A 507202

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

828
B155ms

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MR. FORTUNE SPEAKING

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Mr. Bailey *has also written:*

MR. FORTUNE EXPLAINS
MR. FORTUNE'S PRACTICE
MR. FORTUNE'S TRIALS
KNIGHT-AT-ARMS
THE FOOL
MR. FORTUNE PLEASE
THE YOUNG LOVER
THE MERCHANT PRINCE

Published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MR. FORTUNE SPEAKING

BY
H. C. BAILEY
Author of "Mr. Fortune Explains,"
"Mr. Fortune Please," etc.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MR. FORTUNE SPEAKING, COPYRIGHT, 1931,
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC. : : ALL
RIGHTS RESERVED : : PRINTED IN U. S. A.

FIRST EDITION

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

O. F. BUTLER
BOSTON ST
V-6-40

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	ZODIACS	7
II	THE CAT'S MILK	43
III	THE PINK MACAW	81
IV	THE HAZEL ICE	113
V	THE PAINTED PEBBLES	159
VI	THE WOMAN IN WOOD	199
VII	THE GERMAN SONG	241
VIII	THE LION FISH	279

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MR. FORTUNE SPEAKING

I

ZODIACS

IT was spring. Even in Whitehall the sun was shining.

Mr. Fortune looked up at it morosely and climbed into a taxi and was jolted away to that one of his clubs which most resembles a mausoleum. In the gloom of its hall as many as three venerable forms were watching the tape machine. Mr. Fortune gazed at them with horror, and sought the most sepulchral room in the club.

It is at the top, it is low, its small Victorianly curtained windows maintain a stubborn defensive against light and air, it has sullen furniture, and its drab walls are pitted with portraits of members completely dead. The others use it little. It was empty but for a bearded bishop audibly eating buttered toast.

Mr. Fortune took a remote corner with a monograph on extinct worms and surrendered to his emotions. He believes himself to love the country He is a gardener of standing. But for the tedious affair of the poison in the Home Secretary's Easter eggs he would have been in the company of

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

hawthorn and lilac enjoying his symphony of iris. He disliked life.

The room became even darker. The chimney moaned. Rain and hail rattled on the windows. Mr. Fortune laid down the treatise on ancient worms and stared out at the storm. The melancholy of his round pink face was thus displayed. Sir Marmaduke Jones opened the door. He is the most fashionable of women's doctors, looks like it, dresses like it, walks like it. He was sprightly with the bishop, who mumbled. His tripping splendour crossed the room.

"Hallo, Fortune!"

"When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat," Mr. Fortune murmured, watching the rain.

"Have you been buying Zodiacs?"

Mr. Fortune turned to him with sad eyes. "What are Zodiacs?" he moaned.

"How innocently he says it! I thought you knew everything, Fortune."

"No. No. I'm not a physician. Tell me about Zodiacs. They sound horrid."

And Sir Marmaduke sat down and told him. Zodiacs were a mine in Kurdistan. Lord Blancapel's latest. Platinum. Went off with a great boom. Blancapel's name was enough, of course. The best people went into it. People behind the scenes, you know, said there was absolutely no limit. But a week or two ago the shares took a turn. Nobody knew why. One couldn't hear of anything definite. But they had been jumping up and down and lately there was something very like a slump. Quite a sensation. Nothing like it ever known in Blancapel's mines. Very sound

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

man, Blancapel, safe as the Bank. Queer things, these panics. . . .

Mr. Fortune moaned gently. Mr. Fortune looked out of the window. "It is a beastly day," he said.

"Spring, spring," Sir Marmaduke chirruped. "April showers bring forth May flowers, eh?"

Mr. Fortune stared despair of his intellect. "It'll bring down all the blossom," he said shrilly, and fled and drove home through another thunderous shower.

That was his introduction to the affair of Zodiacs.

His next scene in it was set in the private view of the Academy. He was still out of luck, he could meet nobody but dreary important people; he was meditating the desperate resort of looking at the pictures when Lady Dolly Pendeen bumped into him. She looks like Little Bo-peep, and by the testimony of her friends ought to have been a jockey.

"So sorry," says she over her small shoulder. "Oh, wars! It's Mr. Fortune."

"Yes. That's not my fault," he sighed.

"One fine large hump?" She looked up at him with her head on one side. "Are you in Zodiacs, Mr. Fortune?"

"Heaven forbid."

"Praise God. Aren't we pious? I say, you're a wonder. Every blessed man here is talking Zodiacs, and most of the women."

"I always was an outsider," said Mr. Fortune sadly.

"Rats," said Lady Dolly. "What put you off? Haven't you any use for Blanco?"

"Blanco?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Old Blancapel. Look at them buzzing round him, flies on the jam."

Mr. Fortune saw a little bald man of sandy texture who resembled his tailor. But Lord Blancapel was less talkative. He had the manner of a bored potentate receiving homage. There was plenty of it. He moved on slowly, masterful, with a word or a gesture for those whom he chose to honour. His tired eyes lingered a moment on Dolly Pendeen and Mr. Fortune. In the next moment one of the most respectable of England's politicians was presenting Mr. Fortune to the great man and explaining who he was. Lord Blancapel said that the pictures were very good that year.

"Yes. Yes. They always are," said Mr. Fortune wearily.

"I think so," the great man pronounced and passed on.

"Quite like royalty," Mr. Fortune murmured to Dolly Pendeen, but she was gone. He went too.

On the next day he was in the Central Criminal Court assisting the typist who poisoned the Easter eggs to prison. As he came out to streets drenched with spring rain a newsboy howled in his ear. He recoiled shuddering, he rejected the paper thrust upon him, he hurried to his car. Driving home he read on every placard the substance of that raucous yell: Death of Arthur Bure—Mr. Bure Found Dead.

Arrived at his door he sought enlightenment from the chauffeur: "Sam, who was the late Mr. Bure?"

"I been wondering myself, sir," the chauffeur grinned.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"We're so innocent," Mr. Fortune murmured. "Get me the papers. All the papers."

Thus he came into the middle of the case. The papers explained to him that Arthur Bure was a great financier. Mr. Bure was the other self of Lord Blancapel, a director in all the many companies which flew the Blancapel flag, vice-president of the grand Blancapel Combine, managing director of "the new money-maker, Zodiacs." And Mr. Bure had been found dead on Barton Heath. That was all.

Barton Heath is a large tract of upland common a dozen miles out of London, and about it is what house agents describe as an "exclusive residential district." A book of reference provided the information that Mr. Bure's home was there.

It did not seem to Reggie a case requiring the expert mind. He ate two muffins and dozed over the last play of Signor Pirandello.

As he went yawning to dress for dinner, his parlourmaid presented him with another batch of evening papers. "The late editions, sir. Samuel said you ought to have them at once." Mr. Fortune with sad surprise said that it was very good of Samuel.

Death of Arthur Bure. Big Slump in Zodiacs. The Great Slump. Mr. Bure Found Dead. The headlines in pairs assaulted his eyes. "Oh, ah. Yes. I hadn't thought of that," he murmured. "I'm afraid I wasn't really thinking." He read the papers in his bath.

They had not much more to tell about the death of Arthur Bure. A breeder of Sealyhams exercising her dogs had found a man's body on Barton

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Heath and informed the police. It was at once identified as Mr. Arthur Bure. Mr. Bure had been enjoying his usual excellent health and the news of his death had caused great surprise and regret in the district. The police were anxious to hear from anyone who had seen him out that morning.

So the report ran, carefully conventional. The space necessary to do honour to the event was filled up with Mr. Bure's financial glories and his house and his philanthropy and his O.B.E. The other half of front pages was given to the slump in Zodiacs. For some days before Mr. Bure's death they had been tumbling down. When the news was whispered into the Stock Exchange that afternoon they crashed. Picturesque reporters spread themselves imaginatively. City editors were verbose, oracular, smug.

"Yah," said Reggie Fortune, and came back to the bald narrative of the death and squirmed in his bath. "Yes. We're being very discreet. I wonder." He gazed at those twin headlines. The Great Slump. Mr. Bure Found Dead. Death of Arthur Bure. Big Slump in Zodiacs. "Yes. Every effect implies a cause. But you do want to know which is which. This is kind of circular."

He came out of his bath and went to dinner with his more earnest sister—the one who married a man in the Treasury. It was perhaps the only party in London that night at which no one mentioned Zodiacs or Mr. Bure.

The morning papers had nothing more to say, but something to leave out. The announcement that the police were anxious to hear from anyone

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

who had seen Mr. Bure out walking was eliminated. In discussing the case, which he ranks as rather recherché, Reggie Fortune is wont to say that this was the first thing about it which interested him. He ate his omelette pensively. It appeared to him that the police were very coy over Mr. Bure.

He was in the marmalade stage, still thinking so, when a card was brought to him : Mr. Franklin Lee, Universal Club. The name meant nothing, the club less. The man who was shown into the consulting-room was large and lean and loose made. He looked as if he had slept in his clothes, but was clean and shaven. The brown bony face declared that he was a nasty fellow to cross. He had an unquiet eye.

