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The RED HOUSE MYSTERY

A. A. MILNE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOT THAT IT MATTERS

"There is the satisfaction of knowing that wherever you may dip into this book you will be amused."—*The Times* (*London*).

IF I MAY

"A very entertaining collection of whimsical essays which it is not extravagant to call excellent."—*The Bookman*.

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY

By

A. A. MILNE

Author of "Mr. Pim Passes By,"
"The Dover Road," etc.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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To John Vine Milne

My dear Father,

Like all really nice people, you have a weakness for detective stories, and feel that there are not enough of them. So, after all that you have done for me, the least that I can do for you is to write you one. Here it is: with more gratitude and affection than I can well put down here.

A. A. M.

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THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

MRS. STEVENS IS FRIGHTENED

IN the drowsy heat of the summer afternoon the Red House was taking its siesta. There was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms. From distant lawns came the whir of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds; making ease the sweeter in that it is taken while others are working.

It was the hour when even those whose business it is to attend to the wants of others have a moment or two for themselves. In the housekeeper's room Audrey Stevens, the pretty parlourmaid, re-trimmed her best hat, and talked idly to her aunt, the cook-housekeeper of Mr. Mark Ablett's bachelor home.

"For Joe?" said Mrs. Stevens placidly, her eye on the hat.

Audrey nodded. She took a pin from her mouth, found a place in the hat for it, and said, "He likes a bit of pink."

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"I don't say I mind a bit of pink myself," said her aunt. "Joe Turner isn't the only one."

"It isn't everybody's colour," said Audrey, holding the hat out at arm's-length, and regarding it thoughtfully. "Stylish, isn't it?"

"Oh, it'll suit *you* all right, and it would have suited me at your age. A bit too dressy for me now, though wearing better than some other people, I daresay. I was never the one to pretend to be what I wasn't. If I'm fifty-five, I'm fifty-five—that's what *I* say."

"Fifty-eight, isn't it, auntie?"

"I was just giving that as an example," said Mrs. Stevens with great dignity.

Audrey threaded a needle, held her hand out, and looked at her nails critically for a moment, and then began to sew.

"Funny thing that about Mr. Mark's brother. Fancy not seeing your brother for fifteen years." She gave a self-conscious laugh and went on, "Wonder what I should do if I didn't see Joe for fifteen years."

"As I told you all this morning," said her aunt, "I've been here five years, and never heard of a brother. I could say that before everybody if I was going to die to-morrow. There's been no brother here while I've been here."

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when he spoke about him at breakfast this morning. I didn't hear what went before, naturally, but they

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was all talking about the brother when I went in—now what was it I went in for—hot milk, was it, or toast?—well, they was all talking, and Mr. Mark turns to me, and says—you know his way—'Stevens,' he says, 'my brother is coming to see me this afternoon; I'm expecting him about three,' he says. 'Show him into the office,' he says, just like that. 'Yes, sir,' I says quite quietly, but I was never so surprised in my life, not knowing he had a brother. 'My brother from Australia,' he says—there, I'd forgotten that. From Australia."

"Well, he may have been in Australia," said Mrs. Stevens, judicially; "I can't say for that, not knowing the country; but what I do say is he's never been here. Not while I've been here, and that's five years."

"Well, but, auntie, he hasn't been here for fifteen years. I heard Mr. Mark telling Mr. Cayley. 'Fifteen years,' he says. Mr. Cayley having arst him when his brother was last in England. Mr. Cayley knew of him, I heard him telling Mr. Beverley, but didn't know when he was last in England—see? So that's why he arst Mr. Mark."

"I'm not saying anything about fifteen years, Audrey. I can only speak for what I know, and that's five years Whitsuntide. I can take my oath he's not set foot in the house since five years Whitsuntide. And if he's been in Australia, as you say, well, I daresay he's had his reasons."

"What reasons?" said Audrey lightly.

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"Never mind what reasons. Being in the place of a mother to you, since your poor mother died, I say this, Audrey—when a gentleman goes to Australia, he has his reasons. And when he stays in Australia fifteen years, as Mr. Mark says, and as I know for myself for five years, he has his reasons. And a respectably brought-up girl doesn't ask what reasons."

