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THE BLACK MOTOR CAR

HARRIS BURLAND

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They sprang apart and, turning around, confronted the Earl of Heatherstone.

Frontispiece. Page 164

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The
Black Motor Car

By

HARRIS BURLAND

Author of "Dacobra," "The Princess Thora," Etc.

Illustrations by

CHARLES GRUNWALD

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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THE BLACK MOTOR-CAR

CHAPTER I

THE TEMPTRESS

Mrs. de la Mothe sat alone in her pretty drawing-room in Kensington. A single standard lamp with a fluffy pink shade threw a rose-coloured light on her face. A book lay open on her knees, but it was evident that her thoughts were far away from its contents. She was twining her hands together nervously, and the jewelled rings flashed on her thin white fingers. Every now and then she looked at the little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece.

Marie de la Mothe was a beautiful woman; there were those who thought her the most beautiful woman in the whole wide world. She was not yet thirty, and the contour of her head and features had been pronounced by the most eminent sculptor of the day to be perfect. On this particular evening they seemed almost too perfect—too "icily regular, splendidly null." The face was motionless, save for the large restless eyes, as still as though it had been cut out of a block of marble. She was wont to move through the world with that cold,

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white face. Yet more than one man could tell to his cost how it had softened, and how the tender glow of love had crept into the flashing eyes; aye, and could tell, too, how the features had hardened again as he had pleaded in vain and poured out wild words from a broken heart.

And Marie de la Mothe's vocation in life was to play with hearts, and break her toys when they ceased to amuse her or when they ceased to be profitable. She had been a widow for five years.

Some said that Mr. de la Mothe was still alive; others took him on trust; a few were rather doubtful whether he had ever existed at all. But all agreed on one point—that his widow cherished no particular affection for his memory. She knew the world's opinion of her, and smiled on it contemptuously.

In one sense of the word Mrs. de la Mothe was a "good woman." Mrs. Grundy, in whose eyes there is only one kind of virtue, could have inspected her book of life and found therein no blot of any serious consequence. But judged by a higher and less narrow standard of morality this beautiful woman was bad to the very core. She had never erred through love, yet many had erred through love of her. She moved on, calm and scatheless, through a storm of passions and left behind her a broad track of misery and despair, and even death.

There was no sound in the room but the soft spluttering of the fire in the grate and the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. The door opened, and a neat maid-servant brought in tea. Mrs. de la Mothe rose and

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went over to the window. The rain pattered against the glass. It was a miserable November afternoon. A dull yellow mist shrouded the square on the other side of the road. A line of iron railings and a few gaunt, leafless trees loomed out in the light of the street-lamps. The pavement glistened, and everything seemed to drip as though it had been bathed in tears.

She turned away from the melancholy spectacle and regarded the tea-table with satisfaction. It was like looking from a vision of death to all that made life worth living.

"Draw the blinds and curtains, Lucy," she said quietly, crossing over to the fireside and settling herself in a low chair.

The maid shut out the last dim light of the miserable autumn day, and, moving to the door, stood there as though expecting some further orders.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. de la Mothe said mechanically. "Tell Mrs. Mixon that tea is ready."

In scarcely more than a minute Mrs. Mixon appeared. She was a lady of about fifty and rustled like a withered leaf. In appearance she was tall, angular, and formidable, the personification of respectability, a chaperon *par excellence*, paid in proportion to her severity.

Yet in reality she was a creature as mild as milk, a household drudge, whose work was less noble than that of the scullery maid; for she had to pretend to be that which she could never be—the stern guardian of Mrs. de la Mothe.

She sat down by the tea-table and discoursed with

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feeble persistence. Her employer did not trouble to answer her with more than an interrogative "Yes" or "No," and whenever the conversation grew too brisk she offered her a piece of cake or bread-and-butter. In all cases this proved an effective remedy. Mrs. Mixon ate heartily, and, of course, she could not speak when her mouth was full.

Suddenly there came a violent ring at the bell, and a faint flush came to Mrs. de la Mothe's white cheek. Mrs. Mixon stopped with a piece of cake held close to her mouth, and listened as though she hoped to recognise some voice.

"Whoever can that be, my dear?" she murmured.

The young widow did not reply, but her eyes flashed, and Mrs. Mixon hurriedly thrust the cake into her mouth and took a long gulp of tea.

A few moments passed, and footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the maid ushered a young man into the room. He stood for a moment on the threshold, and frowned slightly as he saw Mrs. Mixon. Then he advanced, smiled, and shook hands with the two ladies.

"You're just in time for some tea, Mr. Porteous," Mrs. de la Mothe said sweetly. "I forget; do you take sugar?"

"No sugar, thanks," the young man replied, seating himself wearily on a straight-backed chair, and laying his hat and gloves on the floor.

"Would you rather have a whisky-and-soda?" she asked. "Yes, I know you would. Just touch the bell."

He laughed, and pressed a small button on the right

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of the fireplace. Mrs. Mixon's face was a study in several subdued shades of disapproval. She had her own opinion of young men who drank whisky-and-soda for tea.

When the servant had brought in a tumbler, a siphon of soda, and a small decanter of whisky, John Porteous poured himself out a drink, and gulped down half of it at a single draught. Mrs. Mixon made a mental note that it was a very strong concoction, even for a young man who was, in her opinion, a confirmed drunkard. Mrs. de la Mothe noticed that the hand trembled as he raised the glass to his lips, and a faint smile of satisfaction crossed her face.

Jack Porteous, the manager of the South Kensington branch of Hetherington's bank, was a tall, bearded, broad-shouldered young fellow of thirty-one, who had risen to his present position by sheer hard work and an extraordinary capacity for management and organisation. His face was deeply lined for so young a man, and those who said that he was scarcely old enough to be in his present position were ignorant of the fact that for the last eight years he had compressed work of two years into every twelve months.

The face was a handsome one, but it was not a pleasant face to look upon, even when it had brightened somewhat after the long draught of whisky-and-soda. A close observer would have said it was the face of a man who had sold all happiness for the sake of success. Yet one woman knew that Jack Porteous was willing to barter all success for love, and that the strong principles

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which had bound him for a lifetime were threads that she could snap at touch.

The three talked of commonplace subjects, and Mrs. Mixon was by courtesy allowed to monopolise as much of the conversation as she chose. She turned it to theatrical matters.

The other two lit cigarettes, and only occasionally expressed a remark. At last Mrs. Mixon caught her employer's eye, and, rising to her feet, expressed a desire to find something that she was sure would interest Mr. Porteous; some old programmes of Drury Lane in 1852. She laboriously explained that they were at the bottom of a large trunk, but that they were things that every young man should see. She asked to be excused. The others raised no objection, Mr. Porteous suggesting that he would be delighted to see anything Mrs. Mixon might possess relating to the theatre. She left the room, closing the door behind her, and feeling that she was earning every penny of the salary Mrs. de la Mothe paid her.

When she had gone Jack Porteous crossed over to the young widow's side, and, seizing her hands in his, pressed them passionately to his lips.

"Maric," he said hoarsely. She leaned a little forward and looked into his eyes. The cold mask had fallen from her features, and her whole face glowed with a tender light. It was now easy to understand why some men had called her the most beautiful woman in all the world.

"Jack," she whispered in a low voice, "my dear old

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Jack," and drawing her hands from his she placed them on his forehead and smoothed back the hair from his brow.

He seized her in his arms and kissed her passionately. Then he suddenly started back as though he had been stung, and buried his face in his hands. The woman leaned back in her chair and frowned.

In fifty previous cases the movement of disgust would have been a source of pleasure to her cruel mind. It denoted the agony of the victim.

But in this particular case Marie de la Mothe had met her match. She had played with love for her own ends, and had conquered. But the battle had been a Pyrrhic victory. She had lost more than she had gained. For the first time in life she was in love, and the knowledge was bitterness to her.

"Well," she said coldly after a pause.

The man lifted his face from his hands. It was haggard and drawn and there were deep lines of pain around the firm mouth. He recovered himself and laughed.

"It's all right," he said in a low voice. "I have them here," and he tapped the breast pocket of his coat.

The woman smiled and held out her hand. He drew out a thick roll of notes and counted them.

"Fifty," he said mechanically, "of a hundred pounds each."

She took them from him and turned them over one by one.

"How long have we got?" she asked abruptly.

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"Perhaps a week," he replied. "Perhaps two or three days; perhaps a bare twenty-four hours."

"They must be turned into gold," she said, "or notes of smaller value."

She handed the packet back to him. He replaced them in his pocket, and, lighting another cigarette, looked away from her to the fire.

"How much have you—have you lent me up to now?" she asked.

"Six thousand three hundred and fifty-five pounds," he replied, still watching the glowing coals.

"You are exact," she said sarcastically. "You evidently have the figures at your finger-ends."

"I am likely to remember the figures," he answered; "every penny has to be accounted for in some way or other."

"Have you included the interest?"

"You have paid me the interest up to date," he answered.

She flushed and rose to her feet imperiously.

"Do you think my love is to be bought?" she cried. "I tell you a millionaire has tried to buy it before now, but he has not had enough money to do so. It certainly could not be bought by you, Jack Porteous."

"No, no," he answered hastily, rising and crossing to her side. "I did not mean that, Marie. I know that you love me. I know that, at any rate, or I would not —oh, my God, you do not realise yet what it means."

She laid her hand upon his arm and looked up into his face.

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"I realise what it means," she said slowly, "and I am going to repay you. You must leave England the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, you must make some excuse—illness, death in the family, anything; but you must leave the day after to-morrow. I have taken you a berth on the *Oroquoya* for Buenos Ayres. Your name is Mr. Hubert Baring."

"But you?"

"I will follow by the next boat a fortnight later. I will join you at the Hôtel Andalusia in Buenos Ayres. Wait for me there. Give me five hundred pounds. I have a few things to settle up before I leave England. Your ticket has taken all my spare cash."

He counted out the notes and handed them to her.

She came toward him, and, placing her arms around his neck, looked pleadingly into his face. He caught her face between his two strong hands, and gazed earnestly into it as though trying to read the truth from her eyes. Then he kissed her passionately.

"I will come, dearest," he said.

She went over to an escritoire, and, taking out an envelope, handed it to him. It was his ticket to Buenos Ayres. He put it in his pocket.

He was like a child in her hands. His career, his honour, his self-respect, were all at her feet, and she had trampled them in the mud. Yet, while she was in his arms, he thought all the world well lost for love.

"You will go the day after to-morrow?" she whis-

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pered. "O heavens, if it should be too late—at any rate, you can conceal yourself till the ship starts. You will, of course, disguise yourself?"

"Yes," he replied, "I shall disguise myself. I shall shave off my beard and moustache."

"And your wife?" she said in a low, hard voice.

He turned away from her and his face whitened.

"My wife?" he repeated slowly, "my wife! Oh, she will be glad." And he laughed. "Her life has been a hell. She has money of her own. She will not starve, but——"

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. She knew what was in his mind. A child branded with its father's shame. She did not wish to hear of it. She tried to stifle the words upon his lips. But he loosed himself gently from her clasp and looked hesitatingly at the door.

"He is too young to know," she said. "They will keep it from him. Why do you think of him? Do you think I am giving up nothing? Have you a thought for me? You are selfish, Jack, selfish. It is my position that should trouble you, not——"

"I shall marry you," he said, and a tender glow of love came into his face. "My darling, I am a brute. You are all the world to me. What else matters so long as you are mine?"

And again he kissed her, and yet again.

A footstep and the rustling of silk were heard in the passage outside. They sprang apart and he seized his hat and gloves as the door opened. Mrs. Mixon

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entered. She looked at both of them, but could read nothing from their faces. Jack Porteous had apparently risen to say "Good-bye."

She produced half a dozen mouldy playbills. He took them from her with a show of interest, and ran his eye over the names. She insisted on his sitting down, and proceeded to give a graphic account of every performance, describing the actors and actresses with such minuteness of detail that it almost seemed as though they were her dearest friends.

Mrs. de la Mothe yawned and closed her eyes.

At last Jack Porteous took advantage of a break in these reminiscences, and said he feared he would have to go. He rose, and said "Good-bye" to Mrs. Mixon. She still had two whole programmes that required explanation and comment. He agreed to call again at an early date, and still further augment his theatrical knowledge of the early fifties.

Mrs. de la Mothe accompanied him to the hall door. She held out her hand, and he raised it to his lips.

"Good-bye, dearest," he said. "I shall go on board the *Oroquoya* the day after to-morrow. You will find me at the Hôtel Andalusia in Buenos Ayres."

"I will not fail you, Jack," she answered. "Good-bye, darling! Be careful for my sake."

"I will be careful," he said slowly, "for your sake."

Then he looked around the empty hall, and kissed her once on the lips. "Till we meet again," he said, hoarsely—"till we meet again!"

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Then he opened the door and passed out into the darkness.

