one of those with pleasure," said he

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with a strange alacrity, quite forgetting his cold, sitting down at the instrument, and striking two or three fierce chords.

I am sure that most of my readers are acquainted with that pretty old English song, of the time of James the First, entitled, "Once I Loved a Maiden Fair." That was the song he chose.

Never, perhaps, did he sing so well before, with a fluctuation of pathos and scorn, tenderness and hatred, expressed with real dramatic fire, and with more power of voice than at moments of less excitement he possessed. He sang it with real passion, and produced, exactly where he wished, a strange but unavowed sensation. He omitted one verse, and the song as he delivered it was thus :—

"Once I loved a maiden fair,
But she did deceive me :
She with Venus could compare,
In my mind, believe me.
She was young, and among
All our maids the sweetest :
Now I say, Ah, well-a-day !
Brightest hopes are fleetest.

Maidens wavering and untrue
Many a heart have broken ;
Sweetest lips the world e'er knew
Falsest words have spoken.
Fare thee well, faithless girl,
I'll not sorrow for thee :
Once I held thee dear as pearl,
Now I do abhor thee."

When he had finished the song, he said coldly, but very distinctly, as he rose—

"I like that song, there is a melancholy psychology in it. It is a song worthy of Shakespeare himself."

Lady Hummington urged him with an encore, but he was proof against her entreaties. And so, after a little, she took Mr. Longcluse's arm ; and Alice felt relieved when the room was rid of them.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

ABOUT THE GROUNDS.

LADY HUMMINGTON, well pleased at having found in Mr. Longcluse what she termed a kindred mind, was warned by the hour that she must depart. She took her leave of Mr. Longcluse with regret, and made him promise to come to luncheon with her on the Thursday following. Mr. Longcluse called her carriage for her, and put in, besides herself, her maiden sister and two daughters, who all exhibited the family leanness, with noses more or less red and aquiline, and small black eyes, set rather close together.

As he ascended the steps he was accosted by a damsel in distress.

"Mr. Longcluse, I'm so glad to see you! You must do a very good-natured thing," said handsome Miss Maubray, smiling on him. "I came here with old Sir Arthur and Lady Tramway, and I've lost them; and I've been bored to death by a Mr. Bagshot, and I've sent him to look for my pocket-handkerchief in the tea-room; and I want you, as you hope for mercy, to show it now, and rescue me from my troubles."

"I'm too much honoured. I'm only too happy, Miss Maubray. I shall put Mr. Bagshot to death, if you wish it, and Sir Arthur and Lady Tramway shall appear the moment you command."

Mr. Longcluse was talking his nonsense with the high spirits which sometimes attend a painful excitement.

"I told them I should get to that tree if I were lost in the crowd, and that they would be sure to find me under it after six o'clock. Do take me there; I am so afraid of Mr. Bagshot's returning!"

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So over the short grass that handsome girl walked, with Mr Longcluse at her side.

"I'll sit at this side, thank you; I don't want to be seen by Mr. Bagshot."

So she sat down, placing herself at the further side of the great trunk of the old chestnut-tree. Mr. Longcluse stood nearly opposite, but so placed as to command a view of the hall-door steps. He was still watching the groups that emerged, with as much interest as if his life depended on the order of their to-ing and fro-ing. But, in spite of this, very soon Miss Maubray's talk began to interest him.

"Whom did Alice Arden come with?" asked Miss Maubray. "I should like to know; because, if I should lose my people, I must find some one to take me home."

"With her brother, I fancy."

"Oh! yes, to be sure—I saw him here. I forgot. But Alice is very independent, just now, of his protection," and she laughed.

"How do you mean?"

"Oh! Lord Wynderbroke, of course, takes care of her while she's here. I saw them walking about together, so happy! I suppose it is all settled."

"About Lord Wynderbroke?" suggested Longcluse, with a gentle carelessness, as if he did not care a farthing—as if a dreadful pain had not at that moment pierced his heart.

"Yes, Lord Wynderbroke. Why, haven't you heard of that?"

"Yes, I believe—I think so. I am sure I have heard something of it; but one hears so many things, one forgets, and I don't know him. What kind of man is he?"

"He's hard to describe; he's not disagreeable, and he's not dull; he has a great deal to say for himself about pictures, and the East, and the Crimea, and the opera, and all the people at all the courts in Europe, and he ought to be amusing; but I think he is the driest person I ever talked to. And he is really good-natured; but I think him much more teasing than the most ill-natured man alive, he's so insufferably punctual and precise."

"You know him very well, then?" said Longcluse, with an effort to contribute his share to the talk.

"Pretty well," said the young lady, with just a slight tinge flushing her haughty cheek. "But no one, who has been a week in the same house with him, could fail to see all that."

Miss Maubray herself, I am told, had hopes of Lord Wynderbroke about a year before, and was not amiably disposed towards him now, and looked on the triumph of Alice a little sourly; although something like the beginning of a real love

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had since stolen into her heart—not, perhaps, destined to be much more happy.