"Got into trouble, I suppose," said Audrey carelessly. "They were saying at breakfast he'd been a wild one. Debts. I'm glad Joe isn't like that. He's got fifteen pounds in the post-office savings' bank. Did I tell you?"

But there was not to be any more talk of Joe Turner that afternoon. The ringing of a bell brought Audrey to her feet—no longer Audrey, but now Stevens. She arranged her cap in front of the glass.

"There, that's the front door," she said. "That's him. 'Show him into the office,' said Mr. Mark. I suppose he doesn't want the other ladies and gentlemen to see him. Well, they're all out at their golf, anyhow—Wonder if he's going to stay—P'raps he's brought back a lot of gold from Australia—I might hear something about Australia, because if *anybody* can get gold there, then I don't say but what Joe and I——"

"Now, now, get on, Audrey."

"Just going, darling."

She went out.

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To anyone who had just walked down the drive in the August sun, the open door of the Red House revealed a delightfully inviting hall, of which even the mere sight was cooling. It was a big low-roofed, oak-beamed place, with cream-washed walls and diamond-paned windows, blue-curtained. On the right and left were doors leading into other living-rooms, but on the side which faced you as you came in were windows again, looking on to a small grass court, and from open windows to open windows such air as there was played gently. The staircase went up in broad, low steps along the right-hand wall, and, turning to the left, led you along a gallery, which ran across the width of the hall, to your bedroom. That is, if you were going to stay the night. Mr. Robert Ablett's intentions in this matter were as yet unknown.

As Audrey came across the hall she gave a little start as she saw Mr. Cayley suddenly, sitting unobtrusively in a seat beneath one of the front windows, reading. No reason why he shouldn't be there; certainly a much cooler place than the golf-links on such a day; but somehow there was a deserted air about the house that afternoon, as if all the guests were outside, or—perhaps the wisest place of all—up in their bedrooms, sleeping. Mr. Cayley, the master's cousin, was a surprise; and, having given a little exclamation as she came suddenly upon him, she blushed, and said, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't see you at first," and he looked up from

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his book and smiled at her. An attractive smile it was on that big ugly face. "Such a gentleman, Mr. Cayley," she thought to herself as she went on, and wondered what the master would do without him. If this brother, for instance, had to be bundled back to Australia, it was Mr. Cayley who would do most of the bundling.

"So this is Mr. Robert," said Audrey to herself, as she came in sight of the visitor.

She told her aunt afterwards that she would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother, but she would have said that in any event. Actually she was surprised. Dapper little Mark, with his neat pointed beard and his carefully-curled moustache; with his quick-darting eyes, always moving from one to the other of any company he was in, to register one more smile to his credit when he had said a good thing, one more expectant look when he was only waiting his turn to say it; he was a very different man from this rough-looking, ill-dressed colonial, staring at her so loweringly.

"I want to see Mr. Mark Ablett," he growled. It sounded almost like a threat.

Audrey recovered herself and smiled reassuringly at him. She had a smile for everybody.

"Yes, sir. He is expecting you, if you will come this way."

"Oh! So you know who I am, eh?"

"Mr. Robert Ablett?"

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"Ay, that's right. So he's expecting me, eh? He'll be glad to see me, eh?"

"If you will come this way, sir," said Audrey primly.

She went to the second door on the left, and opened it.

"Mr. Robert Ab——" she began, and then broke off. The room was empty. She turned to the man behind her. "If you will sit down, sir, I will find the master. I know he's in, because he told me that you were coming this afternoon."

"Oh!" He looked round the room. "What d'you call this place, eh?"

"The office, sir."

"The office?"

"The room where the master works, sir."

"Works, eh? That's new. Didn't know he'd ever done a stroke of work in his life."

"Where he *writes*, sir," said Audrey, with dignity. The fact that Mr. Mark "wrote," though nobody knew what, was a matter of pride in the housekeeper's room.

"Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room, eh?"

"I will tell the master you are here, sir," said Audrey decisively.

She closed the door and left him there.