Mrs. de la Mothe watched his tall figure disappear through the curtain of mist and rain. Then she returned to the drawing-room, and there in the firelight she planned out a fairy edifice of future happiness, where all the world would be glad with love. The sordid past had faded from her mind, and, looking forward, she only saw the glorious sunrise of a new life in a new land.

Little did she dream what fate had in store for both of them. She did not remember that the wages of sin is death.

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CHAPTER II

THE HAND OF THE DEAD

When Jack Porteous had gone a dozen yards he looked back through the fog and saw a dark figure silhouetted against a patch of lights. Then he heard the hall-door close, and, turning up the collar of his coat, he trudged homeward along the wet pavement.

Every now and then two bright yellow eyes came out of the mist and glared at him, and a husky voice hailed him from the darkness. But he turned a deaf ear to the persuasions of the cabmen, and continued his course on foot. He needed physical exercise. His brain was a whirlpool of tumultuous thoughts, and he did not wish to be alone with them in the quiet of a hansom. He liked to feel the rain against his face and to grope his way through the cold fog unaided. The very physical discomfort was a tonic to his overwrought nerves.

But nothing could subdue the fire that was burning in his brain. The present was a confusion of wild joy and vain regret. The future was uncertain—now bright with hope, now dark with fear. The past alone was definite—a clearly cut record of dishonour and infidelity.

He saw it all before him. The sordid dulness of his home life. The daily quarrels with his wife. The first

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meeting with Mrs. de la Mothe. The fascination of the woman. The desire to save her from being turned out penniless into the streets. The first theft. The continual cry for money on some pretext or other. The other thefts, made easy by the responsibility of his position. The gradual passing of friendship into love. The climax—reached on that very night. How clearly he saw it all! How plain was the disgrace of it all; and yet—he felt that he had received more than he had given.

At last he reached his own home. The very exterior, solid, dingy, and respectable, was repulsive to him. In his present mood it seemed to him that he was like a man who, stumbling through the darkness and seeking for light, has suddenly run crash into a blank wall. He paused at the foot of the steps leading up to the pillared portico, and stood irresolute. A light shone in a bedroom window on the second floor. The rest of the house was in darkness. He remembered, with an unreasonable feeling of irritation, that his wife was very economical with the gas. The house seemed even more cheerless than the wet fog outside. The very street-lamp seemed a gay illumination compared to the thin yellow glow from the bedroom window. Even the hall gas had not been lit. The kitchen was in darkness. The cat, mewing pitifully in the area below, seemed to represent the entire life of the household.

He looked once more at the severe frontage of the house. There was the sound of a heavy step in the distance. Probably it was a policeman; no one else would

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move so leisurely on such a miserable night. He did not wish to be seen. Hitherto, the policeman had been a friend watching over his interests as a householder. But to-night Porteous looked at him in a new light. The natural enemy of a thief. The symbol of the laws of society which he had outraged.

He turned abruptly on his heel, and walked down the street. Then he hailed a passing hansom and drove to his club. There he had a hot bath, and dressed leisurely for dinner. His present life necessitated his keeping a suit of dress-clothes away from home. When he came down to the smoking-room he ordered a sherry-and-bitters, and lit a cigarette. He nodded to a few acquaintances, and sat down. The flames roared cheerily, and he lay back in the deep, morocco-covered chair with a sigh of relief. The outlook seemed more rosy in the warmth and light. For the last few years this club had represented his home life. Here he had sought rest from the nagging tongue of his wife. Here he had been able to think out his ambitious plans for the future. He smiled grimly as he thought of the splendid castle he had built. It had proved but a house of cards, and a woman's finger had sent it toppling to the ground.

He enjoyed his dinner thoroughly that night. The club was famous for its cooking, and its wines were superb. Afterward a friend came over to his table, and the two men chatted over their coffee and cigars. The friend suggested a music-hall and the bank manager fell in readily with the idea. It was his last evening as Jack Porteous. On the morrow he intended to have his

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beard and moustache shaved off. From that hour he would be Mr. Hubert Baring. He had decided to take a room at the Cecil and have everything sent there. A letter to the bank that night would explain his absence. He would enclose the keys of the safe. His assistant would see that everything went smoothly. No suspicion would arise in the minds of any of his subordinates. He was known to be an upright man, and one with whom it was advisable to keep on good terms. The whole of the next day would be spent in completing his purchases and making arrangements for his voyage to South America.

He had resolved to cash two thousand pounds' worth of the notes openly at the Bank of England, and get rid of as many of the others as he could at the various shops.

The whole scheme was simple and apparently safe. It would be hard to trace the man who had cashed the notes, a week after he had sailed. Yes, to-morrow he would be Hubert Baring.

It would be the first day of his new life. But to-night he was Jack Porteous, and he made up his mind to enjoy himself.

The two men decided to go to the Empire, and they passed a very pleasant evening in the lounge. Afterward they drove back to the club and stayed there for over an hour. Then Jack Porteous took a cab home.

The rain had stopped, but the fog had grown more dense, and the drive was long and wearisome.

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At last the cabman found the house. Porteous paid him handsomely, and mounted the steps with unsteady feet. He had had a considerable amount to drink that evening.

The house was in absolute darkness. The fog was so dense that he could only just see the nearest street-lamp. It was no more than a dim yellow circle of light. He heard the muffled beat of the horse's hoofs as his cab drove slowly away. He leaned against the pillar, and listened till the sound died away in the distance. Then all was silence.

For quite five minutes he did not move. A sudden and unconquerable fear had seized him. He felt that he dare not enter the house. In his own drunken imagination the dark walls seemed like a tomb. His soul cried out for light. The fog was like a funeral pall. He turned and fixed his eyes on the one yellow glimmer below. It suggested a distant lighthouse—a hope and guide for the storm-tossed mariner. He cowered against the pillar, and clutched the stone with one hand.

Then suddenly from the distance came the sounds of a piano playing "Home, Sweet Home" with infinite variations. The music broke the spell that was upon him. He drew himself upright, and listened. Then he laughed bitterly and looked at the wall of stone that towered above him. Home, sweet home!

He found his latch-key and lit a match, sheltering it with his hand. Something brushed against his feet, and, looking down he saw a blotched mass of fur, and heard the faint mew of a cat. He kicked out with all

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his force, and the wretched animal rolled screaming down the steps.

He put the key into the lock and opened the door. But once again the fear of some unknown evil seized him, and he clung to the side of the doorway, his teeth chattering with terror. He cursed himself for a fool, and staggering into the hall, closed the door behind him. A single spot of light glowed above his head. It was the hall lamp turned down to a mere speck of flame. He reached up a trembling hand, fumbled for a few minutes with the tape, and finally succeeded in extinguishing the light.

He reeled back against the wall, and the perspiration streamed from every pore in his body. It seemed to him hours since he had seen the light. He listened attentively and thought he heard something move far up on one of the landings. The clock in the hall ticked loudly, and the beating of his heart seemed to keep time with it. He idly wondered what would happen if the clock suddenly stopped.

He opened his lips to call out. He had often crept quietly upstairs after returning from his club, so that his wife should not wake and upbraid him. He now longed to hear her voice as he stood there in the darkness. He moved forward, and purposely stumbled in the hope of arousing her. The noise echoed through the house, and he waited eagerly for a door to open on the landing above. But nothing stirred.

Then he pulled himself together, and, striking a match, looked carefully around, as though he expected

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to see something. At the far end of the hall the movement of a dim figure caught his eye. Then he laughed, for he saw that the figure also held a light, and was merely his own reflection in the looking-glass.

He realised the absurdity of his terror, and, reaching up his hand, turned on the gas and put a match to it.

In a moment the hall was flooded with light, and fear, to a large extent, vanished with the darkness. He lit a candle which stood on the hall table and began to ascend the stairs. Then he suddenly recollected the letter to the bank, and, retracing his steps, crossed the hall, went down a short passage, and opened the door of his study. As he entered, a cold draught of air swept across the room and blew out the candle. He heard a rustling of some papers as they fluttered to the floor, and he started nervously at the sound.

The hall lamp was hidden by the angle of the passage, and only a faint, reflected light stole through the open door.

He could, however, just see the table in the centre of the room, and, moving forward, he placed the candlestick upon it, while he felt in his pocket for another match.

Then he remembered the draught, and making his way back to the door, closed it. The room was now in absolute darkness. Something rustled by the window.

He found his match-box and struck a light. Then he gave a start of surprise. Some one was sitting at his desk by the window. It was a woman, with her head sunk forward in her arms.

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He lit the candle and advanced toward the silent figure. It was his wife. She was apparently asleep, for she did not move. She was asleep, but her sleep was the sleep of death.

For a moment he stood in hesitation. He thought of the proverb, "Let sleeping dogs lie." If he roused his wife he knew what he might expect to hear from her lips. Yet he could scarcely with decency leave her there until she awoke of her own accord. He resolved to write and post his letter to the bank. Then he could wake her from her sleep, and go off to bed before she thoroughly realised who had roused her.

He walked up tip-toe to the desk, and took the ink-pot and a pen over to the table. As he did so his hand touched one of the silver candlesticks. It was still hot. The candle had burned down to the socket. He looked round for some writing-paper. There was none to be seen, but he knew that there was plenty in the second drawer from the top on the left hand side of the desk.

He sank quietly on one knee, and opened the drawer. His head was close to his wife's shoulder. He took out a sheet of paper and an envelope. Then for the first time he noticed the complete silence. He held his breath and listened. There was not a single sound but the beating of his own heart. A sudden fear seized him. He tried to see his wife's face. It was buried in her arms. He rose suddenly to his feet, and, taking the candle from the table, thrust it close to her and scrutinised her narrowly. She was absolutely still. There was no movement or sound of breathing.

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CHAPTER III

THE BREAKING OF THE CHAIN

No one answered the bell in response to Porteous' summons. It was now 2.30, and the servants were fast asleep at the top of the house. With an effort the man roused himself to action. Staggering to his feet, he left the room, passed out of the hall door, and groped his way through the fog to the nearest doctor.

The two men returned together. The doctor pronounced life to be extinct. He had attended Mrs. Porteous before, and said he knew her heart was weak. Death was due to syncope. Did her husband know of anything that would have been likely to give a great shock to her system?

Porteous replied mechanically that he was not aware of anything of the sort. He said nothing of the life the two had led for the last three years—the endless quarrels, the sullen endurance of each other's society, the mutual neglect, the indifference, growing gradually into positive hatred. All this would have had but little effect on a hard and callous woman, such as he had imagined his wife to be. But in the last hour his eyes had been opened to the terrible truth. She had loved him to the last. She had, perhaps, through all these years, battled in vain with her own unhappy temperament

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and lived in the hope of regaining her husband's love. His mind went swiftly over the past and he thought he could now recall certain half-hearted advances on her part, advances made with a genuine hope of reconciliation, but so subdued by the sense of wrongs she had suffered that they were scarcely more than a faint intimation of the spirit that prompted them. Such a life must have been a hell to a woman who loved, and who yet was unable to overcome her sense of resentment. Such a life might well kill a woman with a weak heart. And John Porteous did not look the doctor in the face, when he told him that he knew of nothing that could have caused her death.

The servants were roused, and Mrs. Porteous was carried to her bedroom. The doctor left, and Porteous stayed on alone in the study. He lit a dozen candles and made the room a blaze of light. Then he fetched sticks and paper from the kitchen and re-lit the fire. It blazed up cheerfully with the aid of a little lamp oil, and in less than an hour the room had assumed a more comfortable aspect. But to John Porteous the darkness and cold still lay upon it. The thin veil of fog still hung over everything, and in the chair by the desk still sat the shadow of death.

He crouched close to the fire for warmth. He turned his back upon the window. There was much to be thought of that night, much even to be done. The hand of God had struck, and had struck hard. The blow had fallen in the very centre of his dishonourable plans and scattered them in pieces to the four winds of

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Heaven. He had robbed the bank and could not repay the money. His wife was dead, and he could not leave England until she had been buried. Then there was the boy. It would be impossible to desert a motherless and helpless child. Yet his passage was taken on the *Oroquoya* and Marie de la Mothe—he clenched his hands in agony. But out of the chaos of his thoughts came one single idea, clear cut and definite. He could not marry Marie de la Mothe. He owed that at least to the woman who was dead, the woman he had once loved, the woman who had died through his hand.

Yet sentiment would have to be thrust aside if he was to escape the clutches of the law. Sentiment would not weigh with the bank, and the discovery was the matter of a few days, perhaps of a few hours. He could replace nearly £4,500, but the £6,800 had gone as surely as though the money lay at the bottom of the sea. It was the price he had paid for his infidelity, and he had not even yet received that which he had bought. The whole situation was dark and horrible. He could not turn back. It was impossible to go forward. Yet to stand still meant exposure, disgrace, imprisonment—perhaps a long term of penal servitude, for the law does not deal kindly with a man of high position who has abused his trust.