"Lord Wynderbroke—I don't know him. Is that gentleman he whom I saw talking to Miss Arden in the music-room, I wonder? He's not actually thin, and he is not at all stout; he's a little above the middle height, and he stoops just a little. He appears past fifty, and his hair looks like an old-fashioned brown wig, brushed up into a sort of cone over his forehead. He seems a little formal, and very polite and smiling, with a flower in his button-hole; a blue coat; and he has a pair of those little gold Paris glasses, and was looking out through the window with them."

"Had he a high nose?"

"Yes, rather a thin, high nose, and his face is very brown."

"Well, if he was all that, and had a brown face and a high nose, and was pretty near fifty-three, and very near Alice Arden, he was positively Lord Wynderbroke."

"And has this been going on for some time, or is it a sudden thing?"

"Both, I believe. It has been going on a long time, I believe, in old Sir Reginald's head; but it has come about, after all, rather suddenly; and my guardian says—Mr. David Arden, you know—that he has written a proposal in a letter to Sir Reginald, and you see how happy the young lady looks. So I think we may assume that the course of true love, for once, runs smooth—don't you?"

"And I suppose there is no objection anywhere?" said Longcluse, smiling. "It is a pity he is not a little younger, perhaps."

"I don't hear any complaints; let us rather rejoice he is not ten or twenty years older. I am sure it would not prevent his happiness, but it would heighten the ridicule. Are you one of Lady May Penrose's party to the Derby to-morrow?" inquired the young lady.

"No; I haven't been asked."

"Lord Wynderbroke is going."

"Oh! of course he is."

"I don't think Mr. David Arden likes it; but, of course, it is no business of his if other people are pleased. I wonder you did not hear all this from Richard Arden, you and he are so intimate."

So said the young lady, looking very innocent. But I think she suspected more than she said.

"No, I did not hear it," he said carelessly; "or, if I did, I forgot it. But do you blame the young lady?"

"Blame her! not at all. Besides, I am not so sure that she knows."

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"How can you think so?"

"Because I think she likes quite another person."

"Really! And who is he?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Upon my honour, I can't."

There was something so earnest, and even vehement, in this sudden asseveration, that Miss Maubray looked for a moment in his face; and seeing her curious expression, he said more quietly, "I assure you I don't think I ever heard; I'm rather curious to know."

"I mean Mr. Vivian Darnley."

"Oh! Well, I've suspected that a long time. I told Richard Arden, one day—I forget how it came about—but he said no."

"Well, I say yes," laughed the young lady, "and we shall see who's right."

"Oh! Recollect I'm only giving you his opinion. I rather lean to yours, but he said there was positively nothing in it, and that Mr. Darnley is too poor to marry."

"If Alice Arden resembles me," said the young lady, "she thinks there are just two things to marry for—either love or ambition."

"You place love first, I'm glad to hear," said Mr. Longcluse, with a smile.

"So I do, because it is most likely to prevail with a pig-headed girl; but what I mean is this: that social pre-eminence—I mean rank, and not trumpery rank; but such as, being accompanied with wealth and precedence, is also attended with power—is worth an immense sacrifice of all other objects; my reason tells me, worth the sacrifice of love. But that is a sacrifice which impatient, impetuous people can't always so easily make—which I daresay I could not make if I were tried; but I don't think I shall ever be fool enough to become so insane, for the state of a person in love is a state of simple idiotism. It is pitiable, I allow, but also contemptible; but, judging by what I see, it appears to me a more irresistible delusion than ambition. But I don't understand Alice well. I think, if I knew a little more of her brother—certain qualities so run in families—I should be able to make a better guess. What do you think of him?"

"He's very agreeable, isn't he? and, for the rest, really, until men are tried as events only can try them, it is neither wise nor safe to pronounce."

"Is he affectionate?"

"His sister seems to worship him," he answered; "but young ladies are so angelic, that where they like they resent nothing, and respect selfishness itself as a manly virtue."

"But you know him intimately; surely you must know something of him."

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Under different circumstances, this audacious young lady's cross-examination would have amused Mr. Longcluse; but in his present relations, and spirits, it was otherwise.

"I should but mislead you if I were to answer more distinctly. I answer for no man, hardly for myself. Besides, I question your theory. I don't think, except by accident, that a brother's character throws any light upon a sister's; and I hope—I think, I mean—that Miss Arden has qualities illimitably superior to those of her brother. Are these your friends, Miss Maubray?" he continued.

"So they are," she answered. "I'm so much obliged to you, Mr. Longcluse! I think they are leaving."

Mr. Longcluse, having delivered her into the hands of her chaperon, took his leave, and walked into the broad alleys among the trees, and in solitude under their shade, sat himself down by a pond, on which two swans were sailing majestically. Looking down upon the water with a pallid frown, he struck the bank beneath him viciously with his heel, peeling off little bits of the sward, which dropped into the water.