Well! Here was something to tell auntie! Her mind was busy at once, going over all the things which he had said to her and she had said to him—

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quiet-like. "Directly I saw him I said to myself——" Why, you could have knocked her over with a feather. Feathers, indeed, were a perpetual menace to Audrey.

However, the immediate business was to find the master. She walked across the hall to the library, glanced in, came back a little uncertainly, and stood in front of Cayley.

"If you please, sir," she said in a low, respectful voice, "can you tell me where the master is? It's Mr. Robert called."

"What?" said Cayley, looking up from his book. "Who?"

Audrey repeated her question.

"I don't know. Isn't he in the office? He went up to the Temple after lunch. I don't think I've seen him since."

"Thank you, sir. I will go up to the Temple."

Cayley returned to his book.

The "Temple" was a brick summer-house, in the gardens at the back of the house, about three hundred yards away. Here Mark meditated sometimes before retiring to the "office" to put his thoughts upon paper. The thoughts were not of any great value; moreover, they were given off at the dinner-table more often than they got on to paper, and got on to paper more often than they got into print. But that did not prevent the master of the Red House from being a little pained when a visitor treated the Temple carelessly, as if it had been

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erected for the ordinary purposes of flirtation and cigarette-smoking. There had been an occasion when two of his guests had been found playing fives in it. Mark had said nothing at the time, save to ask—with a little less than his usual point—whether they couldn't find anywhere else for their game, but the offenders were never asked to the Red House again.

Audrey walked slowly up to the Temple, looked in and walked slowly back. All that walk for nothing. Perhaps the master was upstairs in his room. "Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room." Well, now, Auntie, would *you* like anyone in *your* drawing-room with a red handkerchief round his neck and great big dusty boots, and—listen! One of the men shooting rabbits. Auntie was partial to a nice rabbit and onion sauce. How hot it was; she wouldn't say no to a cup of tea. Well, one thing, Mr. Robert wasn't staying the night; he hadn't any luggage. Of course Mr. Mark could lend him things; he had clothes enough for six. She would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother.

She came into the house. As she passed the housekeeper's room on her way to the hall, the door opened suddenly, and a rather frightened face looked out.

"Hallo, Aud," said Elsie. "It's Audrey," she said, turning into the room.

"Come in, Audrey," called Mrs. Stevens.

"What's up?" said Audrey, looking in at the door.

"Oh, my dear, you gave me such a turn. Where have you been?"

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"Up to the Temple."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Hear what?"

"Bangs and explosions and terrible things."

"Oh," said Audrey, rather relieved. "One of the men shooting rabbits. Why, I said to myself as I came along, 'Auntie's partial to a nice rabbit,' I said, and I shouldn't be surprised if——"

"Rabbits!" said her aunt scornfully. "It was inside the house, my girl."

"Straight it was," said Elsie. She was one of the housemaids. "I said to Mrs. Stevens—didn't I, Mrs. Stevens?—'That was in the house,' I said."

Audrey looked at her aunt and then at Elsie.

"Do you think he had a revolver with him?" she said in a hushed voice.

"Who?" said Elsie excitedly.

"That brother of his. From Australia. I said as soon as I set eyes on him, 'You're a bad lot, my man!' That's what *I* said, Elsie. Even before he spoke to me. Rude!" She turned to her aunt. "Well, I give you *my* word."

"If you remember, Audrey, I always said there was no saying with anyone from Australia." Mrs. Stevens lay back in her chair, breathing rather rapidly. "I wouldn't go out of this room now, not if you paid me a hundred thousand pounds."

"Oh, Mrs. Stevens!" said Elsie, who badly wanted five shillings for a new pair of shoes, "I wouldn't go as far as that, not myself, but——"

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"There!" cried Mrs. Stevens, sitting up with a start.

They listened anxiously, the two girls instinctively coming closer to the older woman's chair.

A door was being shaken, kicked, rattled.

"Listen!"

Audrey and Elsie looked at each other with frightened eyes.

They heard a man's voice, loud, angry.

"Open the door!" it was shouting. "Open the door! I say, open the door!"

"Don't open the door!" cried Mrs. Stevens in a panic, as if it was her door which was threatened. "Audrey! Elsie! Don't let him in!"

"Damn it, open the door," came the voice again.