All through the night he sat in his chair, and tried to think of some way out of the difficulties that beset him. But his thoughts were clouded by the dark shadow that had crept into the room, and he found it impossible to reason out any clear plan of action. He

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could not forget what he had seen by the desk. Every scheme for the future faded into darkness, where nothing could be distinguished but the silent figure with bowed head and folded arms, and through the silence rang the music of a single refrain:

"Believe me if all those endearing young charms
That I gaze on so fondly to-day."

The significance of the words was terrible. Every note of the music was a pang that wrung nerve, and heart, and brain.

Only once did he rise from his chair through all that long and terrible night; then with a sudden impulse he crossed over to the desk, and, unlocking one of the drawers, took out a revolver. For some minutes he stood irresolute. He did not fear death, but he feared the imputation of cowardice which death would bring. A fierce battle raged in his mind. With a set purpose he kept his eyes on the spot where his wife had died. He intensified the horror of his position by every means in his power, by every thought that would bring home to him the necessity of death. Thrice he raised the weapon to his forehead, and thrice his arm sunk slowly back to his side. The photograph of his only son stood on his desk and he could not keep his eyes off it. The baby face laughed at him across the misty flood which swam before his eyes. Yet it was like the face of an accusing angel, and he saw it age with misery and despair, and he heard a voice crying out, "I am the son of a felon and a suicide." Finally, he thrust the revolver back into the

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drawer, and crossing over to the fireplace, flung himself into a chair.

When dawn broke, his eyes were closed in a brief sleep, and his white and haggard face looked horrible in the grey morning light. One of the servants found him there, and the noise of her footsteps roused him from his slumber. Another day had broken, and the light was more terrible than the darkness had been.

He stumbled upstairs, shaved, had a cold bath, and changed his clothes. The ordinary duties of civilised life in some measure restored him to his senses. He ate a poor breakfast, lit a cigar, and drove round to the bank. He reflected in an agony of shame that a real excuse for absence now lay ready to his hand.

From there he drove to the house of Marie de la Mothe. He had only one clear idea for the future in his mind, that he must break all the chains that bound him to this woman. He owed that at least to his dead wife. He was now free to marry whom he chose. The bonds that he had found so irksome had been cut once and for all. Yet the memory of them had become stronger than the reality had ever been. He felt that it was now impossible for him to marry this woman. He had killed his wife by his neglect. This was the least atonement he could make for his crime.

With this idea strong in his mind, he rang the bell of 46, Carey Terrace, and was shown into the drawing-room. The maid lit the fire and went to find her mistress. In a minute or two she brought back word that

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Mrs. de la Mothe would see him in about half an hour, if he cared to wait. He nodded assent. He did not care to wait, but it was necessary for him to do so. He required all his strength for the battle that lay before him, a battle not only with the woman who loved him, but with his own passions and desires. Every moment of delay was against him. His purpose was firm and unalterable. But as each minute passed he realised more and more how hard he would have to fight for victory. The very room was antagonistic to his purpose. The little presents he had given this woman were dotted about on tables and shelves. Each one of them recalled some tender memory.

In an hour's time Marie de la Mothe appeared. She looked radiantly beautiful, and had evidently spared no time nor trouble over her toilet. She was, as usual, half an hour late. As a rule he chaffed her about her unpunctuality, but to-day he rose to his feet and took her hand in silence. His face was white and haggard. She glanced at him uneasily. She could see at once that his manner toward her had changed.

"What has happened?" she said abruptly.

"The worst," he replied, not daring to look her straight in the face.

"The bank," she cried, laying hold of his arm. "Impossible! You told me twenty-four hours at least—and why are you here; why are you not——?"

"It is not the bank, Marie," he said in a low voice. She loosed his arm and looked keenly into his face.

"Not the bank!" she exclaimed, "what is it, then?

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Why do you look away from me? What is it? Something you are afraid to tell me?"

"I have come to say good-bye, Marie," he replied, "I may not see you again."

Her face grew pale. Her eyes flashed dangerously and she laughed.

"Good-bye," she repeated. "Yes, yes, of course," she added nervously. "How you frightened me. You go to-morrow, but in a month's time—you silly, old Jack, it is only a month after all," and she clung lovingly to his shoulder.

"It is for longer than that, Marie," he said, slowly. Then he swung around sharply and her hands dropped from his shoulder.

"What has happened?" she cried.

"My wife is dead," he answered in a low voice.

"Your wife? Dead?" she repeated. "You have not——" And she shrank from him with a look of horror.

"I have killed her," he said in a hard voice; "you may well shrink from me. In the eyes of the law I am not a murderer. But I have killed her, as surely as if I had shot or poisoned her."

The woman's face brightened. "I do not understand you, Jack," she said. "How did she die? Why do you say that you have killed her?"

"She died a natural death," he replied. "She died of a broken heart."

A sudden look of fury came into the woman's face, but it passed as quickly as it came. She grew very

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white and her lips were pressed closely together. She understood. Both were silent for quite a minute. Then Marie de la Mothe came up to him and laid one hand upon his arm.

"Jack," she whispered, "you are free."

"I am free," he replied mechanically.

"Why do you say the worst has happened?" He was silent. "How can it be the worst when you are free?" she continued. "You did not love your wife, and she—you have often told me of your home life." She looked up into his face pleadingly. But he dared not meet her eyes and he stared fixedly at the window. He had resolved that nothing should turn him from his purpose. Yet he could not bring himself to say that which had to be said.

"Why do you not answer?" she murmured. "Are you not glad that you are free?"

Last night's scene flashed across his brain—the figure in the chair, the awful silence. Glad! Oh, God, the mockery of it all. He clenched his hands and walked away to the window. Then he came back to Marie de la Mothe, who faced him with flashing eyes.

"Marie," he said, "do you not understand that what happened last night has made it impossible for us to marry?"

"I should have thought," she replied quietly, "that it has removed the only barrier to our marriage."

"Do you not understand?" he continued, scarcely heeding her interruption. "Well, I will try and make

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it clear to you," and he told her briefly the story of the night before.

She listened almost, as it seemed, impassively, for one whose whole fate was bound up in the narrative. When he had finished, she laughed.

"I understand," she said, "you miserable coward! You do not love me. You have been acting a lie. You have—bah! why should I talk of it? You have made the first excuse that came ready to your hand. It is a poor one, Jack, a very poor one. And I——" She sank into a chair, and, burying her face in her hands, sobbed passionately.

He came to her side and laid his hand upon her shoulder. The struggle within him was terrible. Well he knew that if he lost, his whole life would be too ghastly to endure. He knew that the memory of the night before would hold him to the day of his death.

"Marie," he said tenderly, "I love you still. But—but this has risen between us. I love you, and it is that which will be my punishment. I have much to atone for; and then there is my child."

She did not look up, but her whole body was shaken with sobs.

"My child is motherless," he continued. "I have wronged him enough already. I cannot leave England until my wife is buried. And any moment I may be arrested. He is the son of a thief."

"Why do you not leave to-morrow, and take him with you?" she broke in, raising a tear-stained face from her hands.

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"I cannot go until my wife is buried," he said doggedly.

"Why not?"

"I cannot go," he repeated.

"You mean you will not?"

"I cannot go," he said sternly. "I have some decency left in me."

She came close up to him and grasped him by the arm.

"You must go," she said slowly.

"I intend to stay."

He had made up his mind on this point, and nothing could move him now. If by going he could have saved his child from shame he would have, perhaps, yielded. But it was merely a question of his own punishment. Whether he paid the penalty of his crime, or escaped from justice, his child's position would be the same. He would be the son of a common felon. For his own sake it would be best to go. But he thrust all thought of self aside.

"I intend to stay," he repeated. "I have made my plans. The funeral will take place in three days' time. It is possible I shall not be found out for a week. Directly the funeral is over I shall leave England."

"Alone?" the woman said, in a tender voice.

"With my child." His voice trembled and the woman was quick to notice his emotion. Without a word she flung her arms about his neck, and burst into tears.

"Marie, Marie," he whispered, "it is not because I do not love you that I do this. I was ready to give up everything for you, to leave my wife, to sacrifice my

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"Go, I tell you, you cur," and she pointed to the door.

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honour. But what has happened has risen between us like a cloud. It is better for both of us to part. We can never be happy with this shadow upon us. I am a murderer, and I have killed a woman who loved me."

"Not as I love you," she cried, seizing his left hand in hers. "Do you remember when I gave you this ring?" It was a single large opal in a plain gold setting. He wore it on his third finger. He remembered well when she had given it to him. He had sworn never to take it from his hand, and to love her to the day of his death.

"I remember," he said solemnly, "and I will wear it always. But after to-day I will never see you again." She broke away from his clasp and faced him with flushed cheeks and eyes that blazed through their hot tears.

"You can go," she cried. He stood irresolute. "Go, I tell you," she repeated. "You cur," and she pointed to the door. He raised his eyes and read the truth in her face. Her love had turned to the fierce hatred of a woman who had been scorned.

He moved toward the door. When he reached it, he stood for a moment irresolute. The woman held her breath, and stared at him with parted lips. If he would only come back to her, and kiss her, and say good-bye, she might yet move him from his purpose. But Jack Porteous knew how weak he was in this woman's hands.

"Good-bye, Marie," he said in a low voice.

He did not even turn his head. He was afraid, and slunk out of the door like a beaten hound. Marie de la

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Mothe moved a step forward and words of entreaty were on her lips. But in a moment she stamped out this last spark of love, and walking over to the fireplace, rang the bell.

A minute later she heard the hall door close. She went to the window and watched the tall figure walk down the street. He did not look back.

Then a sudden burst of fury seized her. She picked up a gold and tortoise-shell paper-knife and, breaking it in half, threw the pieces in the fire. It had been a gift from her lover.

Then she tore the pearl necklace from her throat and stamped it under her foot. Then she moved round the room slowly and deliberately, and, seizing everything he had ever given her, she dashed them one after the other into the fireplace, and beat them into shapeless and broken débris with a poker.

Then she flung herself on the sofa, and lay there with a white face and tearless eyes, staring at the fire until the whole room seemed bathed with blood-red flames. Then suddenly she rose to her feet and laughed. An idea had come to her.

"He shall suffer for this," she cried aloud. "My God! how he shall suffer!"

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CHAPTER IV

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE

Fortune favored Jack Porteous during the next two days, and all his arrangements for leaving the country were carried out satisfactorily.

Three hours after he had left Marie de la Mothe he discovered that it was practically certain his defalcations would not be discovered for at least a fortnight, and the terror of immediate detection was removed. He was also lucky in being able to transfer his berth on the *Oroquoya* to a steamer sailing the next week.

But the question of his child presented many difficulties. He had to decide whether to take the boy with him or leave him behind in the care of some relatives. It was a hard struggle for the wretched man. He was devoted to his son, and he realised that if they parted at all the parting would have to be forever. He could not claim the child in after years and brand him with his father's shame.

For a whole night he fought out a silent battle with himself. It was the night before his wife's funeral. Her body lay in the next room. The lid of the coffin had been screwed down and he knew that he could never see her face again. But that face still lived in the features of her child.

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All night he lay awake and stared into the darkness. But when the cold grey light of morning came he had made up his mind. His atonement had to be final and complete. His own feelings had to be sacrificed. The child must never see its father again, must never even know its father's name.

The day of the funeral was cold and bleak. A bitter wind blew from the north and drove a few scattered flakes of snow across the churchyard. John Porteous listened to the burial service with a face of stone. Not a muscle moved nor an eyelid quivered. To an ordinary spectator it would have seemed that he was merely a respectful mourner, perhaps some distant relative of the deceased, who had been left some money, and who had attended the funeral as a formal mark of respect.

The little boy stood by his side with a frightened look in his large grey eyes. He barely understood what had happened, but his childish mind was terrified at the solemnity and gloom of the proceedings.

It was only when the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and Porteous had taken a last look at it before the earth had covered it up, that he showed any signs of emotion, and lifting his child up in his arms, he kissed him. No one guessed that he meant that kiss for his dead wife, and that it sealed the resolution of atonement.

The only sister of Mrs. Porteous was present at the funeral. Her husband, who held a small living in Essex, had conducted the burial service. Both were staying the night in London. On the way back from

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the cemetery the Rev. George Behag suggested that the widower and his child should return with them to his vicarage and spend a week in the country. The change would do both of them good, and would help in some way to take them out of their grief. Mrs. Behag warmly seconded the proposal. In appearance she was a plain, hard-featured woman, and her general manner was a little forbidding to those who did not know the kindness of heart that lay under the somewhat rough exterior.

She had no children of her own, and this had soured her life. But all her maternal instincts were roused on behalf of the motherless child, who sat beside her in the dark carriage, silent, with wide open eyes, wondering where his mother had gone to, yet not daring to ask his father for a solution of the problem that puzzled his little brain.