"Mr. Fortune? You are Mr. Fortune? I want to consult you."

"I'm not in ordinary practice, you know."

"Medical expert, aren't you?"

"Well, that's one way of putting it. Did anyone send you to me?"

For a moment the man hesitated. "No, sir. Doesn't matter, does it? Heard about you from the papers. You have all the big cases. I want you to take up a case for me. I'd like your opinion. It's like this——"

"One moment. One moment. Have you seen a solicitor, Mr. Lee?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, I'm not a lawyer. Your solicitor could tell you whether you'd better come to me. And I can't."

"I know what I want."

"Yes. Yes. But I might only be able to give

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

you something else." Reggie watched the restless eyes. "A solicitor would let you know whether it's a civil case or criminal."

"I'm not a criminal," the man roared.

Reggie leaned back in his chair. "Now, we're talking about cases, Mr. Lee," he said mildly. "In a criminal case, I may have to advise the Public Prosecutor. So I can't hear the other side."

Mr. Lee started up. "You've been got at already, have you? I was a damned fool to come." He took a step nearer Reggie, his truculent chin came out. "You're for the prosecution, so you can't hear the other side?" He laughed. "That's pretty good, Mr. Fortune." He stamped out.

Reggie Fortune sank down in his chair. "Your trick, I think," he murmured. "You play a dashin' game, Mr. Lee."

"Beg your pardon, sir"—a fluttered parlourmaid entered—"the gentleman went off without his stick."

Reggie took an aged nobbly blackthorn and handled it carefully. It had white mud about the ferrule. Its other end was broad and heavy.

"He would have gone off without his head if he'd brought it," Reggie complained.

"Perhaps he'll come back for it, sir," said the parlourmaid.

"I shan't be at home," said Reggie.

He took a cab to Scotland Yard.

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department looked up at him from a report in several type-written pages.

"Hallo, Lomas, doing work?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"We are always pleased to see you, Reginald. But we are a business department. Is this a friendly call or have you something on your mind."

"Well, I don't quite know," said Mr. Fortune, and Lomas put up his eyeglass. "What have you been doing with the Bure case?"

"My dear fellow, we haven't had time to do anything."

"Oh, Lomas!" Mr. Fortune was shocked.

"What in the world do you know about the Bure case?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Been rather careful about that, haven't you?"

"This tone is very painful, Reginald. What's the matter?"

"Well, you know, I did think you were being rather coy."

"My dear Reginald! Are you feeling neglected? I'm afraid there's nothing in it for you."

"Yes. Yes. I thought that was what you were trying to convey."

"You know, this isn't like you," said Lomas. "I should call it peevish; what's the grievance?"

"Officially, no grievance. But speaking as a simple citizen, I think the police are practisin' a certain economy of truth."

"Let me know what you mean, please," Lomas frowned.

"Well, this fellow's found dead. Seems to be a death of some public interest. Anything about how he died and why he died is kept out of the papers. In the evening the police want to know who saw him last. In the morning they don't.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

And no explanations. And the Stock Exchange goes ramping on. The simple citizen says the Bure case is being handled. Quite firmly handled."

"I don't like the phrase, Fortune."

"Nor do I, Lomas."

"That's how you feel about it, is it?"

"Yes. I'm the natural man."

"You mean it looks as if evidence was being made up or hushed up for the sake of the gamble in Zodiacs?"

"It's a wicked world, Lomas."

"Thank you, I've been here some time," said the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. "I didn't suppose we should get through this without people talking nonsense. It's a perfectly straight case. It's been handled quite correctly. I was just reading the reports from Barton Heath. I shouldn't have done anything different myself. We can't consider the Stock Exchange. A man is found dead: our business is to find out if it was a natural death and, if it wasn't, to get hold of the murderer. The inspector down there didn't choose to give anything away. He was perfectly right."

"It wasn't a natural death, then?"

Lomas turned the pages of the report. "Fractured skull—injury to the brain," he smiled. "Doesn't sound very natural, Reginald."

"No. No. Who's the doctor?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! These professional jealousies! Bure's own doctor and the divisional surgeon have both examined him. I suppose they would both know a fractured skull if they saw it."

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Yes, it is an emphatic sort of thing. And why does Mr. Bure get his skull fractured to help on the slump in Zodiacs?"

"I don't know anything about Zodiacs," Lomas frowned.

"But Mr. Bure did?"

"What are you suggesting, Fortune? The police action is absolutely regular. When the inspector heard of the death he wanted to find out if anybody had seen Bure on his last walk. So he told the reporters to say so in the papers. When he got to work he found out that a man came to call on Bure that morning and went with him when Bure went out for the last time. Well, he couldn't put his hand on the fellow, he didn't want to warn him that he was suspected, so he told the papers to drop the notice about wanting witnesses and kept it dark that the police suspected foul play. Now are you satisfied?"

"Well-meaning man. Did it all for the best. But I don't follow the workings of his mind. If Bure's companion smashed Bure's head in, he won't believe the police haven't noticed it. Bein' so coy only tells him to look out for himself."

"Don't worry," Lomas smiled. "We know all about him."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

Into the room came Superintendent Bell, hasty and happy. "We're in touch with him, sir."

"Good. Have him summoned to the inquest and don't lose sight of him."

"Good morning, Bell," said Reggie. "How is Mr. Franklin Lee feeling now?"

Bell's face expanded in a broad, paternal smile.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He looked at his chief and chuckled. "Now how the devil did you know that?" Lomas cried.

"Not second sight. Nothing supernatural, Lomas, old thing. Just luck."

"Any particular kind of luck?" said Lomas unpleasantly. "I hope I don't intrude, Reginald —but have you been doing something in Zodiacs yourself?"

"No. No. I was born of poor but pious parents. Also I have no head for gambling. I can't count. But thanks for kind inquiries. So Mr. Franklin Lee is in Zodiacs, is he?"

"You'd better ask him," Lomas laughed.

"No; I don't think so. I'm afraid he isn't loving me. You see, he called on me this morning and asked me to take up his case."

"The deuce he did!"

"Yes, that was rather my feeling."

"Did he tell you what he'd done?"

"I didn't ask him. I said we hadn't been introduced. He said he wasn't a criminal and quit."

"What did you make of him?"

Reggie reached for a cigar. "We didn't get on, you know," he said carefully. "Not what you'd call tactful." Smoke grew about him. "Rather an absent-minded beggar, our Mr. Franklin Lee."

"Rattled, is he, sir?" said Bell.

"Yes. Yes. That was indicated."

"They tell me he's powerfully made," said Lomas. "Rather violent in his manner? Nasty temper?"

"Well, he didn't like me. He's a big chap, yes."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"It all fits, doesn't it, sir?" said Bell.

"Yes. He fits. Physically. But if he did it why did he want to consult me?"

Bell laughed. "That's an easy one, sir. So that he shouldn't have you against him."

"I wonder," said Mr. Fortune. "You know, Lomas, if he thought I could make something of the case for him, I think I'd better have a look at it for you."

"It's a queer business," Lomas frowned. "The case seems straight enough. Come and hear what he has to say at the inquest."

Mr. Fortune went away confirmed in his opinion that the police were being coy. He did not say so. He suspected Lomas of nothing worse than an excessive discretion, a point of tactics on which he is wont to differ from that excellent official. It was nothing but correct of Lomas to avoid even the appearance of the police assisting one side or the other in a financial scandal. But the desire to be perfectly correct is not dominant in Mr. Fortune. In this case it seemed to him to issue in the police believing what they were told, a thing abhorrent to his critical mind.

And the slump in Zodiacs stopped. On the day after Mr. Bure's death they had been ten a penny and no buyers. Then it was suddenly discovered there was a market, the price jumped, checked, wavered and slowly climbed. As Reggie Fortune drove down to Barton with Lomas for the inquest he remarked on this. "It is infernally queer," Lomas growled. "Bure's death seems to have pulled the concern together again."

"Why?" said Reggie.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Good Gad, I don't know. If it had smashed them, I could have understood it."

"Oh, could you? But they were slumping before Bure died, slumping good and hard. It wasn't necessary to kill him to knock 'em down. And, in fact, him bein' advertised dead up they go."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Same like you. I don't know anything. But I don't believe anything either. A hearty, comprehensive incredulity. You should try it, Lomas. Very stimulating to the intellect."

"I dare say. I have to believe evidence."

"Oh, my aunt!" said Reggie. "Evidence! Where is it?"

"You're going to hear it. Have you made up your mind it isn't true beforehand?"

Reggie stared at him. "Not your usual kindly self, Lomas. A little fretful, a little peevish with me."

"I don't like your tone. I know it's a nasty case. You might take it our hands are clean."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow!"

"All right. I don't mean to have the police dragged through Stock Exchange mud, that's all."

"Oh, my Lomas!" Reggie sighed. "Mr. Lomas, his theory of the force. What are the police for? Why, to keep out of the mud."

"Many thanks. You needn't be so infernally superior. You know what we're up against. You've had Franklin Lee trying to tamper with you already."