"It is all plain enough now. Richard Arden has been playing me false. It ought not to surprise me, perhaps. The girl, I still believe, has neither act nor part in the conspiracy. She has been duped by her brother. I have thrown myself upon her mercy; I will now appeal to her *justice*. As for him—what vermin mankind are! He must return to his allegiance; he will. After all, he may not like to lose me. He will act in the way that most interests his selfishness. Come, come! it is no impracticable problem. I'm not cruel? Not I! No, I'm not cruel; but I am utterly just. I would not hang a mouse up by the tail to die, as they do in France, head downwards, of hunger, for eating my cheese; but should the vermin nibble at my heart, in that case, what says justice? Alice, beautiful Alice, you shall have every chance before I tear you from my heart—oh, for ever! Ambition! That coarse girl, Miss Maubray, can't understand you. Ambition, in her sense, you have none; there is nothing venal in your nature. Vivian Darnley, is there anything in that either? I think nothing. I observed them closely, that night, at Mortlake. No, there was nothing. My conversation and music interested her, and when I was by, he was nothing.

"They are going to the Derby to-morrow. I think Lady May has treated me rather oddly, considering that she had all but borrowed my drag. She might have put me off civilly; but I don't blame her. She is good-natured, and if she has any idea that I and the Ardens are not quite on pleasant terms, it quite excuses it. Her asking me here, and her little note to remind, were meant to show that she did not take up the quarrel against

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me. Never mind; I shall know all about it, time enough. They are going to the Derby to-morrow. Very well, I shall go also. It will all be right yet. When did I fail? When did I renounce an object? By Heaven, one way or other, I'll accomplish this!"

Tall Mr. Longcluse rose, and looked round him, and in deep thought, marched with a resolute step towards the house.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE LIME-TREES.

AT this garden-party, marvellous as it may appear, Lord Wynderbroke has an aunt. How old she is I know not, nor yet with what conscience her respectable relations can permit her to haunt such places, and run a risk of being suffocated in doorways, or knocked down the steps by an enamoured couple hurrying off to more romantic quarters, or of having her maundering old head knocked with a croquet mallet, as she totters drearily among the hoops.

This old lady is worth conciliating, for she has plate and jewels, and three thousand a-year to leave; and Lord Wynderbroke is a prudent man. He can bear a great deal of money, and has no objection to jewels, and thinks that the plate of his bachelor and old-maid kindred should gravitate to the centre and head of the house. Lord Wynderbroke was indulgent, and did not object to her living a little longer, for this aunt conduced to his air of juvenility more than the flower in his button-hole. However, she was occasionally troublesome, and on this occasion made an unwise mixture of fruit and other things; and a servant glided into the music-room, and with a proper inclination of his person, in a very soft tone said,—

"My lord, Lady Witherspoons is in her carriage at the door, my lord, and says her ladyship is indisposed, and begs, my lord, that your lordship will be so good as to hacompany her 'ome in her carriage, my lord."

"Oh! tell her ladyship I am so *very* sorry, and will be with her in a moment." And he turned with a very serious countenance to Alice. "How extremely unfortunate! When I saw those miserable cherries, I knew how it would be; and now I am torn away from this charming place; and I'm sure I hope

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she may be better soon, it *is* so (disgusting, he thought, but he said) melancholy! With whom shall I leave you, Miss Arden?"

"Thanks, I came with my brother, and here is my cousin, Mr. Darnley, who can tell me where he is."

"With a croquet party, near the little bridge. I'll be your guide, if you'li allow me," said Vivian Darnley eagerly.

"Pray, Lord Wynderbroke, don't let me delay you longer. I shall find my brother quite easily now. I so hope Lady Witherspoons may soon be better!"

"Oh, yes, she always *is* better soon; but in the meantime one is carried away, you see, and everything upset; and all because, poor woman, she won't exercise the smallest restraint. And she has, of course, a right to command me, being my aunt, you know, and—and—the whole thing is ineffably provoking."

And thus he took his reluctant departure, not without a brief but grave scrutiny of Mr. Vivian Darnley. When he was gone, Vivian Darnley proffered his arm, and that little hand was placed on it, the touch of which made his heart beat faster. Though people were beginning to go, there was still a crush about the steps. This little resistance and mimic difficulty were pleasant to him for her sake. Down the steps they went together, and now he had her all to himself; and silently for a while he led her over the closely-shorn grass, and into the green walk between the lime-trees, that leads down to the little bridge.

"Alice," at last he said—"Miss Arden, what have I done that you are so changed?"

"Changed! I don't think I am changed. What is there to change me?" she said carelessly, but in a low tone, as she looked along towards the flowers.

"It won't do, Alice, repeating my question, for that is all you have done. I like you too well to be put off with mere words. You are changed, and without a cause—no, I could not say that—not without a cause. Circumstances are altered; you are in the great world now, and admired; you have wealth and titles at your feet—Mr. Longcluse with his millions, Lord Wynderbroke with his coronet."

"And who told you that these gentlemen were at my feet?" she exclaimed, with a flash from her fine eyes, that reminded him of moments of pretty childish anger, long ago. "If I am changed—and perhaps I am—such speeches as that would quite account for it. You accuse me of caprice—has any one ever accused you of impertinence?"