John Porteous, in spite of the mist of bitter and vain regret which clouded his thoughts, saw his way clear before him. He replied that business would unfortunately keep him in town, but that he would be very grateful if they would take charge of his child for a few days. As a matter of fact the offer only anticipated his own wishes in the matter. He could secretly leave England while his son was away, and write a short note imploring Mrs. Behag to take the lad under her charge, bring him up as her own son, and never let him know his father's name.

When he went to bed that night he fell on his knees and prayed. It was many years since he had asked

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anything of his God, but that night he besought forgiveness for his sins, and prayed that the punishment might not fall on the head of his innocent child.

The next morning the Rev. George Behag and his wife arranged to leave Liverpool Street by the 11:40. John Porteous did not go to the bank that morning. He wanted to have the last few hours with the child, whom, in all probability, he would never see again.

After breakfast he took the little lad into his study. The child was excited at the idea of leaving London, and his father was loth to damp his jubilant spirits. However, Porteous found it impossible to smile in that room. He had purposely chosen it as the place to say good-bye. There, at any rate, his purpose would not be likely to falter. The dark shadow that lay upon his face did not escape the keen observation of the large, childish eyes.

After a while the two talked and played together as if nothing out of the common were about to happen. But by degrees the laughing smile died from the child's face. He threw down his jumping dog, the wonderful black animal that reared impulsively on its hind legs at the mere pressure of the thumb on an India-rubber ball, and came up to his father's side.

"Where's mummy?" he said plaintively.

"She's gone away, Dickie," the wretched man replied.

"When will she come back, papa?"

"She is not coming back, Dickie."

The child clapped his hands. "Mummy's gone to

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the country," he cried joyfully. "I will see her to-day?" The man did not answer.

"To-day, perhaps," the child repeated, a little doubtfully.

"Not to-day, Dickie, but some day. Mamma has gone on a long journey. I told you so before, Dickie."

"Yes, yes, papa, but Uncle George lives an awful way off, miles and miles and miles. Perhaps——"

"Not to-day, Dickie. Some day you will see her, if you are good."

"But, papa——"

The man seized the child and kissed him passionately, stifling the question on his lips. Then he took him on his knee and talked to him about the strange and beautiful things he would see in the country—the cows, the horses, the pigs.

"Pigs," the child asked excitedly. "Real pigs?"

"Yes, Dickie, real pigs that grunt, so," and he imitated the animal to the best of his ability.

The child's mind was wholly occupied in listening to the delightful sound. The pig represented to him the highest form of animal existence. But even the pig palled at last.

He called for other animals, and Porteous gave each of them in turn, running through the whole gamut of the farm-yard.

He was imitating the quack of a duck, when there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered.

"Two gentlemen to see you, sir."

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"I cannot see any one now, Mary," he replied. "Ask them to look in again. Who are they?"

"They gave no name, sir, but they said their business was important."

"Please ask them who they are and what they want. I cannot see any one unless it is on a very urgent matter."

The servant left the room.

Porteous walked over to the window and stared idly into the street. Then he suddenly started, and his face grew very white. Two policemen were standing at the corner half a dozen yards to the right of him. There was nothing unusual in that. But a hundred yards further down the street to the left there was another policeman, and his eyes were fixed on the window. John Porteous moved quickly away and glanced at his child. Then he laughed. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." It was only a mere coincidence. It is not unusual to see policemen in a London street. It is not extraordinary for one of them to be looking at a window.

"Quack, quack," said the child in a piping voice, and waited anxiously for his father to resume the pleasing sound.

The maid re-entered the room.

"The gentlemen say they must see you, sir," she said; "they have come on business from the bank."

"Their names?" he asked.

Before the servant could reply, two men pushed past her into the room. They were both strangers. One of them kept his hands in his pockets.

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"We should like a word with you, Mr. Porteous," said one of them, and then looked at the servant.

"You may go, Mary," he replied, "and take Master Dick with you."

"No, no, papa," yelled the child. He was picked up kicking and screaming, and carried forcibly from the room. Porteous went to his desk, and half opened one drawer, as though he intended to look for something. Then he turned round to the two men.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said. One of them stepped forward and produced a paper.

"John Porteous," he said, "I arrest you in the name of the Queen, on a charge of embezzlement and forgery. Do you wish the warrant read to you?"

"You need not trouble," Porteous replied. "I have no doubt that it is in order, and that you have the authority to act on it. Unless, indeed, you are playing a practical joke on me. Doubtless there has been some mistake."

"We have a cab outside the door," the other man said, jingling something in his pocket, "will you come quietly, or must——"

Porteous stealthily moved his hand toward the half-open drawer, but before he could slip his fingers into it he found himself covered by a revolver.

"Close that drawer," the man said sharply, "the game is up. Edwards, put on the handcuffs."

Porteous closed the drawer and buried his face in his hands. Resistance was useless. He knew now why there were three policemen in the street below him.

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Edwards advanced toward him, the handcuffs clinking as he walked. Porteous raised his head.

"I will come quietly," he said. "My wife was buried yesterday. My little boy is going away with some relatives to-day. I expect them here every minute. Let there be no scene. See here!" He locked the drawer and threw the key in the fireplace.

"Very well, sir," the man replied. He had a wife and child of his own. He realised the pathos of the scene, the arrest of the man the day after his wife's funeral.

"May I write a line to my brother-in-law?"

"Certainly, but I must read it."

"You can read it."

"Very well, sir, you can write."

John Porteous took a sheet of paper and hurriedly wrote a few lines to the Rev. George Behag.

"DEAR GEORGE:

"I am called away on urgent business. Please take Dickie away with you. Will write later.

"JACK PORTEOUS."

The sergeant read it and smiled. "Urgent business," he repeated. "Ha! ha! very good."

"My child," said Porteous, in a low voice, "may I see him?"

"Certainly. Edwards, ring the bell."

A minute or two later the servant entered. Porteous told her to bring the child down again. When the boy came, his father took him on his knee and kissed him.

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The men turned their backs and examined the pictures on the walls.

"Dickie," said the wretched man, "you will have to go in a few minutes. You will be a good boy with your uncle?"

"Yes, papa," the child answered, "and when will you come?"

"Later on, Dickie, later on."

"In a few days?"

"Perhaps, Dickie. Good-bye, my boy."

"Good-bye, papa." Porteous clasped the little child in his arms, kissed him passionately, and set him down on the floor.

"Now, run along, laddie," he said. The boy trotted across the floor, then turned as he reached the door.

"What do the fowls say, papa? I'se forgotten."

"Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck," Porteous replied, "and cock-a-doodle-doo. Good-bye, Dickie."

The boy laughed and clapped his hands. Then he vanished.

"Are you ready, sir?" said Sergeant Scott.

"I am ready."

. . . . . .

Three weeks later John Porteous was sentenced to fourteen years' penal servitude. The judge found no extenuating circumstances. A man of high position had abused the confidence placed in him. The prisoner could not even plead poverty as an excuse.

The money had not been taken to save a home from ruin, nor to replace losses incurred in a moment of

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reckless speculation. It had been taken deliberately and consistently for some purpose which the prisoner declined to disclose.

The judge had no doubt but that the prisoner had been keeping up a second establishment. He laid particular stress on the fact that the anonymous letter which had put the bank on the scent of the fraud was in a woman's handwriting.

All attempts to discover the writer had failed. This was clearly a case where a man's own sin had found him out, and where the woman, for some unknown motive, had perpetrated a swift and terrible revenge.

Through all the summing up, John Porteous stood white and silent, with his hands on the rail of the dock. He alone knew who had written the letter, which had brought all his plans crashing down about his head.

He did not wish the world to know. From false motives of honour he hugged the secret to his breast. He did not then realise how in the long years to come that secret would eat away the best part of his soul and heart and brain, and leave an empty house for all the devils that come up to earth from hell.

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CHAPTER V

HEATHERSTONE HALL

Heatherstone Hall, the seat of the Right Honourable Earl of Heatherstone, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., Privy Councillor and one time Minister at the Court of Rome, is, as most tourists know, one of the show-places of Essex.

It stands on the summit of a small hill, and its great west front, six hundred feet in length, looks over a finely timbered park and across several miles of undulating and wooded country. Behind it the ground slopes gently down to a high stone wall. Beyond that lies the main road running northward into Suffolk, and beyond that a creek, and beyond that again a waste of marshland stretching to the sea.

Heatherstone Hall itself was built by the first Lord Heatherstone in 1730, and replaced a smaller but more picturesque building of red brick, which had served as a home for the family since the days of Queen Elizabeth. It was of white stone and shone as a landmark for miles around, and even far out at sea the sailors on the small vessels that passed up and down the coast could see the light of the rising sun on its long line of windows.

Inside, everything was on the grand scale. The first Earl had spent most of his life in a royal palace, where

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he had discovered many ways of making money, and his views of a house, suitable for a private gentleman, had been modelled on the ideas of kings. The reception-rooms were enormous, and so numerous that half of them were only used once or twice a year.

The visitor who was allowed to wander through them on payment of one shilling when the family was away, grew heartily sick of looking at pictures and objects of art. It was almost as bad as a day at the Louvre. One room, a huge chamber of gold and marble, was styled "the Throne room." George I. once held a court in this regal apartment.

But the name was a standing jest with the Heatherstones' neighbours, who lost no opportunity of poking fun at the family's pretensions to almost royal state. Everything was in keeping with the splendour of the house. The steward would have made an excellent lord high chamberlain. There was a master of the horse, and a mistress of the robes—a young acting manager, invited to bring his whole company down to the private theatre, had irreverently styled her "the wardrobe mistress."

Such was the home of the Heatherstones. A family of great wealth, but of pride out of all proportion to their greatness. For if the truth be told, the family intellect never again came up to the high standard set by the first Earl.

His successors were men of position and importance. Many of them held high offices of state. There were no fools or spendthrifts in the family. They were all

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English gentlemen of culture and sound common-sense, but they never rose to the height of genius.

They were solid and hard-headed, but commonplace. Such men are the ballast of the empire, but it is left to men of a different breed to steer it through the stormy seas of foreign politics.

. . . . . .

One glorious summer's day, twenty years after the events narrated in the last chapter, Lord Heatherstone was giving one of his three annual garden-parties.

Lady Heatherstone was a confirmed invalid, and had not left her room for two years, and the duties of hostess devolved on Lady Agnes Cliffe, Lord Heatherstone's only daughter, by a former wife.

The party was, as Lord Harry Quy dryly observed to Miss Cynthia Fox-Stanton, only a semi-state function, and Lord Harry had come in a flannel suit and panama hat.

Yet it was no ordinary entertainment. It was, in fact, semipolitical in character. A bye-election of unusual importance was agitating the whole of the eastern part of the county.

Lord Heatherstone represented Toryism in its most solid and uncompromising aspect. It is true that his great ancestor had been a Whig, but, as he explained to his friends, a Whig in the time of George I. was a power in the land, and the cause was worthy of the attention of a gentleman.

Only two classes of people had been asked to the

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party, those whose views were unmistakably of the right sort, and those who had no views at all.

The latter were, of course, open to reasonable argument. Lord Harry Quy, the young man who refused to take the garden-party seriously, had been chosen by Lord Heatherstone to represent the Conservative hopes of the district. He was a younger son of the Marquis of Gorehaven, whose estates joined the north side of the Heatherstone property, and was a general favourite in the county.

A genial, careless young sportsman was Lord Harry Quy, and his chief recommendation to parliamentary honours lay in the fact that he was not likely to do anything startling, and that he was a scratch golfer at St. Andrew's.

His career at Oxford had been a brilliant one. He had been president of the Union and president of the O. U. D. S. He had rowed No. 4 in the eight, and had got his blue at Rugger, as a smart and powerful forward. Incidentally he had taken a fourth in law. It was one of the traditions of his family that they should study the laws of their country.

His father had taken a second, but then Lord Gorehaven had been no athlete, and, apart from the exigencies of the hunting season, he had been able to devote his time to solid reading.

There were over eight hundred people at the garden-party, and before 4:30 it was felt that speeches were in the atmosphere. The tennis and croquet languished.

Groups of budding politicians conversed earnestly in

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shady corners. Lord Heatherstone had been seen to glance at some notes in his pocket, and one of his two secretaries was surreptitiously consulting a large book under the shade of a rhododendron.

Lord Harry Quy was nervous and irritable, and looked furtively around as though studying a safe line of retreat. Finally, he retired to the extreme edge of the lawn and pretended to look for lost tennis-balls.

While he was engaged in this engrossing occupation a shadow fell on the flower-bed he had chosen for the scene of his operations, and he turned sharply round on his knees.

"Hallo, Lady Agnes," he cried cheerfully, "have you come to lend a hand?"

Lady Agnes laughed and looked at her frock.

"I am not dressed for gardening," she said, "and why 'Lady Agnes' this afternoon, sir?"