"Tamper! Well, well. You should have been there. He tampers like a rhinoceros." But Lomas withdrew from the conversation.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The little coroner's court was crowded with reporters. The coroner, enjoying his brief hour of fame, prolonged the formalities pompously, and Lomas and Reggie, close compressed, found fellowship again in affliction. At last Mr. Bure's butler was in the box: to identify the dead man as his master: to relate that a gentleman giving his name as Franklin Lee called on his master on the morning of the death, about noon, and went out with him. "They didn't come back, sir. Mr. Bure never came back."

Amelia Fison, breeder of dogs, was walking on the heath in the afternoon, some time between the showers, about half-past two. Her dogs found a man's body. She recognized Mr. Bure. He seemed quite dead. She found a policeman and he telephoned and she took him back to the body. Did Miss Fison notice anything about the body? "Well, he was dead. He was all wet."

Reggie Fortune stirred, a thing impossible without disturbing Lomas, who glanced at him and saw on his round pink face a mild excitement, as when a child hears from careless elders something it wasn't meant to.

Dr. John Smith came into the box, a plump man with a large important manner and a turn for oratory. Mr. Arthur Bure was one of his patients. Mr. Bure was a man of sixty, enjoying excellent health. In every way a first-class life. When he reached the body, Mr. Bure had already been dead an hour or two. Impossible to be more precise. The resources of medical science. . . .

Reggie Fortune groaned.

The body was lying on its back. There was a

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

large lacerated wound on the head at the juncture of the occipital with the parietal bones. The skull was fractured. About the left ear and on the neck below the flesh was swollen and bruised. There were no other injuries. He had made a post-mortem examination with Dr. Keir. He came to the conclusion that the cause of death was injury to the brain inflicted by a violent blow from some blunt instrument, such as a heavy stick. "Anything to add, doctor?" Dr. Smith had nothing to add. There was no room for doubt.

Reggie Fortune leaned back and his hand tapped lightly on his knee and he watched Dr. Smith's stately exit with dreamy eyes.

Dr. James Keir, divisional surgeon, brisk and snappy, had examined the body with Dr. Smith. Came to the same conclusion. Cause of death, blow from blunt weapon, dealt by powerful man.

Lomas looked at Mr. Fortune, but on that plump and boyish face saw only the drowsy stare of a vacant mind.

The powerful man came into the box. At the name of Franklin Lee the packed court rustled and murmured and its uplifted faces gazed at him. His sallow face darkened, he put his hands in his pockets and stood slouching and grinning.

A fat solicitor cleared his throat. He appeared for Mr. Franklin Lee, sir. Mr. Lee desired to give every information. The coroner bowed. "Why did you go to Mr. Bure's house, Mr. Lee?"

"He asked me to."

"That is important. Have you any proof of that?" A letter was produced. "But this asks you to his office in the City last week."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I know. I went. He wanted to do a deal. We never got near terms. So he asked me to come down to his place and go into the whole business."

"But you have no record of that invitation?"

"Let's get this right. I'm just home from Kurdistan. I've got a concession there that makes the Blancapel Zodiacs Company look silly. Bure knew that. He had to get hold of me or Zodiacs were bust. But he was a good little bluffer. He thought he could bluff me."

Another solicitor bobbed up in the middle of that. Representing Mr. Bure's executors, he objected. "Please, please," the coroner swelled. "No financial advertisements, Mr. Lee. Your point is you had something to sell to Mr. Bure."

"No, sir. I had something Bure wanted to buy. I might have sold if he had bid a price. I had him by the short hairs. He knew that, but he didn't know I knew it. He never got near my figure."

Again the solicitor was up. It must not go out that this was the fact.

"What we have to deal with is Mr. Lee's statement that he came down at Mr. Bure's request," said the coroner.

"Yes, sir. It will be denied. I have witnesses to say he pressed himself on Mr. Bure."

Lee laughed. "That's the Blancapel game, is it? Now we know."

"I can't have this," the coroner frowned. "You are doing yourself no good, Mr. Lee."

"All right. All right. Keep him quiet, then. Well, I came down to see the little man. I dare say I was a fool, but I thought we might have done

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

a deal after all. The bottom was dropping out of his Zodiacs. It was worth anything to him to get hold of me. But he couldn't think big. He was still trying to bluff me with nothing in his hand. He wouldn't offer anything fit to look at. So I told him he was wasting my time. He was badly rattled. He tried to keep me and when he couldn't he came out with me. I had him walking with me across the heath to the station talking nineteen to the dozen. I told him to go to the devil, and left him. That's the last I saw of Mr. Bure—standing on the heath, puffing."

"You left him alive?"

"I did. I never touched him."

"But you had a quarrel?"

"I don't call it a quarrel. Bure did all the talking. I only said 'Nothing doing,' 'Guess again'—that sort of thing. I didn't care if we did business or not. I knew I was on velvet."

"You told him to go to the devil?"

"Oh, I was fed up with him at last, yes."

"I see. Had you a stick with you?"

Lee hesitated. "I dare say."

"What sort of a stick?"

"Ordinary walking-stick."

"Do you produce it?"

"No. I haven't got it. I must have left it somewhere."

"Where?"

"Haven't a notion."

"That is unfortunate. Do you wish to add anything, Mr. Lee?"

"I've told you all I know." He left the witness-box in a heavy silence.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The solicitor of Mr. Bure's executors arose and coughed. Grave statements had been made attacking the deceased which would be absolutely denied — several witnesses — important evidence. The coroner thought it obviously necessary to adjourn. The solicitor wished to refute the charges without delay. Large interests were affected. The coroner had nothing to do with that.

But while they talked, Mr. Fortune touched Lomas and rose and slipped out of the court. Lomas found him in the lobby. "What is it, Reginald?"

"I must examine Bure's body."

"Good Gad!"

"Tell these people. Fix it up. I'll come down to-morrow."

"My dear fellow, how can I bring you in now? These doctors are absolutely confident. Their evidence was quite clear and definite. I don't see my way to interfere with them."

"I said 'must,' Lomas."

Lomas and he examined each other's eyes. Lomas went back into the court.

When he came out again Reggie was sitting in the car behind a long cigar. "How can you smoke with your eyes shut?" Lomas complained.

"You've noticed that's unusual? What a gift is the power of observation, Lomas! And how rare!"

"I've noticed you do it when you are at a loss."

"Not a loss, no. Only wondering. When I have all the facts I may be at a loss."

"That's very gratifying. Do you mean to say

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

I had to interfere and set these fellows' backs up because you were merely wondering?"

"No, not merely. There were points."

"Good Gad! If it's any consolation to you, you have made two hearty enemies. These doctors want your blood. Dr. John Smith means to be quite nasty with you."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

"Damme, Fortune, you're making my position rather difficult. I've shown a good deal of confidence in you. The last thing I wanted to do was to take sides in the case. And now on your bare word, without a single reason, I've told these doctors the police aren't satisfied with their evidence. But we can't go on like this. It's time you showed a little confidence in me."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! I do. I have. Absolutely."

"What is it you suspect?"

"Well, you know they don't persuade me. I feel a certain economy of truth, Lomas old thing. An elimination of facts."

"You think these doctors are trumping up a case?"

"I wouldn't say that. They may be right. But I know they're jumping to a conclusion. Several little things they didn't go into."

"For instance?"

"Well, where was his hat? If I thought a man had been knocked on the head, I should want to look at his hat."

"It may have fallen off before he was hit. We have to assume there was a struggle."

"Yes, that's the kind of logic that makes me

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

uncomfortable. What I assume is that his hat wasn't damaged. That tells against their theory and they ought to have mentioned it."

"For what it's worth," Lomas shrugged. "There are half a dozen answers: it blew off, it fell off, it was knocked off before the fatal blow. The point is, they found the man's skull smashed. You don't doubt that?"

"No. No. But you'll have to produce the hat."

"Anything else?"

Mr. Fortune smiled. "Well, I want to have a little talk with the Air Ministry."

"The—the Air Ministry?" Lomas repeated "Good Gad, you don't suppose the man's death was seen from an aeroplane?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Reggie in a low solemn voice. "My dear Lomas, you do have ideas. You really do. No. I wasn't going to ask about aeroplanes. Only the weather. In these days the Air Ministry looks after the weather for us. They ought to be able to tell us what the weather was doing on Barton Heath while Mr. Bure was out."

"What on earth has the weather got to do with it?"

"My dear chap! But you heard Miss Fison's evidence. She said she went out between the showers. She said when she found Bure he was all wet. Seemed to strike her. It struck me."

"Why, what's the matter with that? I don't see the point."

Mr. Fortune did not answer for a moment. "No, nobody cared about his being wet," he said sadly. "Things did get eliminated." He paused

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

again, regarding Lomas pensively. "Well—there's the little matter of time. When did those showers break? If it was looking like heavy showers when Lee left Bure's house, it's still more queer Bure went with him."

"More queer?"

Mr. Fortune looked at him with half-shut eyes. "Why did Bure go with him, Lomas?"