"It is quite true, I deserve your rebuke. I have been speaking as freely as if we were back again at Arden Court, or Ryndelmere, and ten years of our lives were as a mist that rolls away."

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"That's a quotation from a song of Tennyson's."

"I don't know what it is from. Being melancholy myself, I say the words because they are melancholy."

"Surely you can find some friend to console you in your affliction."

"It is not easy to find a friend at any time, much less when things go wrong with us."

"It is very hard if there is really no one to comfort you. Certainly *I* sha'n't try anything so hopeless as comforting a person who is resolved to be miserable. 'There's such a charm in melancholy, I would not if I could, be gay.' There's a quotation for you, as you like verses—particularly what I call moping verses."

"Come, Alice! this is not like you; you are not so unkind as your words would seem; you are not cruel, Alice—you are cruel to no one else, only to me, your old friend."

"I have said nothing cruel," said Miss Alice, looking on the grass before her; "cruelty is too sublime a phrase. I don't think I have ever experienced cruelty in my life; and I don't think it likely that you have; I certainly have never been cruel to any one. I'm a very good-natured person, as my birds and squirrel would testify if they could."

She laughed.

"I suppose people call that cruel which makes them suffer very much; it may be but a light look, or a cold word, but still it may be more than years of suffering to another. But I don't think, Alice, you ought to be so with me. I think you might remember old times a little more kindly."

"I remember them very kindly—as kindly as you do. We were always very good friends, and always, I daresay, shall be. *I* sha'n't quarrel. But I don't like heroics, I think they are so unmeaning. There may be people who like them very well and —— There is Richard, I think, and he has thrown away his mallet. If his game is over, he will come now, and Lady May doesn't want the people to stay late; she is going into town, and I stay with her to-night. We are going to the Derby to-morrow."

"I am going also—it was so kind of her!—she asked me to be of her party," said Vivian Darnley.

"Richard is coming also; I have never been to the Derby, and I daresay we shall be a very pleasant party; I know I like it of all things. Here comes Richard—he sees me. Was my uncle David here?"

"No."

"I hardly thought he was, but I saw Grace Maubray, and I fancied he might have come with her," she said carelessly.

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"Yes, she was here; she came with Lady Tramways. They went away about half-an-hour ago."

So Richard joined her, and they walked to the house together, Vivian Darnley accompanying them.

"I think I saw you a little spooney to-day, Vivian, didn't I?" said Richard Arden, laughing. He remembered what Longcluse once said to him, about Vivian's *tendre* for his sister, and did not choose that Alice should suspect it. "Grace Maubray is a very pretty girl."

"She may be that, though it doesn't strike me," began Darnley.

"Oh! come, I'm too old for that sort of disclaimer; and I don't see why you should be so modest about it. She is clever and pretty."

"Yes, she is very pretty," said Alice.

"I suppose she is, but you're quite mistaken if you really fancy I admire Miss Maubray. I *don't*, I give you my *honour*, I don't," said Vivian vehemently.

Richard Arden laughed again, but prudently urged the point no more, intending to tell the story that evening as he and Alice drove together into town, in the way that best answered his purpose.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DERBY.

THE morning of the Derby day dawned auspiciously. The weather-cocks, the sky, and every other prognostic portended a fine cloudless day, and many an eye peeped early from bed-room window to read these signs, rejoicing.

"Ascot would have been more in *our* way," said Lady May, glancing at Alice, when the time arrived for taking their places in the carriage. "But the time answered, and we shall see a great many people we know there. So you must not think I have led you into a very fast expedition."

Richard Arden took the reins. The footmen were behind, in charge of hampers from Fortnum and Mason's, and inside, opposite to Alice, sat Lord Wynderbroke; and Lady May's *vis-à-vis* was Vivian Darnley. Soon they had got into the double stream of carriages of all sorts. There are closed carriages with pairs or fours, gigs, hansom cabs fitted with gauze curtains, dog-carts, open carriages with hampers lashed to the foot-boards, dandy drags, bright and polished, with crests; vans, cabs, and indescribable contrivances. There are horses worth a hundred and fifty guineas a-piece, and there are others that look as if the knacker should have them. There are all sorts of raws, and sand-cracks, and broken knees. There are kickers and roarers, and bolters and jibbers, such a crush and medley in that densely packed double line, that jogs and crushes along you can hardly tell how.

Sometimes one line passes the other, and then sustains a momentary check, while the other darts forward; and now and then a panel is smashed, with the usual altercation, and dust unspeakable eddying and floating everywhere in the sun; all sorts of chaff exchanged, mail-coach horns blowing, and

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general impudence and hilarity; gentlemen with veils on, and ladies with light hoods over their bonnets, and all sorts of gauzy defences against the dust. The utter novelty of all these sights and sounds highly amuses Alice, to whom they are absolutely strange.

"I am so amused," she said, "at the gravity you all seem to take these wonderful doings with. I could not have fancied anything like it. Isn't that Borrowdale?"

"So it is," said Lady May. "I thought he was in France. He doesn't see us, I think."