"I am such a stranger," he replied. "I do not think I have seen you more than once since you received me —'receive' is, I think, the right phrase for a court function, is it not?"

"Don't be idiotic, Harry."

"How many have kissed your hand since then?" he said, rising to his feet and brushing some of the earth from his trousers. "I suppose you kiss the duchesses on the cheek. I believe that is court etiquette?"

"That is so," she replied gaily; "don't you wish you were a duchess?"

Lord Harry's face grew grave, and he turned slightly

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away from her. Then he looked her in the face and laughed.

"You are a child, Agnes," he said.

"Thank you, and what are you—an M.P.? Ha! ha! but you won't get in. And what are you, then?"

"A fool, perhaps, Agnes; I know you think me one."

The girl laughed and patted him on the back.

She was only seventeen, and very beautiful. She and Lord Harry Quy had been companions from childhood. She regarded him as one of her best friends.

But on his side the friendship had ripened into love. The girl as yet guessed nothing of the truth, for the young man had carefully concealed it from her.

Her manner toward him was that of an old playmate. As she touched him he imperceptibly shrank from her.

"Poor old Harry," she said mockingly, "don't mind me. Father's going to make a speech about you in a few minutes. You had better come and listen. It will be an antidote to my valuable opinions. You will learn that you are one of the pillars of the empire, the friend and leader of the people, a great legislator—you did get honours in law, didn't you?"

Lord Harry winced. "That's enough, Agnes," he said, with a forced smile. "I daresay I can hold my own, if it comes to a fight," and he unconsciously squared his broad shoulders and tightened the muscles of his hands.

"I am afraid you won't be able to fight the other candidate in the prize-ring," she said, with a provoking smile.

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"Stacey Clarke would not be worth fighting anywhere," he replied, "and if it were not for Arthur Holme he would not get a hundred votes. He is a fine fellow, that Holme, a big strong chap, hard as nails, and a good worker. I wish we could have got him to work on our side. Do you know him?"

"No," she said, "and no one seems to know much about him; but all the fisher folk swear by him, and you know they form a large part of your electorate."

"Yes, worse luck! There is no feudal hold on these fisher chaps. They don't care a hang for landowners. In most cases they own their own cottages, and they think more of a mate with a first-class certificate than an earl who does not know a main halliard from a jib sheet."

"Mr. Holme has the pull of you there, Harry. You ought to buy a yacht."

"I hate the sea," he replied. "I should certainly make a fool of myself. This fellow plays the game well. He has bought a fifteen-ton oyster smack and lives in it. No fancy yachts for him with varnished decks and a crew to do the work. He sails the boat himself, with a fisher chap that he treats as a pal. He dodges about these creeks all day long, lives and dresses like a common fisherman. Does his electioneering for Clarke on the water and gets right to the heart of all the men. He is a clever fellow. I daresay it's all humbug, but he makes them think he is a son of the sea, and that he does not care a rap for landlubbers. But

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I know something about Stacey Clarke that I intend to let out before the election."

"Not a scandal, I trust," Lady Agnes replied, with a laugh. "Really, you candidates are almost as bad as old women round a tea-table. You revel in raking up your opponent's past, and construct conclusive evidence of a fearful crime out of shreds of gossip."

"No, it is not exactly scandal, but it will knock off about ten per cent. of his votes."

"Tell me, if I ought to listen to it."

"Well, he's got a motor-car."

Lady Agnes burst out laughing.

"What a terrible thing," she said. "I hope you will reveal his secret as soon as possible."

"I can tell you it is a serious matter, Agnes," the young man replied.

"You know the Liberals are dead against motor-cars. They are one of the 'vices of the rich.' This is not a toy thing with bicycle wheels and a rattle that sounds as if it were going to drop to pieces, but a twenty-four horse-power Mercedes, an 'infernal machine'; 'an infringement of the liberty of the subject.' An old rattle-box that crawls along at eight miles an hour and stops at every hill might be tolerated. But this swift, smoothly running monster is an insult to all peace-loving citizens. It is a point in my favour."

"I thought you intended to buy a motor-car for yourself?" queried Lady Agnes.

"I do," he replied, "but not till after the election. I am going to buy a car compared to which Stacey Clarke's

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Mercedes will be a mere toy. But at present I mean to let out about the Liberal candidate's motor. He has been trying to keep it rather quiet. It has not been out for weeks. It would not be mean to do this, eh, Agnes?"

"Certainly not," she replied, with a laugh, "but you must remember that sailors are not likely to be troubled much by the motor nuisance."

"Hum! Well, I will see about it. What on earth's that?" A loud burst of cheering suddenly burst upon their ears. A crowd was gathering round Lord Heatherstone. One of his secretaries flew across the lawn to where the two young people were standing.

"We must go, Agnes," Lord Harry said calmly. "Let me see you after all this business is over. I have something rather important to discuss with you."

"More important than politics?"

"Yes," he replied. "In about an hour's time. Your father won't speak for more than that, and I can promise you that five minutes will exhaust all I have to say. I will be down by the old cottage near the East wall. You know it? We used to pretend it was a castle on the border, and that all the land beyond the wall was inhabited by the enemy."

"Of course I know it, Harry," she replied, "but why walk all that way? It is half a mile, and besides, I am the hostess and cannot be rude."

"Oh, most of the people will go before your father's finished. And you can make some excuse to the rest. I want to get away from them all, and talk with you. I haven't had a good chat all day. If we stay here some

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idiot is bound to come up and ask for my views on Russia in the Far East."

"Well, I will be there if I can," said the girl, with a laugh. "We must go now. I can see that father has started his speech. Mrs. Maxwell-Frinton is sidling off toward the house under the cover of the audience."

They strolled up to the crowds of people that had gathered round the great Lord Heatherstone, and separated.

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CHAPTER VI

MR. ARTHUR HOLME

Shortly after six o'clock most of the guests had departed, and Lady Agnes, released from part of her social duties, cut the rest and slipped away unobserved to the bottom of the garden.

As she reached the gate, which opened out through a thick yew hedge into the park beyond, there was a rustling in the bushes by the edge of the path, and her favourite Irish terrier came sheepishly to her side.

His nose was covered with mould, and there was little doubt he had been engaged in unlawful pursuits.

"O Ginger," she said, in a tone of reproach. The dog looked up at her with pathetic brown eyes and wagged his tail slowly and doubtfully. She stooped down and patted his rough brown coat.

"Come along, you old villain," she said, holding the gate open for him to pass through, and then the two went together down the sloping grasslands of the park, under the great spreading oaks and chestnuts, and through a narrow copse which fringed this side of the Heatherstone estate for two miles.

They emerged into a small open space thickly overgrown with bracken. Beyond it lay the stone wall, which bordered on the road. Everywhere else the

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copse touched the wall, and the explanation of this open space was not far to seek.

In the centre of it lay the ruins of a small cottage, a mere heap of grey stones, almost hidden by the ferns which sprung up round it. That which was now a piece of waste land had evidently been once a garden.

Lady Agnes brushed her way through the bracken, and, climbing up to the highest part of the ruins, looked out over the wall.

The view that lay before her eyes presented a strange contrast to the wooded slopes of the park behind her. On the other side of the road flowed a sluggish brown stream several yards in width. The tide was coming in, but on either side of the water there was still a narrow belt of mud, brown on the surface, but black as coal underneath.

Two small boats lay on the mud, and a couple of oyster-smacks were anchored out in midstream. A thin curl of blue smoke rose from the stove pipe of one of them. Deep black holes in the mud showed where the fishermen had walked ashore from their stranded dingheys.

Beyond the creek the flat marshes, seamed with little gullies and dykes, ran for miles, till they reached the sea.

To the south the creek itself narrowed down into a mere ditch. To the north it widened and widened, until it turned around a bend and went eastward, to finally join a broad estuary that swept through square miles of sand and mud into the ocean.

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Here and there a small cottage showed up from the waste around it, the home of some lonely fisherman or of one of the watchmen of the oyster-fisheries. These habitations seemed only to accentuate the loneliness of the desolate marshes.

It was a familiar scene to Lady Agnes Cliffe, but it was one that had never lost its fascination for her. To some people the waste places of the earth, the marshes, the deserts, the lonely fields of ice and snow, are only barren and uninteresting.

But the imaginative mind finds more room for its luxuriant fancy in such spots than in the most beautiful landscapes. To Lady Agnes, as she looked out from the border of her father's splendid park, these dreary marshes represented the unknown, the unexplored, the edge of the world.

As children she and Lord Harry had sat secure in their broken stronghold of grey stones and looked out toward the east, watching for the enemy that never came, though they firmly believed that he lay hidden somewhere beyond the muddy creek.

Often of an afternoon they would spy his movements in the white sail of a distant boat, in the stir of some rushes, in the rustling of a bush, in the sudden flight of a heron or some wild duck. But they never saw him, though they knew well where he lived. To the north-east, and distant some eight miles as the crow flew, a small stony hillock rose up against the sky. On the side of it stood a large red brick house.

It was almost invisible from their fortress, but both

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of them had explored the long road which ran to it between two creeks. The house had always, as far as they could remember, been unoccupied. It was a gaunt pile of red brick with no glass in the shuttered windows. Just the hiding-place for a secret foe. Neither of the children had ever had any doubt that this was the actual home of their unseen enemy.

Lady Agnes looked at it on this particular afternoon, and smiled at the remembrance of her childish fancies. Yet she was still child enough to regard the place with some suspicion. It was odd that it had not been let for so many years.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the dog, who hurriedly scrambled from her side and brushed his way through the bracken, barking cheerfully. In a few moments Lord Harry appeared. She arose and waved her hand to him. He strode through the bracken and smiled. But for all that there was an unwonted look of anxiety on his brown face.

"I am sorry, Agnes, to keep you waiting," he said, as he climbed up the heap of stones to her side, "but really, these politicians are most insistent people. My head is going round." He sat down by her side and looked so earnestly at her that she turned her eyes away to the north.

"I've been all right, Harry," she said. "I have been looking at the red castle, the home of our ancient foe." The young man laughed.

"It's been let," he said. "No more room for imagination in that quarter. I rode out there the other

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day. There was glass in the windows, and the garden is being cleared up with a scythe."

"Who's taken it?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "A stranger to these parts, I should say. It is eight miles from a shop, you know."

"Thus end the dreams of our childhood," the girl said, with a smile. "I have no doubt he is a worthy man and will come to our garden-parties. Do you recollect, Harry, how we pictured him, a tall red-bearded scoundrel, with yellow teeth and rusty armour? If I remember right, he always crept, or slunk, or crawled."

"Yes, I remember," he replied gravely, "but I had spotless armour inlaid with gold, and I stood straight up to him and slew him before your eyes. I think your favourite dress was crimson velvet, trimmed with ermine?"

"It was, Harry, it was. Very hot in summer, and most unfashionable in colour. How funny these dreams of one's childhood are, Harry; how unpractical and how seldom realised."

"That's true, Agnes," he replied slowly, "yet there's one dream of my childhood that was very practical, and which could yet be realised. You were, if I remember right, always a princess, and generally in distress."

"Well, Harry?"

"Well," he said, in a low voice, "you are still a princess to me."

"But not in distress, Harry," she faltered, looking away from him, for she dared not look into his face.

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"No, not exactly in distress," he said, "but not too happy. A princess with a stepmother—a sort of Cinderella—neglected——"

"With no ugly sister," she broke in.

"True," he replied, "but with a brother who wants the nonsense kicked out of him. It is a pity your father did not send Overcliffe to a public school."

"Poor Overcliffe."

"Well," the young man continued in a hesitating voice, "I am not exactly a prince, but—but—well, Agnes, you know what I am."

"A politician, I believe," she said archly, but still she did not venture to look him in the face. Her woman's instinct told her what was coming next.

"Damn politics," the young man cried fiercely. "I beg your pardon, Agnes, but you seem to think politics is everything. It appears to be a family failing."

Lady Agnes had no reply to make to this emphatic statement, and for a few moments both were silent. The girl was rapidly casting about for some means whereby she could lead her companion out of the difficult path he had chosen, and the young man was uncertain how best to proceed. The thread of the conversation was becoming slightly tangled.

"Agnes," he suddenly blurted out. Then he stopped, and his brown hand closed over her slender fingers. The colour flushed to her cheek.

"Agnes," he repeated softly and tenderly. But before he could say another word, the thunder of wheels

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and hoofs, the rattling of chains, and the hoarse cries of a man burst upon their ears.

Lady Agnes started to her feet, glad of the opportunity to move from a somewhat embarrassing position, and ran down to the wall. Lord Harry followed her, cursing at the interruption. The noise grew louder and louder.

Looking along the road to the south, they saw three great horses with heads down, tearing madly along in a cloud of dust, and behind them an enormous dray, swaying from side to side, and a man standing up and leaning back on the reins with all his strength.