"Bure was worried about this Zodiacs slump. Lee was somehow mixed up in it. Take Lee's own story, he had a concession to sell which would have been very useful to Zodiacs. They couldn't come to terms. Lee went off in a rage. Bure hurried after him to have another try. They wouldn't be thinking about umbrellas. Then Lee lost his temper, hit him and left him in the rain." Mr. Fortune lay back looking at the sky.

"Well," said Lomas triumphantly, "what's the matter with that?"

"It's all right. But it's going to be denied, you know. You assume Bure was mighty keen to get hold of Lee. Bure's solicitors are bringing evidence that he wasn't. Their story is Lee was worrying him. If you can tell me why a man of sixty who doesn't want to be worried goes out on a stormy day running after the man who worried him, I'll be very interested."

"Oh, Lord, I don't suppose we are going to hear the truth about Zodiacs," Lomas laughed. "All that stuff is bluff for the Stock Exchange. I dare say Bure did want to get hold of Lee. What then? He wouldn't pay the price, as Lee admitted. Lee lost his temper, as he also admitted—and Bure went out. What do you say to that?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

" It's a hypothesis," Mr. Fortune admitted.

" With evidence," Lomas smiled. " You know, you're rather capricious about evidence, Reginald. You don't like it when the doctors ignore Bure's hat. But you're rather ignoring Lee's stick. The stick that he conveniently lost."

" His stick ? Oh, I know all about that. He left it in my house."

Lomas sat up. " Did he though ? You didn't happen to mention it."

" I didn't know it was relevant."

Lomas smiled. " These little errors do occur, don't they ? Is it the sort of stick that could crack a man's skull ? "

" Yes. Yes. I think so."

" You'll produce it, of course ? "

" I've got it all right. He didn't come back for it."

" And that's very interesting, isn't it ? " Lomas laughed.

The car was driving through London. Reggie leaned forward and told the chauffeur to stop at the next newspaper boy. He bought a paper and studied it. " Good heavens, you don't want to read the report of the inquest ? "

" No. No. Latest prices." He pointed to the figures of Zodiacs. " Another little point that's ignored, Lomas. Why does the inquest on Mr. Bure send Zodiacs up ? "

" It is a filthy case," said Lomas.

" Lots of mud about," Reggie agreed cheerfully.

This did not comfort Lomas, nor even conciliate him. He refused to go and eat muffins at the dowdy club which has the best in London. He

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

said morosely that he had work to do, and entered Scotland Yard. So Reggie Fortune ate his muffins with a professor who talked the new mathematics and he came home a little late for dinner, dreamily placid.

The parlourmaid met him in the hall. There was a lady waiting for him : Lady Dolly Pendeen : been waiting some time. He applied himself to the process of waking up.

A pair of slim legs were displayed before the fire in the morning-room, crossing and uncrossing. That was all he could see of her at first, her small person was sunk in a big chair, but she started up as he came in. " Now what in the world is the matter with you ? " said Reggie.

Her little shoulders moved. Her face was red. " Oh, Mr. Fortune, you don't mind my coming, do you ? " She took his hand and held on to it. " You've always been such a lamb, I felt sure you'd help me."

Reggie recovered his hand. " Haven't you got a nice doctor of your own ? "

" An ordinary doctor wouldn't do. I say, can't we sit down and be comfy ? "

" I beg your pardon," said Reggie solemnly, and set the chair for her.

" You sit down too." She put her hand on his arm. He brought a chair to the table a yard off. Lady Dolly disposed herself in the chair, coat thrown back from her boyish little self, neat legs displayed, and smiled brightly. " You see, it's frightfully important to me, Mr. Fortune."

" And what is it that an ordinary doctor won't do ? "

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Well, he wouldn't know. You will help me, won't you?" She put her head on one side.

"I'm limited, you know," said Reggie, who had never liked her so little.

"You're not! You're wonderful. I wanted you to help me about this Zodiacs case."

"I don't know anything about Zodiacs."

"Oh, I don't mean the silly shares. I mean this man who was found dead. You know all about that, I'm sure you do."

"I know all that's in the papers."

"Oh, but that isn't anything, not really, is it? You see, I'm awfully interested, Mr. Fortune. It means a frightful lot to me."

"I'm sorry."

"But you will help me! I want to know what you really think about it. You see, there's only you, Mr. Fortune."

"Oh no. Lots of people."

"But it will come to you, you know it will. Are they going to make out Franklin Lee did it?"

"I'm sorry." Mr. Fortune stood up. "This isn't doing anybody any good."

"You won't help me?"

"You oughtn't to be here. Good night."

Lady Dolly stared at him a moment and ran out of the house.

Mr. Fortune's comfortable face was troubled. "Not one of our nicer young persons," he said sadly. "Did Lee send her? The blighter. Yes, Lomas, a mucky case."

He has always been ready to admit that he never saw his way through it, but considers this no disgrace. The argument is that the obscurities

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

were not within his functions as a man of science. In fact, he classes the case among his best, being wont to remark that he touched the spot from the first : when Miss Fison shuddered and said, " He was all wet."

The morning papers said there was sensational evidence at the Bure inquest : doctors find death by violence : Franklin Lee's story ; the missing stick. It was obvious what reporters and sub-editors were getting ready for. And Zodiacs bore up firmly. But some of the papers mentioned that the mining market was still uneasy.

At the mortuary Mr. Fortune found the two doctors waiting for him with a hostile manner. He said that it was very good of them. The divisional surgeon snorted and understood Mr. Fortune was not satisfied with his evidence. Mr. Fortune wouldn't say that : the department wanted another opinion. Dr. Smith must own that he was surprised : he had found himself in complete agreement with the divisional surgeon. It appeared to him there was no possibility of doubt : he would be glad to know what point in their evidence suggested it to Mr. Fortune.

" My dear doctor, I don't doubt you found everything you said you found."

" I am obliged to you." Dr. Smith was more haughty than ever. " Am I to infer that you expect to find something else ? "

" It's a mistake to rely on expectations, you know," said Reggie slowly.

" I am glad to hear you say so," Dr. Smith condescended. " I came to this sad case with a perfectly open mind, Mr. Fortune. I may say, a

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

blank mind. I was forced to the one conclusion. Pray understand that I shall be happy to assist you in your examination."

"Ay, we'll be present, if you please," the divisional surgeon growled.

Mr. Fortune said that they were very good. But when they were shut in with the dead body he had to be curt with Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith wanted to demonstrate. The amiability of Mr. Fortune does not extend to those who would teach him his job. Dr. Smith, swelling and purple, retreated upon the divisional surgeon and they murmured together.

Medical students have been heard to say that old Fortune is slow. He was very slow with the body of Mr. Bure. The murmuring of the two doctors rose loud before he was done with the damaged head. But that was not the end. The body also occupied him long. . . .

When at last he turned away, his face was still set in thought.

"Well, sir," Dr. Smith cried, "do you dispute our conclusion?"

"You'll not deny he was killed by that injury to the head?" said the divisional surgeon.

"Fracture at the junction of the occipital and parietal bones," Dr. Smith boomed, "bones depressed, injury to——"

"Yes, I did notice it," said Reggie.

"Oh, I am glad. I venture to remain of the opinion, Mr. Fortune, that was the cause of death."

"What did you make of this?" Reggie pointed to red lines running down the dead man's chest. "You didn't mention it."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The divisional surgeon smiled. "I did not. He wouldn't be dying of shingles."

"Look again," said Reggie, and went to wash his hands.

"I'll grant you, it looks queer." The divisional surgeon's voice changed as he pored over the body. "But what would it be but shingles, Mr. Fortune?"

"Undoubtedly shingles," Dr. Smith boomed. "I see nothing abnormal, Keir. It could be nothing else."

"Ay, ay." The divisional surgeon looked at Reggie. "What are you putting to us, Mr. Fortune?"

"Well, what about his hat?" said Reggie.

"Lord, man, I've never seen his hat," the divisional surgeon cried. "I didn't get to the body on the ground. I only saw him laid out here. What about his hat, Smith?"

"I know nothing of his hat," said Dr. Smith. "He had none on when I reached him. Really, Mr. Fortune, I must say I don't follow your methods."

"I dare say the policeman picked it up," Reggie murmured. "They're very careful, the police." He went out and called the mortuary keeper. He wanted Mr. Bure's hat and all Mr.Bure's clothes.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. They're sopping wet. Wet to the skin he was. And I didn't like to dry 'em."

"Quite right," Reggie nodded. And the hat and the wet clothes were brought. He picked up the hat. It was a bowler. It was perfectly in shape. He looked at the two doctors. "Not a sign of a blow," he said softly.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Dr. Smith took it from him. "I presume his hat fell off in the struggle," he cried, fingering it. . . . "Why, it's torn."

"Yes, that's very interesting. A tear on the left side. But not crushed at all. How was it torn, doctor? Not by a blow." He took up the wet clothes and examined them carefully with nose as well as eye.

"God, man, I get you now," the divisional surgeon cried, and himself began to search them. "But there's naught to show."

"No. He was all wet," Mr. Fortune murmured. "What was in his pockets?" A note-case, a gold cigarette-case and some silver had been brought, with a penknife and a wooden match-box. He opened the match-box. The match heads were sodden. He took up the penknife and opened it, produced his own and laid blade upon blade. He wandered round the room, found a pen, pulled out the nib and laid it on the table. Mr. Bure's penknife picked it up.