"We're all going to be murdered in our beds," she quavered. Terrified, the two girls huddled closer, and with an arm round each, Mrs. Stevens sat there, waiting.

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CHAPTER II

MR. GILLINGHAM GETS OUT AT THE WRONG STATION

WHETHER Mark Ablett was a bore or not depended on the point of view, but it may be said at once that he never bored his company on the subject of his early life. However, stories get about. There is always somebody who knows. It was understood—and this, anyhow, on Mark's own authority—that his father had been a country clergyman. It was said that, as a boy, Mark had attracted the notice, and patronage, of some rich old spinster of the neighbourhood, who had paid for his education, both at school and university. At about the time when he was coming down from Cambridge, his father had died; leaving behind him a few debts, as a warning to his family, and a reputation for short sermons, as an example to his successor. Neither warning nor example seems to have been effective. Mark went to London, with an allowance from his patron, and (it is generally agreed) made acquaintance with the money-lenders. He was supposed, by his patron and any others who inquired, to be "writing"; but what he wrote, other than letters asking

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for more time to pay, has never been discovered. However, he attended the theatres and music halls very regularly—no doubt with a view to some serious articles in the "Spectator" on the decadence of the English stage.

Fortunately (from Mark's point of view) his patron died during his third year in London, and left him all the money he wanted. From that moment his life loses its legendary character, and becomes more a matter of history. He settled accounts with the money-lenders, abandoned his crop of wild oats to the harvesting of others, and became in his turn a patron. He patronized the Arts. It was not only usurers who discovered that Mark Ablett no longer wrote for money; editors were now offered free contributions as well as free lunches; publishers were given agreements for an occasional slender volume, in which the author paid all expenses and waived all royalties; promising young painters and poets dined with him; and he even took a theatrical company on tour, playing host and "lead" with equal lavishness.

He was not what most people call a snob. A snob has been defined carelessly as a man who loves a lord; and, more carefully, as a mean lover of mean things—which would be a little unkind to the peerage if the first definition were true. Mark had his vanities undoubtedly, but he would sooner have met an actor-manager than an earl; he would have spoken of his friendship with Dante—had that been possible—more glibly than of his friendship with the Duke.

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Call him a snob if you like, but not the worst kind of snob; a hanger-on, but to the skirts of Art, not Society; a climber, but in the neighborhood of Parnassus, not of Hay Hill.

His patronage did not stop at the Arts. It also included Matthew Cayley, a small cousin of thirteen, whose circumstances were as limited as had been Mark's own before his patron had rescued him. He sent the Cayley cousin to school and Cambridge. His motives, no doubt, were unworldly enough at first; a mere repaying to his account in the Recording Angel's book of the generosity which had been lavished on himself; a laying-up of treasure in heaven. But it is probable that, as the boy grew up, Mark's designs for his future were based on his own interests as much as those of his cousin, and that a suitably educated Matthew Cayley of twenty-three was felt by him to be a useful property for a man in his position; a man, that is to say, whose vanities left him so little time for his affairs.

Cayley, then, at twenty-three, looked after his cousin's affairs. By this time Mark had bought the Red House and the considerable amount of land which went with it. Cayley superintended the necessary staff. His duties, indeed, were many. He was not quite secretary, not quite land-agent, not quite business-adviser, not quite companion, but something of all four. Mark leant upon him and called him "Cay," objecting quite rightly in the circumstances to the name of Matthew. Cay, he felt was, above

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all, dependable; a big, heavy-jawed, solid fellow, who didn't bother you with unnecessary talk—a boon to a man who liked to do most of the talking himself.

Cayley was now twenty-eight, but had all the appearance of forty, which was his patron's age. Spasmodically they entertained a good deal at the Red House, and Mark's preference—call it kindliness or vanity, as you please—was for guests who were not in a position to repay his hospitality. Let us have a look at them as they came down to that breakfast, of which Stevens, the parlourmaid, has already given us a glimpse.