"A runaway!" cried Lord Harry. "Keep back from the wall, Agnes, for heaven's sake," and he pulled her away with some violence. He knew well enough that a swerve of the horses to the left would hurl all the contents of the dray on the top of them.

Another man had heard the clatter and cries along the road. He climbed out of the hatchway of one of the oyster-smacks and stood upon the deck.

A tall, broad-shouldered man, with a bronzed, weather-beaten face, and a golden beard and moustache. He was dressed in a blue jersey, blue serge trousers, and a pair of heavy fisherman's boots.

He came to the edge of the smack and glanced keenly at the runaway horses and then at the two figures behind the park wall. When the dray got within fifty yards of the onlookers, Lord Harry sprang lightly over the wall and crossed the road. He was an athlete, and, moreover, absolutely devoid of fear.

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He thought it possible that he might catch the reins of the leader, and pull the whole concern to a standstill.

Lady Agnes cried out to him to come back, and the man on the smack yelled something out to him that he did not hear.

The horses came at him like an avalanche. He sprang at the reins of the leader and was swung off his feet.

If the horses had kept straight on he must inevitably have been trampled under their hoofs, but as luck would have it they caught sight of the girl's white dress and swerved sharply toward the creek, as though they had been struck broadside by a tornado.

Lord Harry was swung round like a stone in a sling, jerked off his hold and shot out half a dozen yards into the water. The driver went flying after him.

The contents of the van scattered and broke in every direction. The horses plunged a few yards through the mud, slipped, struggled to their feet, slipped again, rolled over and kicked furiously, churning the mud into a filthy black slime. The driver was pitched onto the leader's back, whence he ricochetted into a soft bed of mud two feet in depth.

He fell over and almost disappeared, but he rose unhurt, a filthy spectacle, spitting mud from his mouth and dripping with it from head to foot.

Lord Harry Quy was not so fortunate. The man on the smack kicked off the big boots and looked keenly at the foam-flecked water where he had disappeared. It was several seconds before he appeared on the surface,

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and then he was some yards farther down the stream. He sank almost as suddenly as he had risen.

The man on the smack looked no longer, but dived into the swift tide and swam rapidly to the spot where the body had vanished. He had seen at a glance that the young man was either stunned or dead.

Once more the head appeared and vanished, this time but a few feet from the rescuer. The latter dashed through the water, and, diving down, caught the arm of the drowning man and brought him to the surface. The body was limp and still, and it was easy work to swim with it to the shore.

He did not touch bottom until he got into three feet of water, for to swim was mere child's play compared to walking through the mud. And then he lifted Lord Harry Quy onto his shoulder and carried him to the grass by the side of the road. Lady Agnes came to him with a white face.

"Is he—is he——" she faltered.

"He's all right," replied the man roughly; "run up to the house, that's a good girl, and get help; blankets, hot water, something to carry him up on. I will rub him down, and I'll bet he's smiling when you come back, but run like the devil, in case we don't happen to get him round." The girl turned without another word, and, clambering over the wall, disappeared from sight.

"Hi, you there," yelled the man to the driver, who had cut the traces and got his three horses to their feet, "just leave your damned horses, and lend a hand here.

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They will walk out of the mud by themselves now, I guess."

The man came through the slime, a pitiable spectacle, black and odorous from head to foot, oozing mud from every part of his clothing.

The sailor gave him a few rapid instructions, and then, hurrying to one of the dingheys, pushed it off and sculled over to the smack. In less than two minutes he was on his way back, clothed in a dry jersey and trousers and with a bottle of brandy and a rough blanket in the bottom of the boat.

Then both men set to work with a will, and in less than ten minutes Lord Harry sighed and opened his eyes.

A quarter of an hour before the arrival of the relief party from the hall he was clothed in a borrowed serge suit and smoking a cigarette, and was chatting cheerfully to the man who had pulled him out of the water.

The sailor went over to the dray and gave a hand to the driver, who was trying to save some of his cases from the encroaching tide. The two men toiled hard at their task and succeeded in depositing most of the boxes on the road.

Two of them, however, defied their united efforts, and they lay half-buried in the black mud, with the tide eddying round them. One of the cases was broken, and it appeared to be full of metal castings of small cogs, bars of steel, bolts, screws and bits of the framework of some engine.

The three horses, black with mud and trembling from head to foot, watched the operations with apparent

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unconcern, and grazed unfeelingly by the edge of the road.

Lord Harry Quy strolled down and looked at the address on the labels.

They were all consigned to the same person:

Mr. William Jordison,
The Red House,
Gorehaven,
Essex.

"Hum!" said Lord Harry to himself, "that's curious."

At last a number of people came crashing through the copse and scrambled over the edge of the wall.

Lady Agnes rushed up to Lord Harry and overwhelmed him with a torrent of questions: How did he feel? Was he cold? Was he feverish? Did his head ache? Was he wet? and so on. A crowd of servants from the hall, armed with blankets, hot-water bottles, brandy, whisky, stretchers, etc., stood sheepishly by, and looked in vain for some one who was in need of them.

It was with difficulty they could be restrained from applying a course of treatment to the driver of the dray. He acquiesced in the brandy, but drew the line at hot-water bottles.

"Agnes," said Lord Harry, when she had exhausted her torrent of questions, "let me introduce you to this gentleman, who has saved my life. We shall probably see much of him during the next few weeks. Mr. Arthur Holme—Lady Agnes Cliffe."

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CHAPTER VII

THE RED HOUSE

Of all the lonely habitations in the eastern part of Essex, the Red House was the loneliest and least attractive. It did not stand, like Heatherstone Hall, on the edge of the marshes, with fair and fertile country stretching to the west of it.

It stood in the very centre of a desolate tract of land, on a small, rocky eminence that was like an island in a sea of marshes. To east and west and south and north the land lay flat and uninhabited, save for an isolated cottage, the home of some watchman or ferryman.

Not a tree broke the monotony of the landscape. On the eastern horizon lay the sea. On the west, six miles away, the rising ground showed up dim and indistinct, like a miniature range of mountains.

A straight road commenced at the mound and ran west between two creeks. It was closed in on either side with high banks of turf, for with spring tides and an easterly wind the water rose above the level of it, and, but for this protection, would have flooded it a foot deep from end to end.

This road, constructed at enormous expense by the man who built the house, ran inland for six miles, and then cut at right angles into the same road that ran past

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Heatherstone Hall—a wide causeway that had been built in the time of the Romans, and had been maintained ever since as a communication between the north and south of Essex.

It was very little used, for in its whole course of twenty miles it scarcely touched on half a dozen villages, and a similar road which ran parallel to it, but several miles inland, was the main highway into Suffolk.

It was not surprising that the Red House had been unoccupied for many years. It had been built by a man who had been interested in the oyster-fisheries, and who thought it would be well to be near the spot where he had invested the money.

He lived there for ten years and then hanged himself from one of the upper windows facing the sea. He was a bachelor, and it was surmised that the awful loneliness of the place had unhinged his mind, for his business had prospered exceedingly, and there was absolutely no other reason for his suicide.

The house itself was as unattractive as the scenery that surrounded it—a great, bare building, badly constructed of very inferior bricks.

Behind it lay numerous outhouses and sheds, and a brick stable large enough to accommodate a dozen horses and as many carts or carriages. A tarred fence some three hundred yards in circumference enclosed a piece of ground which had once been a garden.

The knoll, on which the house stood, was about ten acres in extent, and was supposed to be the site of an old Roman camp. A faint square outline of trench

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and rampart, plainly visible to the keen eye of the antiquarian, lent some colour to this supposition. And it was, at any rate, a commanding situation, such as might well have been chosen for military purposes. The two creeks ran round either side of the knoll, and, joining a couple of hundred yards farther on, spread out into the wide waters of the estuary. The place would have made an almost inaccessible fortress.

To this lonely spot, after fourteen years of hell in a convict prison, and eight years of feverish work in France, came John Porteous, now known to the world as William Jordison.

The hard work and simple fare of prison life had broadened his shoulders and strengthened his muscles. But his hair was white as snow, and the deep lines on his rugged face spoke eloquently of the mental anguish he had suffered.

For there had been more than the degradation of his punishment to sear John Porteous' mind. There had been the daily, almost hourly thought of the woman who had betrayed him.

There had been the secret locked tight within his breast, and which had gnawed at his heart and brain till the one was eaten away and the other was inflamed with disease.

John Porteous had gone into the prison a man who had indeed lost his honour, but who still retained many admirable traits of a fine and gentlemanly nature.

He came out of it a wild and ravening beast, insensible, save for the love he still bore his son, to every pas-

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sion and emotion but revenge. A callous, cold-hearted ruffian, a monomaniac, who wanted only one thing in the world, and whose brain would never rest until he had found it.

When he left Portland he had a few pounds in his pocket, and he cast about in his mind how he could earn his living and make money. He did not want money for the pleasures that gold can buy, but because money is power, and without it he would be powerless to accomplish his task.

He spent several weeks looking for a job that offered some prospects in the future. He was a man of fine commercial capabilities, and with a few hundred pounds of capital he could doubtless have soon built up a business. But he was handicapped by want of money, and he realised that he had to start at the very bottom.

The idea of a clerkship was distasteful to him. He knew only too well how few chances came to a clerk, and how the most splendid abilities have rusted for years at the office desk.

He picked up an odd job here and there and kept himself alive, travelling about the country on foot from place to place. During this time he made diligent inquiries for his son.

He had no intention of making himself known to him, nor of asking for assistance, but his heart yearned for some news of the boy. He learned nothing, save that Mr. and Mrs. Behag were both dead, and that the boy had run away to sea.

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He also made inquiries about Marie de la Mothe, but he found out absolutely nothing about her movements. He was hampered in his search by want of money, and resolved to wait until he could pay detectives to prosecute a systematic inquiry.

At last, after a long period of semistarvation, he found the opening that he required. At that time the motor-car industry was in its infancy in France, but astute men of business were already trying to grasp the future possibilities of the petrol-driven machine.

Capital was being slowly, but steadily, sunk in the business, and the only difficulty was the shortage of skilled labour. Labour has always been more conservative than capital, and has always fought shy of anything new.

It was a fortunate circumstance for John Porteous that mechanical engineering had been one of the hobbies of his earlier days. As a boy he had invested all his spare savings in little vertical and horizontal engines that had whizzed round wildly and perilously under the influence of methylated spirits.

At the age of sixteen he had been apprenticed to an engineering firm, and had remained there for two years at a salary of five shillings per week. Then his ideas of life had become enlarged, and, seeing no prospect of earning a living wage for several years, he had gone into a bank.

Engineering, however, remained his hobby, and he read much on the subject in his leisure hours, and had even made some small inventions, which were of no

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practical value, but which stood in the same relation to his reading as problems do to the books of Euclid.

As things turned out, this harmless hobby proved of more value to him than all the years spent in the intricacies of banking. On the strength of his mechanical knowledge, he applied for and obtained a position with Jacquart et Cie., a new motor-car firm that had just been started in France.

He picked up the language in a few months, and before he had been there a year the directors recognised that they had got hold of a man who might do much for them, and whose mechanical skill was nothing compared to his commercial capabilities.

He was speedily transferred from the constructive to the executive part of the business, and before another two years had elapsed he found himself general manager of a fine business, with a liberal remuneration and a commission that brought him in three times his fixed salary.

Under his able management the business grew and throve exceedingly. He invested his savings in the company. He was elected to a vacant seat on the board. Motors were then on the boom, and he raked in money hand over fist.

To the outer world he was a capable and successful business man. Few people could ever guess for what purpose he toiled and saved and grew rich. None knew of the fierce fires that burnt beneath the calm and calculating surface of his mind.

And he himself did not know the whole truth, for he did not guess that the seeds of insanity had been sown

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in these fourteen years of humiliation and despair, and that the time of reaping was near at hand.

When he had saved thirty thousand pounds he retired from business and returned to England, bringing with him a fifty-horse-power car. He considered that it would be of assistance to him in his search.

He would have in it a speedy means of locomotion from place to place; he would be independent of trains and time-tables. He could scour the country from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and follow up every clue in person.

But no such clue came to William Jordison. The practised skill of detectives failed to discover anything of Marie de la Mothe or his son.

For six months he lived in London, and then, on one of his frequent tours through Essex, he saw the Red House, and the loneliness of it appealed to him.

He purchased it for a mere song, and decided to make it his headquarters. The noise of London was working horribly on his nerves, and the rush and hum of his motor-car gave the only relief from the ceaseless rattle of the traffic. He longed for silence where he could think.

He did not realise that it was unwise for him to think too much, and that the very distractions of a great city prevented him from brooding over his past life.

He sought rest. The Red House offered it almost as completely as a desert island might have done. It was, moreover in Essex, the county where young Richard Behag was last seen, and where presumably the first clue would be found by those who sought for him.