"Magnetized!" the divisional surgeon cried. "Look you now, Smith, it's magnetized! Not a singe on his hair or his clothes, but his knife's magnetized."

"He was all wet, you see," Mr. Fortune said mildly.

"Man, is that what gave you the hint? You're extraordinary acute, Mr. Fortune."

"I do not follow," Dr. Smith announced.

"The poor fellow was struck by lightning in those thunder showers we had and we would have been putting it on the man Lee! It's a very remarkable case. Ay, ay, ay, but we'll be none

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

too proud of it, eh, Smith? Mr. Fortune, I hope you'll let us down as light as you can."

"Yes. Unusual case. You'll find others recorded, you know. Don't get 'em in practice, of course."

"It is an amazing theory," said Dr. Smith, pale and shrunken. "I—I really, I must not be understood as accepting it. Dear me, it's very late. I have a number of calls—I must leave you." He hurried away.

The divisional surgeon grinned. "That's how you make us feel, Mr. Fortune. Be gentle with us, won't you? Thank God, we've done no harm. It's a lucky doctor who can be sure of that every time, eh?"

A little later Reggie talked to Lomas over the telephone. "Peace be with you. Come and dine with me to-night. Why? Oh, just to show there's no ill-feeling. 'For old sake's sake you are still, dear, the prettiest doll in the world.' What? Am I satisfied now? Yes, thank you. They were all wrong. Very grateful and comforting. One of my best cases. Nobody for you to hang. I don't say nobody ought to be hanged. There's a lot of dirty work about. But Bure wasn't murdered. He was killed by lightning. Yes, I said lightning."

"Good Gad," the telephone answered. "So that's what you were after."

Lomas came to dine before the usual time. He found Mr. Fortune dressed and dozing in front of a bright wood fire. "Is that you?" the pink face said without opening its eyes. "Don't have a cocktail, will you? I'm going to give you some

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Richebourg in its bloom and one of Elise's own filets. She said something about crêpes."

"This is killing the fatted calf. I appreciate it. Thank you, I won't have a cocktail. But I should like a little information."

"I was afraid so," Mr. Fortune sighed. He rolled out of his chair. "Exhibit A.—Note of telephone message from the Air Ministry. A heavy thunder-shower passed over the high ground of Barton Heath between 1 and 2 p.m. on May 1. Exhibit B.—A penknife found in the right-hand trousers pocket of the late Arthur Bure, which is sufficiently magnetized to pick up a nib: thus."

"But is that all your evidence?"

"Oh no, no. Bure wore a bowler hat. It had received no blow, but on the left side it was torn. The injury to the head and the bruise on the neck show no marks of any weapon. Bure's chest bears red streaks such as are only produced by shock from electricity—or heat. Other points, too."

"But I thought if a man was struck by lightning he was always burnt or singed somewhere."

"Quite often. But Bure was all wet. He wouldn't burn. There have been cases like it. It's quite clear. Lee left him and went on to the station. Bure was up on the heath when the storm came down with no shelter. He'd be drenched in a few minutes. Then the lightning struck him. And that was that."

"You've no sort of doubt?"

"You'll hear me swear. Same like Dr. Smith."

Reggie smiled.

"Does he take it back?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Not to notice. Not nicely. Your divisional surgeon does, though. He's not in it."

"Oh, Lord." Lomas let his eyeglass fall. "What's this? Not in it?"

"Hush. Put off the world. Here is Gladys. Here's dinner."

They went in. They ate Elise's mousseline of sole and her filet and her pancakes, and drank Richebourg of 1906, and talked of these things and others not wholly unworthy of them. Not till they had come to coffee and smoke did the Bure case intrude. "I suppose you see your way through this Zodiacs business, Reginald," said Lomas.

"Oh no, no. Speakin' strictly, we don't get anywhere, do we?"

"My dear fellow, you mustn't say that. You've kept us out of a very nasty mess. All my acknowledgments. And you've saved Mr. Franklin Lee's life for him."

"Yes, I think so. Yet I cannot love him."

"Not a winning personality, no," Lomas agreed. "On the make. Excessively. But he has a right to live."

"Well, the other fellows have no right to do him in."

"You suggest bad faith? I thought you did."

"Look at it. Our Dr. Smith, Bure's medical man, as soon as Bure's dead goes bald-headed to get Lee hanged for it: nobbles the other doctor; and confound him, he cheeks me."

"Professional vanity, my dear fellow."

"Yes. That's all right. But I don't care for the professional vanity that swears blind to hang a man for the Stock Exchange."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Oh, you go as far as that?"

"Look at it. When it got about Lee was to be brought in Bure's murderer, up went Zodiacs. Neat way of getting rid of Lee. Mr. Bure wouldn't have died in vain."

"It is a filthy case," Lomas nodded. "I suppose Lee has got hold of something that dishes Zodiacs?"

"I dare say. Lots of strings being pulled on all sides. Lee tried to work me."

"What again?" Lomas stared.

The parlourmaid came in. Sir Marmaduke Jones would like a word with Mr. Fortune.

"Oh, my aunt!" Reggie murmured. "What are we coming to? Pardon me." He went into his consulting-room.

Sir Marmaduke Jones was not in evening dress, a deficiency which in him at that hour was previously unknown. He explained that he was sure Fortune would forgive him: been terribly driven: did hope he wasn't troublesome: just wanted a few words; his old friend Smith. . . .

Mr. Fortune waited for him to take breath. He seemed to want it. "Smith?" said Mr. Fortune.

Sir Marmaduke meant John Smith of Barton Heath. A very sound man, most reliable opinion. Smith had been consulting him, and really he thought it was only right to come and put Smith's view of the matter.

"He's done that himself," said Mr. Fortune.

But really, Fortune, it couldn't be dismissed so curtly. Smith's opinion was formed after the most careful examination, a well grounded, reasoned opinion and (Sir Marmaduke must say)

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

it commanded confidence. The theory which Fortune had put forward was surely a little fantastic : it depended on very slight indications and imaginative inferences. Surely Fortune must realize that to throw over Dr. Smith's conclusions for such a startling hypothesis must have a very odd look.

" Don't mind me. The jury will choose whether they believe Smith's evidence or mine. That'll be all right."

Sir Marmaduke must ask his dear Fortune not to take the case so lightly. After all, there were very grave matters involved : very large interests. He did not hesitate to say that no case in his time had been of such importance to the public. Was it fair, was it right that Fortune should traverse the medical evidence already sworn on such small grounds ? A very, ve-ry dangerous course. As an old friend—long experience—a man of the world—Fortune might trust him—no rash action—Fortune would never regret it.

" In a simpler world I should knock you down," said Mr. Fortune.

" My dear Fortune, you mistake me sadly. I——"

" Oh, no. No mistake. It was either a bribe or a threat. I have the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department here. He'll be very pleased to see you. You're what we were waiting for."

" I am ? I ? "

" Yes. Don't go."

Mr. Fortune went out, and gave Lomas a summary of Sir Marmaduke Jones. " Good Gad ! The scoundrel ! Who sent him ? "

" That's your show. Come on." They came

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

downstairs and as they came heard the voice of Sir Marmaduke uplifted.

"The beggar's on the telephone," Lomas muttered. "Wait!"

Sir Marmaduke's voice went higher. "What? What? I can't hear you. I can't hear. Oh, my God!" There was silence. They went into the room to see Sir Marmaduke with the telephone hanging from his hands; he dropped it, he staggered, he fell. Reggie went to him. Lomas went to the telephone. "Hallo, hallo. Who is that, please?" This familiar tune filled the room while Reggie worked on the fallen man. "I can't get an answer. What's the matter with him?"

"Fainting. Shock." Reggie rang the bell and servants came, and while Sir Marmaduke was taken away Lomas sat down again to the telephone. . . .

When Reggie came back he was still at it, but in a brisk conversation with Scotland Yard. "Right. Get on to it. I'll be there myself in ten minutes." He rang off and turned to Reggie. "Well, how is the patient?"

"In his little bed, confound him. He had the impertinence to squeeze my hand."

"All my sympathy. A worm, quite a worm. It was Lord Blancapel he rang up. I suppose he had to tell his employer he'd failed with you. Blancapel has just shot himself. The butler was scared by a row, went into the study, found him dead with the pistol in his hand. Telephone receiver lying on the table. Marmaduke Jones must have heard the shot and crashed."

"Yes. Yes. Very convenient all round, wasn't it?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Oh quite! Thank you for a very pleasant evening, Reginald." Lomas tripped away.

It was late in the afternoon of the next day but one that Lomas came back. He found Mr. Fortune in the drawing-room arranging with tender care a bowl of iris.