The first to appear was Major Rumbold, a tall, grey-haired, grey-moustached, silent man, wearing a Norfolk coat and grey flannel trousers, who lived on his retired pay and wrote natural history articles for the papers. He inspected the dishes on the side-table, decided carefully on kedgeree, and got to work on it. He had passed on to a sausage by the time of the next arrival. This was Bill Beverley, a cheerful young man in white flannel trousers and a blazer.

"Hallo, Major," he said as he came in, "how's the gout?"

"It isn't gout," said the Major gruffly.

"Well, whatever it is."

The Major grunted.

"I make a point of being polite at breakfast," said Bill, helping himself largely to porridge. "Most people are so rude. That's why I asked you. But

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don't tell me if it's a secret. Coffee?" he added, as he poured himself out a cup.

"No, thanks. I never drink till I've finished eating."

"Quite right, Major; it's only manners." He sat down opposite to the other. "Well, we've got a good day for our game. It's going to be dashed hot, but that's where Betty and I score. On the fifth green, your old wound, the one you got in that frontier skirmish in '43, will begin to trouble you; on the eighth, your liver, undermined by years of curry, will drop to pieces; on the twelfth——"

"Oh, shut up, you ass!"

"Well, I'm only warning you. Hallo; good morning, Miss Norris. I was just telling the Major what was going to happen to you and him this morning. Do you want any assistance, or do you prefer choosing your own breakfast?"

"Please don't get up," said Miss Norris. "I'll help myself. Good morning, Major." She smiled pleasantly at him.

The Major nodded.

"Good morning. Going to be hot."

"As I was telling him," began Bill, "that's where—— Hallo, here's Betty. Morning, Cayley."

Betty Calladine and Cayley had come in together. Betty was the eighteen-year-old daughter of Mrs. John Calladine, widow of the painter, who was acting hostess on this occasion for Mark. Ruth Norris took herself seriously as an actress and, on her holi-

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days, seriously as a golfer. She was quite competent as either. Neither the Stage Society nor Sandwich had any terrors for her.

"By the way, the car will be round at 10.30," said Cayley, looking up from his letters. "You're lunching there, and driving back directly afterwards. Isn't that right?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't have two rounds," said Bill hopefully.

"Much too hot in the afternoon," said the Major. "Get back comfortably for tea."

Mark came in. He was generally the last. He greeted them and sat down to toast and tea. Breakfast was not his meal. The others chattered gently while he read his letters.

"Good God!" said Mark suddenly.

There was an instinctive turning of heads towards him.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Norris. Sorry, Betty."

Miss Norris smiled her forgiveness. She often wanted to say it herself, particularly at rehearsals.

"I say, Cay!" He was frowning to himself—annoyed, puzzled. He held up a letter and shook it. "Who do you think this is from?"

Cayley, at the other end of the table, shrugged his shoulders. How could he possibly guess?

"Robert," said Mark.

"Robert?" It was difficult to surprise Cayley. "Well?"

"It's all very well to say 'Well?' like that," said

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Mark peevishly. "He's coming here this afternoon."

"I thought he was in Australia, or somewhere."

"Of course. So did I." He looked across at Rumbold. "Got any brothers, Major?"

"No."

"Well, take my advice, and don't have any."

"Not likely to now," said the Major.

Bill laughed. Miss Norris said politely: "But *you* haven't any brothers, Mr. Ablett?"

"One," said Mark grimly. "If you're back in time you'll see him this afternoon. He'll probably ask you to lend him five pounds. Don't."

Everybody felt a little uncomfortable.

"I've got a brother," said Bill helpfully, "but I always borrow from *him*."

"Like Robert," said Mark.

"When was he in England last?" asked Cayley.

"About fifteen years ago, wasn't it? You'd have been a boy, of course."

"Yes, I remember seeing him once about then, but I didn't know if he had been back since."

"No. Not to my knowledge." Mark, still obviously upset, returned to his letter.

"Personally," said Bill, "I think relations are a great mistake."

"All the same," said Betty a little daringly, "it must be rather fun having a skeleton in the cupboard."

Mark looked up, frowning.

"If you think it's fun, I'll hand him over to you,

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Betty. If he's anything like he used to be, and like his few letters have been—well, Cay knows."

Cayley grunted.

"All I knew was that one didn't ask questions about him."