He did see them, but it was just as he was cracking a personal joke with a busman, in which the latter had decidedly the best of it, and he did not care to recognise his lady acquaintances at disadvantage.

"What a fright that man is!" said Lord Wynderbroke.

"But his team is the prettiest in England, except Longcluse's," said Darnley; "and, by Jove, there's Longcluse's drag!"

"Those are very nice horses," said Lord Wynderbroke looking at Longcluse's team, as if he had not heard Darnley's observation. "They are worth looking at, Miss Arden."

Longcluse was seated on the box, with a veil on, through which his white smile was indistinctly visible.

"And what a fright *he* is, also! He looks like a picture of Death I once saw, with a cloth half over his face; or the Veiled Prophet. By Jove, a curious thing that the two most hideous men in England should have between them the two prettiest teams on earth!"

Lord Wynderbroke looks at Darnley with raised brows, vaguely. He has been talking more than his lordship perhaps thinks he has any business to talk, especially to Alice.

"You will be more diverted still when we have got upon the course," interposes Lord Wynderbroke. "The variety of strange people there—gipsies, you know, and all that—mountebanks, and thimble-riggers, and beggars, and musicians—you'll wonder how such hordes could be collected in all England, or where they come from."

"And although they make something of a day like this, how on earth they contrive to exist all the other days of the year, when people are sober, and minding their own business," added Darnley.

"To me the pleasantest thing about the drive is our finding ourselves in the open country. Look out of the window there—trees and farm-steads—it is so rural, and such an odd change!" said Lady May.

"And the young corn, I'm glad to see, is looking very well," said Lord Wynderbroke, who claimed to be something of an agriculturist.

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"And the oddest thing about it is our being surrounded, in the midst of all this rural simplicity, with the population of London," threw in Vivian Darnley.

"Remember, Miss Arden, our wager," said Lord Wynderbroke; "you have backed May Queen."

"May! she should be a cousin of mine," said good Lady May, firing off her little pun, which was received very kindly by her audience.

"Ha, ha! I did not think of that; she should certainly be the most popular name on the card," said Lord Wynderbroke. "I hope I have not made a great mistake, Miss Arden, in betting against so—so auspicious a name."

"I sha'n't let you off, though. I'm told I'm very likely to win—isn't it so?" she asked Vivian.

"Yes, the odds are in favour of May Queen now; you might make a capital hedge."

"You don't know what a hedge is, I daresay, Miss Arden; ladies don't always quite understand our turf language," said Lord Wynderbroke, with a consideration which he hoped that very forward young man, on whom he fancied Miss Arden looked good-naturedly, felt as he ought. "It is called a hedge, by betting men, when ——" and he expounded the meaning of the term.

The road had now become more free, as they approached the course, and Dick Arden took advantage of the circumstance to pass the omnibuses, and other lumbering vehicles, which he soon left far behind. The grand stand now rose in view—and now they were on the course. The first race had not yet come off, and young Arden found a good place among the triple line of carriages. Off go the horses! Miss Arden is assisted to a cushion on the roof; Lord Wynderbroke and Vivian take places beside her. The sun is growing rather hot, and the parasol is up. Good-natured Lady May is a little too stout for climbing, but won't hear of anyone's staying to keep her company. Perhaps when Richard Arden, who is taking a walk by the ropes, and wants to see the horses which are showing, returns, she may have a little talk with him at the window. In the meantime, all the curious groups of figures, and a hundred more, which Lord Wynderbroke promised—the monotonous challenges of the fellows with games of all sorts, the whine of the beggar for a little penny, the guitarring, singing, barrel-organing, and the gipsy inviting Miss Arden to try her lucky sixpence—all make a curious and merry Babel about her.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SHARP COLLOQUY.

ON foot, near the weighing stand, is a tall, powerful, and clumsy fellow, got up gaudily—a fellow with a lowering red face, in loud good-humour, very ill-looking. He is now grinning and chuckling with his hands in his pockets, and talking with a little Hebrew, young, sable-haired, with the sallow tint, great black eyes, and fleshy nose that characterise his race. A singularly sullen mouth aids the effect of his vivid eyes, in making this young Jew's face ominous.

"Young Dick Harden's 'ere," said Mr. Levi.

"Eh? is he?" said the big man with the red face and pimples, the green cut-away coat, gilt buttons, purple neck-tie, yellow waistcoat, white cord tights, and top boots.

"Walking down there," said Levi, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. "I shaw him shpeak to a fellow in chocolate and gold livery."

"And an eagle on the button, I know. That's Lady May Penrose's livery," said his companion. "He came down with her, I lay you fifty. And he has a nice sister as ever you set eyes on—pretty gal, Mr. Levi—a reg'lar little angel," and he giggled after his wont. "If there's a dragful of hangels anyvere, she's one of them. I saw her yesterday in one of Lady May Penrose's carriages in St. James' Street. Mr. Longcluse is engaged to get married to her; you may see them linked arm-in-arm, any day you please, walkin' hup and down Hoxford Street. And her brother, Richard Harden, is to marry Lady May Penrose. That will be a warm family yet, them Hardens, arter all."