"My dear Reginald, I thought we should have seen you before," he said brightly. Mr. Fortune stared melancholy curiosity and asked why. "Well, I think we have worked it all out." Mr. Fortune sighed and asked what. "There's merry hell on the Stock Exchange. All Blancapel's things are down and out. He seems to have been in a bad way when he started Zodiacs. That was a double or quits gamble. Then Lee turned up with a rival concession on the best of the Zodiac ground. Bure was put on to buy him out. They did bid high but they couldn't find Lee's price. There's some desperate letters in Blancapel's papers. When Bure was killed, Blancapel snatched at the chance to get rid of Lee. He's been in touch with Smith and then this worm Marmaduke Jones. That was the last chance. When Jones telephoned there was nothing doing, that broke him. He dropped the telephone and took his pistol. You see, we've got it all fitting now. He put it about Lee murdered Bure, and that sent Zodiacs up again. While he could keep the case strong against Lee, they'd go up and up. But with Lee cleared he was beat." Lomas rubbed his hands. "We've made a pretty neat case of it, haven't we?"

Mr. Fortune gazed at him with round, admiring eyes. "How do you do these things, Lomas?" he murmured.

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

II

THE CAT'S MILK

MR. FORTUNE put his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand and, with large and solemn eyes, contemplated the one nectarine which remained in the dish.

"My dear child," Mrs. Fortune protested.

"Yes. Perhaps you're right, Joan," said Mr. Fortune, but he took it. He ate it slowly between sips of a white wine. He shook his head. "An ingenious experiment. One of my failures."

"Can't you move?" Mrs. Fortune inquired.

"You're treating a serious subject with levity," Mr. Fortune sighed. "That Anjou wine doesn't really go with the subtler fruits. There's something of quinces about it. Too insistent. We must keep to the Sauternes."

Mrs. Fortune rose decisively. "Shall I tell Emily to clear you away?" she asked as she departed.

He followed her into the garden, to the shade of the sweet briar hedge, and lowered himself with caution into a deck chair. "Why this wild haste?" he murmured, and lit a cigar.

"Poor dear," Mrs. Fortune smiled, and ruffled his hair. "Such a poor dear. We have the mothers' meeting coming to tea this afternoon."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"My only aunt!" Reggie groaned. He squirmed, he sat up and with dazed horror watched Emily bring coffee.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Fortune kindly. "You will have to be the little gentleman all the afternoon. I expect you will have to make a speech."

"Oh, my aunt!" Reggie moaned. "I hate you, Joan." He sank down again on to the small of his back. "How I hate you," he murmured with passion.

And then Emily came back. Dr. Smithson of Tavington had rung up and wanted to speak to Mr. Fortune. Reggie opened one eye at her and grunted that he was busy and she could take the message.

"Oh naughty temper," said Mrs. Fortune.

"You have no heart, Joan," Reggie mumbled. "No woman has any heart."

Emily was back again. "He says to say he's Tim Smithson, sir, and you'll remember him and he must speak to you yourself."

Reggie waved her away and rose in slow instalments.

"Who is he, child?" said Mrs. Fortune.

"He was the messiest house physician I ever knew," said Reggie bitterly, and went to the telephone.

But when he returned he had a hat and gloves and a smile. "Men must work and women must weep," he announced and kissed his wife. "My love to the mothers, darling."

"Pig!" said Mrs. Fortune, with conviction. "Oh, pig. What does the man want, Reggie?"

"Me. Just me."

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

His car bore him away from the river and the mellow orchard valley, climbed through the heather of sandy hills, and came to a lonelier country of brown stone and woodland, where the stream wrought out deep clefts and pools beneath cliffs of foliage.

He lay back wondering what Smithson had been up to. Over the telephone Smithson, always of an incoherent mind, was obscurely excited. It was not really his affair at all. Fortune must understand the lady was not a patient of his: but he had been called in and he didn't care to refuse; it would have made most unpleasant talk and Fortune knew how scandal grew in these little towns. Mrs. Heath had met with an accident. They found her lying in the rhododendron pool. Smithson really knew nothing of the circumstances, nothing at all, he had not been called in till the day after. When he saw her, her condition was very serious: the left arm broken and two ribs, possibly internal injuries, she was prostrate from the shock. In his situation he did not like to bear the responsibility of the case. It was really not fair that they should have sent for him. As soon as he thought over his position he felt he ought to have Fortune's opinion.

On that point only Reggie was prepared to agree with him.

The little town of Tavington preserved an ancient comfortable dignity, some of it timbered Elizabethan, some Georgian red brick. The house of Dr. Smithson was Georgian without, but within had neither dignity nor comfort, being, like him, messy. He was a loose made man, loosely clothed

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and shaggy, with the complexion of indigestion and a walrus moustache.

He gushed, "My dear Fortune! Such a relief to see you. I said to myself, 'Fortune won't have forgotten old times.'"

"I haven't," said Reggie, and sat gingerly on the hard patients' chair.

"Really too good of you, my dear fellow," Smithson rubbed his hands. "Too good."

"Yes. Quite. That bein' that—and having thought it over—what's the matter with your position?"

"I'm very uneasy, Fortune." Smithson wriggled. "They really shouldn't have called me in, you know. Mrs. Heath was an old patient of my father's, but she quarrelled with me some time ago and went to Dillon. He's a new man here, a pushing young fellow. I don't know what people see in him myself." Smithson was plaintive. "He has a way with women. That type of man, Fortune."

"Yes. Yes. A sad world. So Dillon got on with Mrs. Heath—till she fell into the pool?"

"Not so much with Mrs. Heath as with her niece, Fortune," said Smithson.

"Yet Mrs. Heath being down and out the niece sent for Dr. Smithson?"

"No, indeed. It was Mr. Brett who insisted that I should be called in. He told me so."

"Oh my hat!" Reggie groaned. "Why is there always somebody else? Who is the unexplained Brett?"

But Smithson went on with his reminiscences. "Dillon did not like it at all. He couldn't

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

refuse to meet me, of course. That would have made an open scandal. And in the suspicious circumstances! But he was very sullen and unpleasant."

"Oh yes. Yes. The circumstances bein' suspicious. You said you didn't know anything about the circumstances."

"Well, really," Smithson twisted his hands. "I didn't want to commit myself, Fortune."

"Yes. I noticed that. It makes you a little vague, you know. Let's define things."

Goading the evasive Smithson on this side and that to the facts, he made them out at last. Mrs. Heath was the great lady of the place, and a childless widow. She lived at Tavington House with her niece Valerie Caryll. She was nearing seventy but quite healthy and capable. Smithson couldn't say she was well liked—she had a way of setting people's backs up—ordering everybody about, you know—and a very difficult temper. But quite a lady, of course. Miss Caryll—Smithson put out his loose under-lip at her—Miss Caryll was one of these very modern young women. She thought she knew everything. No doubt she did know a great deal. Then Mr. Brett—he was a quite different type, a very pleasant genial fellow, racing man and all that sort of thing. He was Mrs. Heath's nephew, but he didn't live with her, in fact he had not been at Tavington when she met with her accident. He came down the next day and, finding how seriously she was hurt, insisted that Smithson should be called in. Of course it was quite natural. Smithson's father had been the family doctor, Smithson might say

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

that all the best people still came to him. No doubt Mrs. Heath would never have left him if Dillon had not worked his way in. Dillon was half foreign—an Italian mother, or something. Dillon read Italian with Miss Caryll.

"Yes. Very reprehensible," Reggie murmured. "You said Mrs. Heath's affair was an accident, Smithson."

"My dear Fortune! I have no right to say anything else. I must not prejudice you in any way. What I'm informed is just this. At dusk on the night before last one of Mrs. Heath's gardeners found her lying in the rhododendron pool. She was unconscious. She was taken home and Dillon was sent for. When I saw her the next day, she was still not fully conscious. She is in the same condition to-day. I told you about her injuries."

"The pool," Reggie murmured. "That'll be one of these pools with steep banks. Little cliffs. Twenty-foot drop to the water."

Smithson's loose lip gaped. "You've been there!"

"No. No. Saw 'em like that coming along."

Smithson looked uncomfortable. "But you describe it exactly. Well, of course a fall from the top of the bank would quite account for her condition."

"Yes. It could be," Reggie murmured.

"Oh certainly, I agree. She was walking in the twilight—an old lady—she fell. Just so. The night nurse reports—— Oh, I should tell you they have a nurse at night, but Miss Caryll is with her all day. The nurse reports that on the first night

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

she said something like 'Pushed me. I was pushed.'"

Reggie lay back and gazed at Dr. Smithson with round wondering eyes.

And Smithson shifted the papers on his untidy table. "Of course you see that makes a very serious situation."

"Yes, yes. Has she said anything else?"

"Miss Caryll declares that she hasn't spoken. The nurse heard nothing last night. You see, Fortune, considering her condition, I can hardly believe she did speak."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured; and still contemplated Dr. Smithson. "Yes, I'll have to see her. I'll see her quick, please." He stood up.

"Oh certainly. You're very good. I—I'll just telephone. I must warn Dillon."

Reggie watched the door close on Smithson's shambling hurry. "She hasn't spoken since she saw you," he said. "I wonder."