It may have been meant as a hint to any too curious guest not to ask more questions, or a reminder to his host not to talk too freely in front of strangers, although he gave it the sound of a mere statement of fact. But the subject dropped, to be succeeded by the more fascinating one of the coming foursome. Mrs. Calladine was driving over with the players in order to lunch with an old friend who lived near the links, and Mark and Cayley were remaining at home—on affairs. Apparently "affairs" were now to include a prodigal brother. But that need not make the foursome less enjoyable.

. . . . .

At about the time when the Major (for whatever reasons) was fluffing his tee-shot at the sixteenth, and Mark and his cousin were at their business at the Red House, an attractive gentleman of the name of Antony Gillingham was handing up his ticket at Woodham station and asking the way to the village. Having received directions, he left his bag with the station-master and walked off leisurely. He is an important person to this story, so that it is as well we should know something about him before letting him loose in it. Let us stop him at the top of the hill on some excuse, and have a good look at him.

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The first thing we realize is that he is doing more of the looking than we are. Above a clean-cut, clean-shaven face, of the type usually associated with the Navy, he carries a pair of grey eyes which seem to be absorbing every detail of our person. To strangers this look is almost alarming at first, until they discover that his mind is very often elsewhere; that he has, so to speak, left his eyes on guard, while he himself follows a train of thought in another direction. Many people do this, of course; when, for instance, they are talking to one person and trying to listen to another; but their eyes betray them. Antony's never did.

He had seen a good deal of the world with those eyes, though never as a sailor. When at the age of twenty-one he came into his mother's money, £400 a year, old Gillingham looked up from the "Stock-breeders' Gazette" to ask him what he was going to do.

"See the world," said Antony.

"Well, send me a line from America, or wherever you get to."

"Right," said Antony.

Old Gillingham returned to his paper. Antony was a younger son, and, on the whole, not so interesting to his father as the cadets of certain other families; Champion Birket's, for instance. But, then, Champion Birket was the best Hereford bull he had ever bred.

Antony, however, had no intention of going fur-

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ther away than London. His idea of seeing the world was to see, not countries, but people; and to see them from as many angles as possible. There are all sorts in London if you know how to look at them. So Antony looked at them—from various strange corners; from the view-point of the valet, the newspaper-reporter, the waiter, the shop-assistant. With the independence of £400 a year behind him, he enjoyed it immensely. He never stayed long in one job, and generally closed his connexion with it by telling his employer (contrary to all etiquette as understood between master and servant) exactly what he thought of him. He had no difficulty in finding a new profession. Instead of experience and testimonials he offered his personality and a sporting bet. He would take no wages the first month, and—if he satisfied his employer—double wages the second. He always got his double wages.

He was now thirty. He had come to Woodham for a holiday, because he liked the look of the station. His ticket entitled him to travel further, but he had always intended to please himself in the matter. Woodham attracted him, and he had a suit-case in the carriage with him and money in his pocket. Why not get out?

The landlady of the "George" was only too glad to put him up, and promised that her husband would drive over that afternoon for his luggage.

"And you would like some lunch, I expect, sir."

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"Yes, but don't give yourself any trouble about it. Cold anything-you've-got."

"What about beef, sir?" she asked, as if she had a hundred varieties of meat to select from, and was offering him her best.

"That will do splendidly. And a pint of beer."

While he was finishing his lunch, the landlord came in to ask about the luggage. Antony ordered another pint, and soon had him talking.

"It must be rather fun to keep a country inn," he said, thinking that it was about time he started another profession

"I don't know about fun, sir. It gives us a living, and a bit over."

"You ought to take a holiday," said Antony, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Funny thing your saying that," said the landlord, with a smile. "Another gentleman, over from the Red House, was saying that on'y yesterday. Offered to take my place an all." He laughed rumblingly.

"The Red House? Not the Red House, Stanton?"

"That's right, sir. Stanton's the next station to Woodham. The Red House is about a mile from here—Mr. Ablett's."

Antony took a letter from his pocket. It was addressed from "The Red House, Stanton," and signed "Bill."

"Good old Bill," he murmured to himself. "He's getting on."