"A family with a title, Mr. Ballard, be it never so humble, Sir, like 'ome shweet 'ome, hash nine livesh in it; they'll be down to the last pig, and not the thickness of an old tizzy between them and the glue-pot; and while you'd write your

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name across the back of a cheque, all's right again. The title doesh it. You never shaw a title in the workus yet, Mr. Ballard, and you'll wait awhile before you 'av a hoppertunity of shayin', 'My lord Dooke, I hope your grashe's water-gruel is salted to your noble tasht thish morning,' or, 'My noble marquishe, I humbly hope you are pleashed with the fit of them pepper-and-salts;' and, 'My lord earl, I'm glad to see by the register you took a right honourable twisht at the crank thish morning.' No, Mishter Ballard, you nor me won't shee that, Shir."

While these gentlemen enjoyed their agreeable banter, and settled the fortunes of Richard Arden and Mr. Longcluse, the latter person was walking down the course in the direction in which Mr. Levi had seen Arden go, in the hope of discovering Lady May's carriage. Longcluse was in an odd state of excitement. He had entered into the spirit of the carnival. Voices all around were shouting, "Twenty to five on Dotheboys;" or, "A hundred to five against Parachute."

"In what?" called Mr. Longcluse to the latter challenge.

"In assassins!" cried a voice from the crowd.

Mr. Longcluse hustled his way into the thick of it.

"Who said that?" he thundered.

No one could say. No one else had heard it. Who cared? He recovered his coolness quickly, and made no further fuss about it. People were too busy with other things to bother themselves about his questions, or his temper. He hurried forward after young Arden, whom he saw at the turn of the course a little way on.

"The first race no one cares much about; compared with the great event of the day, it is as the farce before the pantomime, or the oyster before the feast."

The bells had not yet rung out their warning, and Alice said to Vivian,—

"How beautifully that girl with the tambourine danced and sang! I do so hope she'll come again; and she is, I think, so perfectly lovely. She is so like the picture of La Esmeralda; didn't you think so?"

"Do you really wish to see her again?" said Vivian. "Then if she's to be found on earth you shall see her."

He was smiling, but he spoke in the low tone that love is said to employ and understand, and his eyes looked softly on her. He was pleased that she enjoyed everything so. In a moment he had jumped to the ground, and with one smile back at the eager girl he disappeared.

And now the bells were ringing, and the police clearing the course. And now the cry, "They're off, they're off!" came rolling down the crowd like a hedge-fire. Lord Wynderbroke

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offered Alice his race-glass, but ladies are not good at optical aids, and she prefers her eyes ; and the Earl constitutes himself her sentinel, and will report all he sees, and stands on the roof beside her place, with the glasses to his eyes. And now the excitement grows. Beggar-boys, butcher-boys, stable-helps, jump up on carriage-wheels unnoticed, and cling to the roof with filthy fingers. And now they are in sight, and a wild clamour arises. "Red's first !" "No, Blue !" "White leads !" "Pink's first !"

And here they are ! White, crimson, pink, black, yellow—the silk jackets quivering like pennons in a storm—the jockeys tossing their arms madly about, the horses seeming actually to fly ; swaying, reeling, whirring, the whole thing passes in a beautiful drift of a moment, and is gone !

Lord Wynderbroke is standing on tip-toe, trying to catch a g impse of the caps as they show at the opening nearer the winning-post. Vivian Darnley is away in search of La Esmeralda. Miss Arden has seen the first race of the day, the first she has ever seen, and is amazed and delighted. The intruders who had been clinging to the carriage now jump down, and join the crowd that crush on towards the winning-post, or break in on the course. But there rises at the point next her a figure she little expected to see so near that day. Mr. Longcluse has swung himself up, and stands upon the wheel. He is bare-headed, his hat is in the hand he clings by. In the other hand he holds up a small glove—a lady's glove. His face is very pale. He is not smiling ; he looks with an expression of pain, on the contrary, and very great respect.

"Miss Arden, will you forgive my venturing to restore this glove, which I happened to see you drop as the horses passed ?"

She looked at him with something of surprise and fear, and drew back a little instead of taking the proffered glove.

"I find I have been too presumptuous," he said gently. "I place it there. I see, Miss Arden, I have been maligned. Some one has wronged me cruelly. I plead only for a fair chance—for God's sake, give me a chance. I don't say hear me now, only say you won't condemn me utterly unheard."

He spoke vehemently, but so low that, amid the hubbub of other voices, no one but Miss Arden, on whom his eyes were fixed, could hear him.

"I take my leave, Miss Arden, and may God bless you. But I rest in the hope that your noble nature will refuse to treat any creature as my enemies would have you treat me."

His looks were so sad and even reverential, and his voice, though low, so full of agony, that no one could suppose the speaker had the least idea of forcing his presence upon the lady

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a moment longer than sufficed to ascertain that it was not welcome. He was about to step to the ground, when he saw Richard Arden striding rapidly up with a very angry countenance. Then and there seemed likely to occur what the newspapers term an ungentlemanlike fracas. Richard Arden caught him, and pulled him roughly to the ground. Mr. Longcluse staggered back a step or two, and recovered himself. His pale face glared wickedly, for a moment or two, on the flushed and haughty young man; his arm was a little raised, and his fist clenched. I daresay it was just the turn of a die, at that moment, whether he struck him or not.