His car carried them through a park of green hillsides and dark coverts to Tavington House. It is of brown stone in the Victorian baronial style. Gardens of many kinds spread about it, great rose beds, lily ponds, geometrical patterns in sunken compartments, broad borders ablaze, a wilderness with banks of shrubs and flowering trees, lilac, hawthorn, laburnum. But their flowers were turned to berries and seed-pods, and the shadow of autumn was over all. Yet Reggie looked with hungry eyes and sighed. "Voluptuous peace," he moaned. "Ever break the tenth commandment, Smithson?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I—really, Fortune, I don't know why you should say so."

"I do. I always covet gardens. I hate Mrs. Heath."

Smithson gazed at him and looked away and gulped.

They came to the house. In a little glum drawing-room of Victorian antiques Reggie was introduced by an uncomfortable Smithson to Mr. Brett. There was nothing uncomfortable about him.

"Ah, that's good. Very kind of you to come, Mr. Fortune. Smithson's told you all about it?"

"Smithson's told me," Reggie said, and considered him. He was nothing in particular, he might have been in a shop or the army, he was well enough made and dressed and mannered. He had a jaw. "I had better see Mrs. Heath," said Reggie.

"I've told Valerie. I suppose she'll be here in a minute. She's always with my aunt, you know. Valerie—she's my cousin, Miss Caryll. Almost the mistress of the house."

And Valerie came: a dark girl, made like a boy but too slight for that, and with a face that no boy ever wore, a face which knew life and thought and passion.

"Mr. Fortune?" She stood away from him. "Dr. Dillon will be here presently."

"Oh yes, we had better wait for Dr. Dillon," said Smithson in a hurry.

"I don't know the etiquette," Brett smiled. "You'd better give Mr. Fortune some tea, Valerie."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Ring then," she said over her shoulder. She had not ceased to look at Mr. Fortune. "My aunt is not conscious, did they tell you?"

"She hasn't spoken again?"

"No, she hasn't spoken. I don't believe she ever did speak."

"You think not?" Reggie murmured.

The tea was brought and with the tea came a grey Persian cat, large ruffed, majestical. He sat in the middle of the room, surveyed them one by one with narrowing golden eyes and yawned.

"Hullo! Thought the Emperor was with auntie," Brett smiled.

"So he was," said Valerie. "He's left her for his tea, I suppose." Reggie, a friend of cats, was pained: he bent and tickled the Emperor respectfully. The Emperor walked a yard away.

Valerie laughed. "Almost human, isn't he, Mr. Fortune?" She gave Reggie a cup.

"But he should have his first," Reggie protested.

"Oh, if you like," she poured a saucer of milk and set it down. The Emperor watched her, came to the milk, looked at it and sat down by it. Then he licked his lips and walked to the door and said that he wished to go.

"Well, I'm hanged," said Brett. "Poor old man."

"He don't like strangers, perhaps," Reggie murmured, and opened the door for the Emperor.

A sturdy fellow confronted him, handsome in a sleek sallow way, and scowled, "Mr. Fortune, is it?"

"Mind the cat," said Reggie. The Emperor

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

withdrew from advancing feet with disdain and sped out behind them. "Yes. Dr. Dillon, I presume? I've only been waiting for you."

"Have you, then? Smithson's told you all about it. I suppose," Dillon turned from him to Valerie. "Mr. Fortune can go up now?"

"When you like." They looked at each other more than a moment before Dillon led the way out.

Mrs. Heath's room was vast and gloomy and so full of odd furniture that Reggie could not at first discover her bed. He drew the curtains back from one of the many windows, and the nurse came to help him, an oldish woman with peaceable shrewd eyes.

"I don't see any change, sir. I've only just come in now. Miss Caryll's with her through the day. She's been like this all the time."

"The first night?" Reggie murmured.

"She was a little restless the first night. She tried to speak then."

"Yes. Yes. What exactly did she say?"

"Something about 'pushed,' sir,—'pushed me' or 'I was pushed.' I couldn't tell if she was coming to or delirious."

"Not very sure, are you?" Dillon said sharply.

"I'm sure she said 'pushed,' doctor. Then she settled off again."

"And when you went off duty in the morning she was just as she is now?"

The nurse looked puzzled. "Yes, sir. Well, sir, I couldn't quite say. I thought she seemed doing nicely then, but it's gone on, you see, and she looks worse to my mind."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"These cases of shock and concussion," Dillon shrugged.

"Yes. Yes. As you say," Reggie murmured, and moved to the bed.

Mrs. Heath lay breathing noisily. Save where bruises swelled dark on her brow, she was of a livid pallor. Reggie drew back the clothes and his gentle hands moved over her. . . .

"She's so cold, sir," the nurse said. "She's always so cold."

"You think so?" Reggie murmured and wandered away. "Where's a room?" he turned to Dillon.

"We can go into Miss Caryll's study," said Dillon, and Smithson cleared his throat.

Miss Caryll's study was a severe place lined with books, of no decorations but a bowl of autumn foliage on the plain oak table. Reggie sat himself on the cushioned fender. "Well. Anything occur to you?"

"Plain case, isn't it?" said Dillon. "She'd a great fall. There's the fractures, concussion, shock. That accounts for everything. No mystery about it."

"You—you take it she fell?" Smithson stammered. "We—we have to consider what she said, you know."

Dillon made an impatient noise. "What she said! We don't know what she said. I'll consider what she has to say when she's in her senses."

"Well, well. Don't be cross," Reggie murmured.

Dillon turned on him. "You're amusing yourself, aren't you?"

"Oh no, no, I'm not amused."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"You don't give us your opinion."

"Did you want it?" Reggie contemplated his sullen stare with eyes half shut. "Well, I think it's a matter of nursing. She must have some more nursing."

"What do you mean? She's always had the night nurse. Miss Caryll's been with her all day." Dillon flushed. "I suppose you don't trust Miss Caryll?"

"You're so cross, you know," Reggie murmured. "Mrs. Heath must have a trained nurse always with her. I'll get two down to-night. Then she may have a chance." He slid off the fender, he opened the door. "You might tell them," he said, and went back into Mrs. Heath's room.

The nurse stood up. "Yes, I forgot to ask you," he came to the table by the bed, he fingered a cup with a spout, a lidded jug. "What have you been giving her?"

"Dr. Dillon said to try her with a little milk every few hours."

"Oh yes. Yes. She's taken it?"

"Just at first a little. She didn't swallow properly last night."

"Any sickness?"

"No, sir. Not with me. She did seem as if she wanted to retch once or twice."

"Yes, yes." Reggie bent over the woman.

"She does look to be in such pain, poor dear," the nurse said.

The pallid face was drawn in strange suffering, as though, unconscious, she was miserable. "The distress. Yes." Reggie murmured. He drew

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

back the eyelids and saw the pupils widely dilated. "Yes. Don't give her anything more." He looked at the nurse. "Nothing. You're in charge. I'll see you have help soon."

The little drawing-room gave forth loud sounds as he came down to it, was silent when he opened the door. Then Valerie broke out at him. "Dr. Dillon says you've ordered more nurses. We don't need any more nurses. I can look after my aunt, Mr. Fortune." Her dark eyes flashed.

"Mr. Fortune doesn't think so, that's all," Dillon laughed.

"Look here, Dillon, you needn't make trouble," said Brett. "I'm hanged if I know why you two should object. Mr. Fortune says we ought to have another nurse or so. Well, we must then. Dash it, it's only decent. Besides, if you call him in and won't do what he says—well, what's it look like?"

"I didn't call him in," Valerie cried.

"Oh, I say! This won't do, Val. What's the matter, anyway? You don't mind Auntie having nurses?"

Valerie kept her angry eyes on Reggie. "Why shouldn't I nurse her myself, Mr. Fortune?"

"It's too grave a responsibility, Miss Caryll."

"You mean you don't trust me. Well, say it, then!"

"Why should I say it?" Reggie watched her a moment and turned to Dillon. "Do you object to skilled nursing, Dr. Dillon?"

"Well, if you want another nurse," Dillon looked quickly at Valerie.

"I won't have your nurses," Valerie cried.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Oh yes. Yes. I'm going to telephone for two more. I'm going to wait till they come and give them their instructions."

Valerie flinched. It appeared to Reggie that Dillon gave her a nod. Valerie breathed deep. "You believe she is really in danger?"

"I know she's in great danger," said Reggie slowly.

"Oh very well, then." Valerie was pale, Dillon pushed a chair to her and she sank on it. "Very well. You do what you want."

"Of course he must," said Brett. "Then you'll take charge of the case now, Mr. Fortune?"

"Yes, I think so." Reggie looked at Dillon.

"You don't suppose I object," Dillon said sullenly.

"It's awfuly good of you, sir," Brett cried. "But I say—I didn't like to ask—but of course you'll stay here then. Won't he, Val?" He turned to Valerie miserably silent.

"What? Stay here? Yes, I suppose so," she dragged herself to her feet. "I'll tell them," she went wearily out.

"Well, you'll not want me any more." Dillon stood up.

"You never know, you know," Reggie murmured. "Good night, doctor." But Dillon's departing back was unresponsive.

Smithson fidgeted. "My dear Fortune, I'm really very sorry. It is a most distressing affair. I—I hope you don't mind."