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CHAPTER VIII

"RICHARD BEHAG IS DEAD"

William Jordison sat in a small room on the first floor of the Red House. It overlooked the eastern marshes, and from his chair he could see the sunlight sparkling on the ocean.

The chair was drawn up to a large deal table set close to the window. The table was covered with plans, pencils, rulers and compasses. He was measuring out fractions of a line with a diagonal scale.

The room was bare and comfortless. Its sole furniture consisted of a hard wooden chair, a table, and a row of plain deal shelves heaped up with papers. The walls were decorated with plans of machinery. On the top of the book-shelf was a half-finished working model of a motor-car nearly two feet in length.

William Jordison was playing with what had once been part of his daily work—the perfecting of a new invention which would reduce the cost of running a car to almost nothing, which would simplify the machinery, and which would generate a horse-power hitherto undreamed of in the trade.

The invention had been abandoned before it had been placed on a practical basis, and it was not until he had given up business that he turned to it once again. It

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formed some relaxation from the serious purpose of his life.

Every now and then he looked up from the drawings on the table and gazed abstractedly out of the window, apparently lost in thought. On such occasions the lines round his mouth deepened and a heavy scowl darkened his forehead. Any one looking at him during these moments would have said that it was the face of a criminal—animal, brutal, debased in every feature.

Finally he threw the pencil down, tore up the drawing in front of him and rose to his feet. His playtime was over. He paced up and down the room with knitted brows and hands clasped behind his back.

In a few minutes' time there was a slow, heavy footstep on the stairs outside. Then the door opened and a man entered. He was short and thick-set, with a low forehead, bestial mouth, and a sullen, clean-shaven face.

Jordison could not stand the sight of a woman in the house. He had three men-servants, and a more unprepossessing trio could scarcely have been chosen for the purpose.

They had been selected from the worst types of humanity, and were, in point of fact, three convicts who had escaped from Portland jail the year before. They served Jordison's purpose, however. Their faithfulness was practically assured, for the terrors of the law still hung over their heads.

Jordison's only fear was that they might choose to preserve their secret by killing him. He was prepared

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for such an emergency. A loaded revolver was always to hand, in his pocket by day, under his pillow at night.

"Well, Lipp," he said, as the man entered.

"Jermy's just brought the second post from Gorehaven," the man replied sullenly, holding out a letter in his dirty muscular fingers.

Jordison took the letter, and glanced at the handwriting. A flush came to his haggard face. The servant still waited, scowling as though he had received some insult.

"Well, Lipp," said the master of the house, placing the letter in his pocket, "how are things going on?"

"They're making an 'orrid mess in the garden, and they're damned slow. I've bin round talking to 'em, and if I 'aven't scared 'em, may——"

"Quite right, Lipp," Jordison broke in; "any news from Gorehaven?"

"This damned election's driving 'em all crazy. They collared Jermy and asked him to vote straight and true, and filled 'im up with drink."

"Drink!" Jordison said sharply; "Jermy drunk? I'll have no drunken blackguards about this house."

"Drunk, lor' bless yer. There ain't a drink made that could fuddle old Jermy in an afternoon; 'is 'ead's as clear as a bloomin' bell. Swelp me——"

"That'll do," Jordison said sternly. "Have those castings come yet from Sheffield?"

"Those that ain't in the mud," the man replied with a grin, and he told the story of the accident in a few words, liberally sprinkled with high-coloured epithets.

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Jordison appeared to take no interest in the narrative. However, he made a note on a piece of paper.

"See that I get the rest of the castings to-morrow, Lipp," he said quietly. "You may go." The man went, but when he reached the door his master called him back.

"Have they begun excavating for the bed of the engine-house, Lipp?"

"Not as I knows of. The 'ole place is in such a bloomin' mess that they might be going to dig a coal-mine."

"Well, tell Bysouth's foreman that I want it done at once, and that everything else must be postponed until it is finished. He has the plans. The engine will be here next week."

"Orl right, guvner. I'll make 'em jump," and the man slouched toward the door.

"And be civil with these people, Lipp," Jordison continued; "they're independent folk, and I don't want them to go off and leave me in the lurch."

"Orl right, guvner," the man replied without turning round. "I'll be as sweet as jam."

The door closed behind him with a crash, and the sound of his clumsy feet died away on the uncarpeted staircase.

Jordison smiled grimly. "A nasty customer," he said to himself. "I expect he had all the benefit of the doubt when the jury brought in a verdict of man-slaughter. But he'll do for the present." He walked over to the window and sat on the table. Then he

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pulled the letter out of his pocket, opened it, and perused it carefully. It ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR: We have at last obtained some clue to the movements of Mr. Richard Behag. It is certain that he embarked as a common seaman on the brig *Valetta*, bound for Valparaiso, and that he left the ship at that port. Further search will be expensive, as it will entail a journey to South America. Are you prepared to go on? It will probably cost you at least one thousand pounds, but we will cut down all expenses as much as possible. We enclose our account to date. A cheque will oblige.

"Your obedient servants,

"BRIGGS & WARLOCK."

"One thousand pounds," he murmured, and then he laughed and, sitting down at the table, filled in a telegram form.

"BRIGGS & WARLOCK, 21 Ship Street, Strand: Proceed with search. Spare no necessary expense.

"JORDISON."

Then he rang the bell and glanced at the account. It came to three hundred forty-seven pounds ten shillings and three pence, of which more than half had been spent on the useless search for Mrs. de la Mothe. He smiled as he read some of the items; little trivial details of daily expenditure, pennies, sixpences, half-crowns, stretching

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over pages and pages, and mounting up with extraordinary rapidity.

"If it costs me all I have," he said to himself, "I will see it through. There's lots more money to be had in the world."

In five minutes' time Lipp entered.

"Have the horse put in the dogcart at once, Lipp," said Jordison, "and get Jermy to drive you into Gorehaven. This telegram must go at once. Look sharp." He gave the man the telegram, and the latter left, mumbling something to himself. When he had gone, Jordison paced up and down the room. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled with unwonted brilliancy.

"If I could only find him," he murmured. "If I could only find him, it might yet save me from this other search, and the duty that lies at the end of it." Jordison knew well that love for his son was the only redeeming trait in his character, and that this alone could drag him from the path he wished to tread.

The room seemed stifling, and he longed for the fresh air. He went down-stairs, and, crossing the garden, which looked like part of the London County Council improvements, made his way to the far end of the knoll.

The western sky was ablaze with crimson and gold, and the dreary marshes which stretched for miles round the Red House had acquired a strange beauty from the sunset. It was just past high tide on the distant coast, and every creek and pool and gully was full of water as far as the eye could reach.

The unsightly mud was concealed with a garment

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that reflected all the glory of the sky. The barrenness of the land was clothed in a golden haze. Its very loneliness harmonised with the quiet of the eventide. The whole land breathed of peace. A few plovers flapped slowly from place to place, and their plaintive cries were the only sounds to break the silence.

Yet there was no peace in the heart of the man who gazed abstractedly across the marshes to the sea. Despair, revenge, the memory of those years spent in the lowest depths of hell, a brief thrill of hope at the news he had received that afternoon, all these were in his heart, but there was no peace.

Half a mile up the creek the sails of a yacht swelled in the faint west breeze, and seemed like the wings of some great white bird gliding over the golden waters.

As it came nearer, Jordison began to regard it with interest, and wondered why it had sailed so far up the creek. It was drifting down with the wind and tide, but it would scarcely make the sea before dark.

Nearer the boat came and still nearer, till Jordison could see the faces of the two men on the deck.

One was at the tiller and the other was loosing the jib halliard from its cleet. As they came opposite the house the bulging balloon jib came fluttering down in a crumpled heap of canvas, and a second later came the rattling of the anchor-chain as it ran swiftly over the bows. The man at the helm loosed the tiller and hauled in the main sheet. The boat swung round with the tide till her nose faced the west.

In less than ten minutes the men on board had stowed

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sail and made everything snug for the night. Jordison frowned and, rising to his feet, walked slowly down the slope toward the creek. He was not pleased at the idea of the yacht anchoring under his windows.

Before he reached the edge of the water, one of the men had put off in the dinghey and was making it fast to an old post on the bank. Jordison stopped and leaned against the black tarred palings of his garden. He had no desire to converse with strangers. The man, however, crossed the road and came straight up to him.

"Are you Mr. Jordison of the Red House?" he asked abruptly.

"I am Mr. Jordison," was the curt reply.

"Well, I have got a couple of your cases here. Pitched into the mud the day before yesterday. Suppose you have heard all about it. You seem to take it coolly, though. No one's been near 'em till we decided to take 'em on board this morning. They were nearly out of sight in the mud, but we made fast to them, and waited till high tide. Then we pulled them aboard with our anchor-winch. You can have them when you like, but you must send some one on board to help get them off. I am Arthur Holme."

"I am much indebted to you, Mr. Holme," Jordison replied. "Will you come into the house? We are a little unsettled as yet, but still——"

"No, thanks," Holme replied, "I have got to cook our dinner yet. My man's a duffer at the household work, but, by gad, you should see him at the tiller in

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dirty weather. There's not a man on this coast to touch him, I can tell you. Have you got any men about that can lend a hand with the cases when the tide runs out? I reckon we shall be high and dry then."

"You will be stranded shortly after midnight, Mr. Holme. There is only a foot of water in the creek at low tide, and I suppose you draw five. I have three men here and I will send them across. It is a full moon to-night. Between the lot of us we ought to get the cases ashore. How's the electioneering going, Mr. Holme?"

"We are quite satisfied," Holme replied. "By the by, I suppose you haven't a vote—too late to get on the register, eh?"

"I have no vote," Jordison said, with a faint smile, "but if I had, I'd give it to your party. I'm of your way of thinking."

"Well, you might do what you can for us. You don't speak, I suppose?"

"Not more than I can help," Jordison replied grimly. "No, I'm afraid I cannot be of much service to you. I have a few tenants in East Wick, and I'll see that they vote for you right enough."

"It is good of you," Arthur Holme replied. "I have got the interests of this part of the world at heart. Landowners don't understand these fisher-folk; I do. Quy seems a decent sort of chap, but I don't think he'll get in. I have been a sailor myself, and served before the mast. It's a damn rough life, but it's a good life, mark you, and it moulds good men out

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of rotten material. Well, I will go and look after the dinner, and will turn in till you come on board. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Holme," Jordison replied with sadness in his voice. This rough-bearded young fellow had brought with him the breath of the salt seas. It would have been hard to find a greater contrast to the general atmosphere of the Red House. To Jordison it brought back the days of his own youth, and the young man's voice touched some hidden chord in his hard, callous heart.

Then a sudden idea seized him, and hurrying after Holme's retreating figure, he came up to him as he was untying the dinghey's painter.

"Mr. Holme," he said quietly, "excuse me asking you a question, but you might be able to give me some information."

"Certainly," Holme replied, with a smile. "If I am able to do so."

"You have been a sailor and mixed with seafaring folk. Have you ever come across a young fellow of the name of Richard Behag?"

Arthur Holme did not answer. His back was to the west, where a faint glow of crimson still lingered. His face was in shadow, but to Jordison it seemed as if the young man remembered the name and was trying to recall the owner of it.

"Do you happen to recollect the name, Mr. Holme?" Jordison continued.

"Yes," the young man replied, "I certainly recollect

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the name. But for the moment—ah! I have it. Of course. I remember now."

"If you know anything of him," said Jordison, "I should be much obliged by the information. I mean him no harm."

"It would not be much good if you did," Holme answered, "for Richard Behag is dead."

"Dead," repeated Jordison in a low voice. "Are you sure? Have you proof?" And he caught the young man by the arm and peered anxiously into his shadowed face.

"I am sure," Holme replied. "He died in Valparaiso. I remember the story now. It made something of a stir. He was drowned."

"Drowned?" cried Jordison. "Are you sure?"

Holme shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he replied, "drowned while yachting off Valparaiso. I should not inquire too closely if you are a friend of Behag's. The whole story is not very creditable to him. You will excuse me now, Mr. Jordison. I am hungry. I will see you later," and stepping into the dinghey, he put the rowlocks in place and loosed the painter.

Jordison did not stir. He wished to question the young man further, but Holme had cut the conversation short. He kept his eyes on the brown-bearded face which seemed all red and gold in the light of the setting sun. It was hard and stern. He wished he could see the eyes, but the young man had shipped his sculls, and was gazing at the bottom of the boat.

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"Twelve o'clock," said Jordison pleasantly.

The young man looked up and smiled.

"That'll be all right," he answered. "Good-bye till then."

Jordison had taken a keen look at the man's eyes, and they had fallen guiltily from his glance. He turned back and walked slowly to the house.

"Dickie dead," he kept on repeating to himself. "Well, Briggs & Warlock will soon find out for me in Valparaiso, and if it is true I shall not lose sight of you, my young man. You know more of my boy's death than you have told me. I will find out the truth if it cost me every penny I have in the world." He turned and shook his fist at the yacht in the stream.