These two bosom friends, and sworn brothers, of a week or two ago, were confronted now with strange looks, and in threatening attitude. How frail a thing is the worldly man's friendship, hanging on flatteries and community of interest! A word or two of truth, and a conflict or even a divergence of interest, and where is the liking, the friendship, the intimacy?

A sudden change marked the face of Mr. Longcluse. The vivid fires that gleamed for a moment from his eyes sunk in their dark sockets, the intense look changed to one of sullen gloom. He beckoned, and said coldly, "Please follow me;" and then turned and walked, at a leisurely pace, a little way inward from the course.

Richard Arden, perhaps, felt that had he hesitated it would have reflected on his courage. He therefore disregarded the pride that would have scorned even a seeming compliance with that rather haughty summons, and he followed him with something of the odd dreamy feeling which men experience when they are stepping, consciously, into a risk of life. He thought that Mr. Longcluse was inviting the interview for the purpose of arranging the preliminaries of who were to act as their "friends," and where each gentleman was to be heard of that evening. He followed, with oddly conflicting feelings, to a place in the rear of some tents. Here was a sort of booth. Two doors admitted to it—one to the longer room, where was whirling that roulette round which men who, like Richard Arden, could not deny themselves, even on the meanest scale, the excitement of chance gain and loss, were betting and bawling. Into the smaller room of plank, which was now empty, they stepped.

"Now, Sir, you'll be so good as to to observe that you have taken upon you a rather serious responsibility in laying your hand on me," said Longcluse, in a very low tone, coldly and gently. "In France, such a profanation would be followed by an exchange of shots, and here, under other circumstances, I should exact the same chance of retaliation. I mean to deal differently—quite differently. I have fought too many duels, as

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you know, to be the least apprehensive of being misunderstood or my courage questioned. For your sister's sake, not yours, I take a peculiar course with you. I offer you an alternative ; you may have reconciliation—here is my hand" (he extended it)—"or you may abide the other consequence, at which I sha'n't hint, in pretty near futurity. You don't accept my hand?"

"No, Sir," said Arden haughtily—more than haughtily, insolently. "I can have no desire to renew an acquaintance with you. I sha'n't do that. I'll fight you, if you like it. I'll go to Boulogne, or wherever you like, and we can have our shot, Sir, whenever you please."

"No, if you please—not so fast. You decline my friendship—that offer is over," said Longcluse, lowering his hand resolutely. "I am not going to shoot you—I have not the least notion of that. I shall take, let me see, a different course with you, and I shall obtain on reflection your entire concurrence with the hopes I have no idea of relinquishing. You will probably understand me pretty clearly by-and-by."

Richard Arden was angry ; he was puzzled ; he wished to speak, but could not light quickly on a suitable answer. Longcluse stood for some seconds, smiling his pale sinister smile upon him, and then turned on his heel, and walked quietly out upon the grass, and disappeared in the crowd.

Richard Arden was irresolute. He threw open the door, and entered the roulette-room—looked round on all the strange faces, that did not mind him, or seem to see that he was there—then, with a sudden change of mind, he retraced his steps more quickly, and followed Longcluse through the other door. But there he could not trace him. He had quite vanished. Perhaps, next morning, he was glad that he had missed him, and had been compelled to "sleep upon it."

Now and then, with a sense of disagreeable uncertainty, recurred to his mind the mysterious intimation, or rather menace, with which he had taken his departure. It was not, however, his business to look up Longcluse. He had himself seemed to intimate that the balance of insult was the other way. If "satisfaction," in the slang of the duellist, was to be looked for, the initiative devolved undoubtedly upon Longcluse.

Alice was so placed on the carriage, that she did not see what passed immediately beside it, between Longcluse and her brother. Still, the appearance of this man, and his having accosted her, had agitated her a good deal, and for some hours the unpleasant effect of the little scene spoiled her enjoyment of this day of wonders.

Very gaily, notwithstanding, the party returned—except, perhaps, one person who had reason to remember that day.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

DINNER AT MORTLAKE.

LADY MAY'S party from the Derby dined together late, that evening, at Mortlake. Lord Wynderbroke, of course, was included. He was very happy, and extremely agreeable. When Alice, and Lady May, who was to stay that night at Mortlake, and Miss Maubray, who had come with Uncle David, took their departure for the drawing-room, the four gentlemen who remained over their claret drew more together, and chatted at their ease.

Lord Wynderbroke was in high spirits. He admired Alice more than ever. He admired everything. A faint rumour had got about that something was not very unlikely to be. It did not displease him. He had been looking at diamonds the day before; he was not vexed when that amusing wag, Pokely, who had surprised him in the act, asked him that day, on the Downs, some sly questions on the subject, with an arch glance at beautiful Miss Arden. Lord Wynderbroke pooh-pooh'd this impertinence very radiantly. And now this happy peer, pleased with himself, pleased with everybody, with the flush of a complacent elation on his thin cheeks, was simpering and chatting most agreeably, and commending everything to which his attention was drawn.