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Antony had met Bill Beverley two years before in a tobacconist's shop. Gillingham was on one side of the counter and Mr. Beverley on the other. Something about Bill, his youth and freshness, perhaps, attracted Antony; and when cigarettes had been ordered, and an address given to which they were to be sent, he remembered that he had come across an aunt of Beverley's once at a country-house. Beverley and he met again a little later at a restaurant. Both of them were in evening-dress, but they did different things with their napkins, and Antony was the more polite of the two. However, he still liked Bill. So on one of his holidays, when he was unemployed, he arranged an introduction through a mutual friend. Beverley was a little inclined to be shocked when he was reminded of their previous meetings, but his uncomfortable feeling soon wore off, and he and Antony quickly became intimate. But Bill generally addressed him as "Dear Madman" when he happened to write.

Antony decided to stroll over to the Red House after lunch and call upon his friend. Having inspected his bedroom, which was not quite the lavender-smelling country-inn bedroom of fiction, but sufficiently clean and comfortable, he set out over the fields.

As he came down the drive and approached the old red-brick front of the house, there was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms, and from distant

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lawns the whir of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds. . . .

And in the hall a man was banging at a locked door, and shouting, "Open the *door,* I say; open the *door!*"

"Hallo!" said Antony in amazement.

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CHAPTER III

TWO MEN AND A BODY

CAYLEY looked round suddenly at the voice. "Can I help?" said Antony politely.

"Something's happened," said Cayley. He was breathing quickly. "I heard a shot—it sounded like a shot—I was in the library. A loud bang—I didn't know what it was. And the door's locked." He rattled the handle again, and shook it. "Open the *door!*" he cried. "I say, Mark, what is it? Open the door!"

"But he must have locked the door on purpose," said Antony. "So why should he open it just because you ask him to?"

Cayley looked at him in a bewildered way. Then he turned to the door again. "We must break it in," he said, putting his shoulder to it. "Help me."

"Isn't there a window?"

Cayley turned to him stupidly.

"Window? Window?"

"So much easier to break in a window," said Antony with a smile. He looked very cool and collected, as he stood just inside the hall, leaning on

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his stick, and thinking, no doubt, that a great deal of fuss was being made about nothing. But then, he had not heard the shot.

"Window—of course! What an idiot I am."

He pushed past Antony, and began running out into the drive. Antony followed him. They ran along the front of the house, down a path to the left, and then to the left again over the grass, Cayley in front, the other close behind him. Suddenly Cayley looked over his shoulder and pulled up short.

"Here," he said.

They had come to the windows of the locked room, French windows which opened on to the lawns at the back of the house. But now they were closed. Antony couldn't help feeling a thrill of excitement as he followed Cayley's example, and put his face close up to the glass. For the first time he wondered if there really *had* been a revolver shot in this mysterious room. It had all seemed so absurd and melodramatic from the other side of the door. But if there had been one shot, why should there not be two more?—at the careless fools who were pressing their noses against the panes, and asking for it.

"My God, can you see it?" said Cayley in a shaking voice. "Down there. Look!"

The next moment Antony saw it. A man was lying on the floor at the far end of the room, his back towards them. A man? Or the body of a man?

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"I don't know," the other whispered.

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"Well, we'd better go and see." He considered the windows for a moment. "I should think, if you put your weight into it, just where they join, they'll give all right. Otherwise, we can kick the glass in."

Without saying anything, Cayley put his weight into it. The window gave, and they went into the room. Cayley walked quickly to the body, and dropped on his knees by it. For the moment he seemed to hesitate; then with an effort he put a hand on to its shoulder and pulled it over.

"Thank God!" he murmured, and let the body go again.

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"Robert Ablett."

"Oh!" said Antony. "I thought his name was Mark," he added, more to himself than to the other.

"Yes, Mark Ablett lives here. Robert is his brother." He shuddered, and said, "I was afraid it was Mark."

"Was Mark in the room too?"

"Yes," said Cayley absently. Then, as if resenting suddenly these questions from a stranger, "Who are you?"

But Antony had gone to the locked door, and was turning the handle. "I suppose he put the key in his pocket," he said, as he came back to the body again.

"Who?"

Antony shrugged his shoulders.

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