Then he went in and stumbled up to the small room that looked to the east, groping his way as though he could not see.

When he reached the table by the window he sank down in the chair, and buried his face in his hands. For ten minutes he did not move. His mind went back through all the years of agony and despair to the morning when he had last seen his son.

He could almost hear his own feeble imitations of the birds and animals of a farmyard.

"What do the fowls say, papa? I'ze forgot."

"Cluck, cluck, cluck, and cock-a-doodle-doo."

The wretched man rose to his feet and clenched his hands.

"If Dickie is dead," he murmured to himself, "there is only one thing left to me in life."

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He sat down at the table and draughted a long telegram to Briggs & Warlock to be despatched first thing in the morning. The burden of it all was that no expense was to be spared to find proof of Richard Behag's death.

At midnight, Jordison and his three servants went down to the creek. It was a dark night, but there was sufficient light to see that the yacht had moved from her anchorage. Lipp threw the rays of his lantern over the mud and across the narrow channel to the farther shore.

The two cases lay half a dozen yards from the bank. They were still wet and had evidently been thrown overboard into the water, which had gone down, and left them on the sloping bed of the creek.

It was clear that for some reason or other Arthur Holme had taken advantage of the falling tide to haul up his anchor and drift down the channel.

The business had an ugly look in Jordison's eyes. But he said nothing to his men, and they all four worked hard to get the cases onto the bank. They were embedded in two feet of slime, and the men found the task too much for them.

After several vain efforts they gave up the task, and breaking the case open, transferred the contents piecemeal to the shore.

William Jordison toiled furiously, and did as much work as the other three men combined. He had an idea that severe physical exertion would distract his thoughts. But he found it impossible to get rid of the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

And all the time he was going to and fro through the

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mud, black to his knees, sweating with the burden of some great piece of iron, he was wondering why Arthur Holme had left so suddenly. By the time the work was over he decided that the young man had shirked another meeting and further questions.

And he strongly suspected that Arthur Holme knew more of the death of Richard Behag in Valparaiso than he cared to disclose.

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CHAPTER IX

NEW FRIENDSHIPS

During the next three months many things of importance occurred, which can only be briefly touched upon in this narrative.

Lord Harry Quy was elected member for the eastern division of Essex by a narrow margin of three votes. The "oldest inhabitant" could not recall so keen and exciting a contest.

Yet it was a contest singularly free from personal animosity, and was waged with such consideration and courtesy on either side that the more acrimonious of both parties looked on the two candidates as singularly deficient in the art of sword-play. Yet nothing that could be fairly done was left undone.

In many cases two solid hours were devoted to the conversion of some deaf old man, who knew nothing of politics and cared less. The cause received no mercy on either side. It was made clear to every one in the district that both the Liberal and the Conservative policies were the creations of the devil himself.

The bewildered fishermen and cottagers had only to decide which was the worst. In the end Stacey Clarke lost the seat by five votes, which a re-count reduced to three. William Jordison smiled when he saw the result,

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for the seven votes he had promised to Arthur Holme were given to Lord Harry Quy.

These events concerned the outside world, but other matters, of even more importance to the private individuals in this story, took place during these three months.

In the first place a thing happened that was known only to two people. Lord Harry, on the strength of his parliamentary success, asked Lady Agnes Cliffe to be his wife. She refused his offer, tearfully and pathetically, as though afraid of the consequences.

He had been her friend from childhood, and she dreaded the rupture of the friendship. But Lord Harry Quy took the blow like a man. He laughed away her tears, kissed her hand, and left her with the assurance that what had happened would not in any way alter the good-fellowship that had hitherto existed between them.

Lord Harry, for his part, had no intention of cutting himself adrift from her society. He had not yet given up all hope, though he knew in his heart that they could never be such good and close friends as they had been in the past, unless they became something more than friends in the future.

In the second place, Lord Harry Quy and Arthur Holme had conceived a strong affection for each other.

This was necessarily kept in the background during the strenuous times of electioneering, but, directly the contest was over, they let their feelings have full play, to the scandal of the narrowminded of both parties, who

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could not conceive a union of personal friendship and political animosity.

The friendship was in many ways a strange one. It was true that Holme had saved Lord Harry's life, but a debt of gratitude does not as a rule make for real friendship, and the dissimilarity of their two characters would seem to have stood in the way of anything but a general acquaintance.

Arthur Holme was a young man who took life very seriously. His whole heart had been in the election, and he was bitterly disappointed at the result. Lord Harry Quy, on the other hand, did not care a penny for politics, and would just as soon have been a Liberal as a Conservative, if the father of Lady Agnes Cliffe had been of the former way of thinking.

Arthur Holme, moreover, was grim and saturnine for so young a man, while Lord Harry was the very essence of geniality. The latter, again, was of high birth. The very parentage of the former was wrapt in obscurity. He had sprung from nowhere, a man without name or reputation. He had to stand entirely on his personal qualities. It was a strange irony of fate, indeed, that made these two fast friends.

One result of this friendship was subsequently destined to have far-reaching consequences. Arthur Holme received more than one invitation to accompany Lord Harry to Heatherstone Hall. The Earl of Heatherstone could be gracious to a fallen foe, for this, indeed, is one of the easiest of human virtues.

He was pleased to bestow his patronage on the agent

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of the defeated Liberal candidate. Mrs. Maxwell-Frinton compared him to a Roman victor, who liked to drag about a prisoner at the wheels of his chariot. But, as a matter of fact, Lord Heatherstone's attitude was not entirely that of the conqueror. For all his pride and pomposity he was a keen judge of men, and he saw in Arthur Holme certain qualities that would be very useful to the Conservative cause, if they could be directed into the right channel. Lord Heatherstone's family had been trained through generations to see far across the political horizon.

And he foresaw in the near future one of those great political upheavals wherein men of all parties are shuffled together and dealt out in two new packs. In such a crisis, a young man like Holme, a man of high ideals, would be a valuable adherent.

Holme, on his part, did not respond very warmly to these advances. But his insight into the future was nearly as keen as that of the noble Earl, and he saw a possible advantage to himself from an apparent friendship with the great house of Heatherstone. He was a young man who could not afford to throw away a chance.

And so it came to pass that Arthur Holme was frequently at Heatherstone Hall, and before very long one member of the family began to look forward to his visits with more eagerness than prudence.

Lady Agnes Cliffe had no excuse whatever for the interest she began to take in this somewhat rough and surly young man, whom Lord Harry had brought to the house.

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He admired her beauty, and saw much to love in her disposition, but, regarding her in the light of a possible wife for his friend, he went out of his way to dismiss her from his thoughts, and to avoid any unnecessary conversation with her.

Lord Harry's feelings in this quarter were plain and manifest, and Arthur Holme was strong-minded enough to avoid any possible temptation, which might lead him to interfere with his friend's happiness.

He noticed with some uneasiness that Lady Agnes had begun to regard him with interest, and he secretly resolved that his visits to Heatherstone Hall would have to become less frequent. The girl was too proud and modest to give any outward indication of her feelings, but for all that Holme instinctively felt that he was occupying her thoughts rather more than was desirable for either of them.

Lady Agnes, on her part, would have laughed if any one had told her that she was beginning to think too much about a young man of unknown parentage and rather unprepossessing manners.

She deluded herself into the idea that she was a student of human character, and that this particular specimen interested her by reason of its rarity in her own sphere of life.

Most of the young men she knew—and many young men fluttered around Heatherstone Hall—were of two entirely different types: the one well-set, well-groomed young fellows, mostly sportsmen and athletes; men careless of serious matters, but trained to a nicety in the

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choice of a dog, a horse, or a gun; gentlemen of honour and reputation, all of them, for Lord Heatherstone was careful what men he asked to the house; not foolish nor vacuous, but singularly devoid of any definite purpose in life. The other class were political young men, many of them keen and intellectual, but all self-seeking and subservient to the great Lord Heatherstone; the "rising hopes of the Tory party," each with his own axe to grind, and more than one of them with an eye to the advantages that might accrue to him if he could marry the Lady Agnes Cliffe.

Arthur Holme was like none of these men. In many respects he was inferior, but the girl found something in him that coincided with her own views of life.

She had grown up to believe herself a democrat, a friend of the oppressed lower classes, and, like most ladies of rank who espouse the cause, she believed the poor were much more miserable and oppressed than they really are.

Her social views were unsound, but her practical exposition of them gained her many humble friends in the county. She went about doing good, and there was no doubt that she won Lord Harry his seat in Parliament.

Now Arthur Holme was also a friend of the people, and therein lay a real solid bond between these two, yet one that was weak in comparison to the links of steel that Time was forging for them on his anvil.

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CHAPTER X

A BURIED PALACE

When Jordison had despatched the telegram to Messrs. Briggs & Warlock, he tried to thrust the matter from his mind, and threw himself heart and soul into the construction of his new motor-car.

Day after day he shut himself up in the little room that looked out over the eastern marshes, and night after night he sat at the deal table till his brain grew too weary to think, and the plans and figures swam before his eyes.

Happy is the mind that can forget its sorrows in work or dull its pain in sheer weariness of physical exertion. Jordison worked hard and he worked late, but he could not forget that his work was far removed from the purpose of his life.

Never an hour passed in which he did not turn away from the papers before him, and think of the son that was lost to him; of the woman with whom he had yet to settle a long-standing account.

And even his wife had her place in these movements of remembrance. He could plainly see the bowed head on the desk, feel the stiffened arms, and read from the tear-stained page the poem he had marked for her in the days of their courtship.

It was the curse of his life that he could not forget.

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He fought with the memories, and beat them down into oblivion, and turned to his work with renewed energy.

The pangs were short, for he stifled them, but they were insistent and inevitable—two or three minutes, perhaps, out of each hour, but every second of these minutes full to the brim with pain.

Yet for all these interruptions, Jordison's mind worked with mechanical precision. It was the mind of an expert moving steadily in a fixed direction, neglecting no chance that might lead to ultimate success, weighing every possibility, working out every calculation with exactitude.

The moments came when all the work became a chaos and figures and plans were whirled away like dust in a storm. But the rest of the time Jordison's mind was calm and even. Every line was drawn true and firm, every calculation was absolutely accurate, even to ten places in decimals.

And success came to Jordison at last, as it comes to most men with an earnest purpose. The whole of one day and the whole of one night he sat at his deal table and made calculations and measured lines and drew plans to scale.

And when the grey light of morning came through the window it showed a white face still poring over a growing heap of papers, a white haggard face with a gleam of triumph in the restless eyes. And on paper the motor-car had become an accomplished fact.

Jordison was no dreamy inventor, but a practical workman. All the time he had been toiling with his

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brain, others had been toiling with their hands. Before he had completed his invention, the engine-house was built, the engine installed, a lathe fixed up, and a brick furnace erected.

Two practical mechanics were engaged, and everything was ready for the fitting together of the machinery before the whole design had assumed a definite form.

Directly Jordison's brain had accomplished part of its task, the work of construction commenced, and the framework of the car was completed before the finishing touches had been put to the plans for the machinery. Every week castings came in from various firms with whom the orders had been placed. These were filed and finished off and fitted together in the workshop.

In less than three months from the date when the first castings had been thrown into the creek, the car was completed, and Jordison sold his fifty horse-power Jacquart for nine hundred pounds.

On October 25th Jordison took the first run on his new motor. It was blowing half a gale, pouring with rain, and the roads were deep in mud and water. It was a severe test for the new car, but she came through it splendidly and ploughed through the storm like a ship through a heavy sea, throwing up a shower of mud, like spray, on each side of her. Jordison revelled in the ride.

The wind and rain lashed him like a whip, but he drove through it all at the top speed, and gloried in the power of his new-found joy. He was an experienced motorist, and knew, before he had gone half a dozen

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miles, that no one had ever driven such a car as this before.

For three hours he sat with his hand on the steering wheel, and in that time they had traversed Essex from north to south and east to west. Lipp sat shivering and cursing by his side.

He was there to learn all about the monster that jumped and quivered beneath him. He was commencing his education as a chauffeur. But he only took a feeble interest in the proceedings; and while Jordison explained the art of driving, his whole mind was occupied with wondering when the car would be scattered in pieces over the roadway.

For, like many experts, Jordison cut his corners very close indeed.

Lipp's face did not brighten until they came within sight of the Red House. The ugly building on the little hill had never appeared in so attractive a light to him before. No mariner returning from a stormy voyage could have welcomed the first glimpse of home with greater joy and thankfulness.

Then, as they rushed along the straight road, the hill in front of them was suddenly hidden in a flash of blinding light. A few seconds later a loud report burst on their ears, and the ground trembled beneath them.

Instinctively Jordison put on the brake, just as a man shuts his eyes to protect them from danger, not stopping to reason whether he will come to harm or not.

The great car slowed down, and, peering through the driving rain, the two occupants saw a heavy cloud of

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