In very marked contrast with this happy man was Richard Arden, who talked but little, was absent, utterly out of spirits, and smiled with a palpable effort when he did smile. His conversation with Lady May showed the same uncomfortable peculiarities. It was intermittent and bewildered. It saddened the good lady. Was he ill? or in some difficulty?

Now that she had withdrawn, Richard Arden seemed less attentive to Lord Wynderbroke than to his uncle. In so far as a wight in his melancholy mood could do so, he seemed to have

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laid himself out to please his uncle in those small ways where, in such situations, an anxiety to please can show itself. Once his father's voice had roused him with the intimation, "Richard, Lord Wynderbroke is speaking to you;" and he saw a very urbane smile on his thin lips, and encountered a very formidable glare from his dark eyes. The only subject on which Richard Arden at all brightened up was the defeat of the favourite. Lord Wynderbroke remarked,—

"It seems to have caused a good deal of observation. I saw Hounsley and Crackham, and they shake their heads at it a good deal, and ——"

He paused, thinking that Richard Arden was going to interpose something, but nothing followed, and he continued,—

"And Lord Shillingsworth, he's very well up in all these things, and he seems to think it is a very suspicious affair; and old Sir Thomas Fetlock, who should have known better, has been hit very hard, and says he'll have it before the Jockey Club."

"I don't mind Sir Thomas, he blusters and makes a noise about everything," said Richard Arden; "but it was quite palpable, when the horse showed, he wasn't fit to run. I don't suppose Sir Thomas will do it, but it certainly will be done. I know a dozen men who will sell their horses, if it isn't done. I don't see how any man can take payment of the odds on Dotheboys—I don't, I assure you—till the affair is cleared up: *gentlemen*, of course, I mean; the other people would like the money all the better if it came to them by a swindle. But it certainly can't rest where it is."

No one disputing this, and none of the other gentlemen being authorities of any value upon turf matters, the subject dropped, and others came on, and Richard Arden was silent again. Lord Wynderbroke, who was to pass two or three days at Mortlake, and who had made up his mind that he was to leave that interesting place a *promesso sposo*, was restless, and longed to escape to the drawing-room. So the sitting over the wine was not very long.

Richard Arden made an effort, in the drawing-room, to retrieve his character with Lady May and Miss Maubray, who had been rather puzzled by his hang-dog looks and flagging conversation.

"There are times, Lady May," said he, placing himself on the sofa beside her, "when one loses all faith in the future—when everything goes wrong, and happiness becomes incredible. Then one's wisest course seems to be, to take off one's hat to the good people in this planet, and go off to another."

"Only that I know you so well," said Lady May, "I should tell Reginald—I mean your father—what you say; and I think

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your uncle, there, is a magistrate for the county of Middlesex, and could commit you, couldn't he? for any such foolish speech. Did you observe to-day—you saw him, of course—how miserably ill poor Pindledykes is looking? I don't think, really, he'll be alive in six months."

"Don't throw away your compassion, dear Lady May. Pindledykes has always looked dying as long as I can remember, and on his last legs; but those last legs carry some fellows a long way, and I'm very sure he'll outlive me."

"And what pleasure can a person so very ill as he looks take in going to places like that?"

"The pleasure of winning other people's money," laughed Arden sourly. "Pindledykes knows very well what he's about. He turns his time to very good account, and wastes very little of it, I assure you, in pitying other people's misfortunes."

"I'm glad to see that you and Richard are on pleasanter terms," said David Arden to his brother, as he sipped his tea beside him.

"Egad! we are *not*, though. I hate him worse than ever. Would you oblige me by putting a bit of wood on the fire? I told you how he has treated me. I wonder, David, how the devil you could suppose we were on pleasanter terms!"

Sir Reginald was seated with his crutch-handled stick beside him, and an easy fur slipper on his gouty foot, which rested on a stool, and was a great deal better. He leaned back in a cushioned arm-chair, and his fierce prominent eyes glanced across the room, in the direction of his son, with a flash like a scimitar's.

"There's no good, you know, David, in exposing one's ulcers to strangers—there's no use in plaguing one's guests with family quarrels."

"Upon my word, you disguised this one admirably, for I mistook you for two people on tolerably friendly terms."

"I don't want to plague Wynderbroke about the puppy; there is no need to mention that he has made so much unhappiness. *You* won't, neither will I."

David nodded.

"Something has gone wrong with him," said David Arden, "and I thought you might possibly know."

"Not I."

"I think he has lost money on the races to-day," said David.

"I hope to Heaven he has! I'm glad of it. It will do me good; let him settle it out of his blackguard *post-obit*," snarled Sir Reginald, and ground his teeth.

"If he has been gambling, he has disappointed me. He can, however, disappoint me but once. I had better thoughts of him."

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