"No. I don't mind."

"I'm afraid you're rather disturbed?" Smithson drew confidentially near.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"It is jolly queer she should be so bad," said Brett.

Reggie considered them both with dreamy eyes. "You think so?" he murmured. "The telephone, please. Good night, Smithson."

Brett took him to the telephone in the hall. "Can't understand her being so knocked out, you know. She's always been as fit as anything."

"Yes. Might look after my chauffeur, will you?" said Reggie, and took up the telephone. When he was done with it he went back to Mrs. Heath.

At dinner Valerie did not appear. Brett made stumbling, eager apologies for her. She was awfully upset, of course. Mr. Fortune could see that. Of course it was a frightfully queer business.

Reggie evaded the business. Reggie talked gardens, and escaped to receive the nurses.

When he came at last to his own room he had the spouted cup and the jug of milk from Mrs. Heath's table. He examined the cup carefully under the light. Some tiny dark flecks like dust were dried in it. He tasted the milk with the tip of a cautious tongue.

Early in the morning he sent his chauffeur away with a packet for his hospital laboratory.

Brett was waiting for him in the breakfast-room, anxious and hearty. "I'm afraid you have been up a long time, sir. I heard you about. I hope she's not doing badly?"

"No, quite a good night."

"I say! That's splendid. Is she coming round?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Not yet. No. She's quieter. There's less distress. You might tell Miss Caryll."

"Yes, rather. Ought to buck her up, what? You know I believe she'd made up her mind it was all over."

Brett bustled away. When he came back, he was embarrassed. "Afraid she won't come down, sir. Awfully sorry. Seems as if she couldn't believe things were going all right. She is queer. You really think there is a chance, don't you?"

"Oh yes. Yes. Quite a chance," said Reggie, and finished his coffee in a gulp and went into the garden with a cigar. He was profoundly miserable. He had been up too early. He ranked the cook of Tavington Park among the world's worst women. He did not see his way. When he can be brought to speak of this case he is bitter about it. His success, he will tell you, was due to simple moral worth unaided by intelligence: a humiliating thing.

His cigar soothed him. The autumn flowering of the roses was grateful. He wandered away to the wild garden and became more interested in the world. A pleasant laburnum walk: must be very genial in spring: bluebells under them: very benign when they hit off the flowering together, which they would miss when they could. A sad life, this life. He stopped suddenly. Someone had been cutting one of the laburnums. Why in wonder should anybody want sprays of laburnum in autumn? But there was a gap in the drooping leaves and seed-pods, and the cuts were fresh.

He went back to the house. Brett was still

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

at breakfast, in the cigarette stage. "I say, is there anything I can do, sir? Anything you want?"

"No. No. I'm going up to the patient."

"Oh quite, yes. But I mean to say, I'll be about. I expect Val's in her study."

Reggie went upstairs. There was a maid in the corridor. At Mrs. Heath's door stood the Persian cat announcing haughtily that he wished to go in. "He does so fuss to be with mistress, doctor," the maid apologized.

Reggie stroked his majesty, who bit. "Want your breakfast, old man?"

"It ain't that, sir. He ain't eat nothing hardly this two days. He won't touch his milk. He does miss her so."

The Emperor stood up and patted the handle of the door. Reggie went in with him and he sprang on to the bed and purred. A horrified nurse moved to him.

"No, I don't think so," Reggie murmured. The Emperor curled himself up, sighed, and shut his eyes. "Do you believe in omens, nurse? No, quite unscientific. But helpful." He bent over Mrs. Heath. She was still pale, but the sunken face had grown calm. She breathed sweetly. . . . He stood looking at the nurse as though she were not there.

"I thought she seemed to be doing well, sir?"

"Oh yes. Yes," Reggie murmured and wandered out.

He tapped at Valerie's study and had no answer. He went in and shut the door behind him, looked about him with puzzled questing eyes. But there

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

never was a room of less concealment: walls of books, chairs, table, and on that, as on the night before, a bowl of autumn foliage. "Oh my aunt," he muttered. Among the glowing maple and beech was a spray of laburnum. He stood frowning at it some while, then turned and moved here and there, looking at the books which lay about. Miss Caryll's reading seemed to be in poetry and archaic; Rossetti, Italian poets, Catullus: there was also a vellum book of ancient folk-lore. Reggie took it up and opened it at a page headed ODIA AMICITIAEQUE RERUM SENSU CARENTIUM and he read on. For that means "the hates and friendships of inanimate things." Half-way down the page he came upon the words *Itaque dormientes sub cytiso aureo veneno mortali statim afficiuntur*—" and thus those who sleep under the golden laburnum are at once stricken by a mortal poison," so lethal, the author explained, are the flowers and seeds of that tree. Reggie turned the pages. There was a book-plate with a coat-of-arms and *Ex libris C. J. Heath.* 1870. He heard a step, put the book down and opening the door came face to face with Valerie.

"I suppose you know that's my room!" she cried. "What do you want in there?"

"I thought I might find you," said Reggie. "I wanted to tell you, Mrs. Heath is going on well now."

She was not soothed. The pale face flushed. "Of course she is. I knew she would. Dr. Dillon said you were making a fuss about nothing."

"You think so?" Reggie murmured. She swept by him into the room, and he went down-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

stairs and rang up his hospital. "Mr. Fortune speaking. I want Dr. Priestly. . . . Hallo, Priestly! Working on it? Good. Try for cytisine. Yes, I said cytisine."

"Good Lord," said the telephone. "Never had a case yet."

"Nor have I," said Reggie.

"Rather rustic method, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't say that," said Reggie. "Good-bye. Ring you up in the evening."

Valerie was at his elbow. "I'm sorry. Were you waiting for the 'phone?" She took it from him without a word. As he walked away into the library he heard her ask for Dr. Dillon.

The late C. J. Heath had amassed many books, and his taste, like Valerie's, was for the antique. There was a long shelf of old science, magic and folk-lore, vellum bound, like the book in Valerie's room, and in it a gap which that volume would fit. Reggie turned away from it and his round face had the anxiety of a puzzled child. He wandered aimless about the room and came back to the hall.

Valerie was talking to Brett, a sharp voice against cool remonstrance. "My dear girl, I can't tell him to go," Brett said. "I don't know why you——" Valerie stopped him. "Oh hallo," he laughed with embarrassment.

"I was just going out," Reggie explained. "One or two things. Shan't be in to lunch. I'll see Mrs. Heath again this evening."

"Dr. Dillon will be here," Valerie said fiercely.

"Yes, yes. I may want him," Reggie murmured, and strolled away.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

He desired to see the rhododendron pool and he did not desire that anybody should show it to him. He found it easily, following the stream through the park in its deepening cleft till it became a wide sheet of water, one bank a sloping lawn, the other a cliff of green foliage. Upon that a path wound among clumps of rhododendrons, sometimes at the cliff edge. But he was not to see the pool alone. A man came out in front of him. "You'll excuse me, sir? Are you one of the family?"

"Oh no, no. Staying at the house."

"I see. You wouldn't mind giving me your name?"

The square face of Superintendent Bell looked round the rhododendrons. "Bless my soul!" it said. "Well, Mr. Fortune, fancy meeting you!

"And the same to you," Reggie sighed.

"How are you, sir?"

"Lonely, Bell, very lonely. It's a large and puzzlin' world."

"I didn't know you were on the case."

"Speakin' professionally—is there a case?" said Reggie.

"That's what we'd like to know, eh, James?"

"I'm sure," Inspector James agreed.

"Yes, very natural. Very proper. And whose little idea was it there ought to be?"

"Well, sir, there's a Doctor Smithson here went to Inspector James and said his patient Mrs. Heath was down with shock and concussion from a fall over this place and he had reason to think she'd been attacked."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Smithson?" Reggie murmured. "Well, well."

"That's all right, isn't it, sir?"

"Oh yes. Yes. Quite correct of Smithson. Only he didn't tell me." Reggie gazed at the compact form of Superintendent Bell as if it were strange and unreal. "I fear I have underrated Smithson."

"Something queer, Mr. Fortune?" said Inspector James eagerly.

"I feel so young: so young and innocent," Reggie murmured. "'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.' I'm not bein' clever at all. On the contrary. But very good. And it isn't comfortable," his voice rose plaintively. "I don't like it, Bell. Smithson sent for me and said his patient, Mrs. Heath—said all that—and he didn't like it and would I take it on and I did. I'm so good."

"You mean he's not telling us the truth, sir?" the Inspector cried.

"Oh no. No. I wouldn't say that. He hasn't told anything else. Mrs. Heath is sufferin' from shock and concussion. She has had a fall. She was found here. And he had reason to think there was foul play. But he's bein' rather careful."

"She says herself she was pushed over, don't she, sir?"

"The nurse heard her say something about pushed. She hasn't spoken again."

"Do you think she'll die without speaking, sir?" said the Inspector anxiously. "Looks to me that would leave us beat."

"Yes. Yes. The mind seems almost useless,"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Reggie sighed. "I'm not sure I've got a mind any more. Well, well. 'Do the work that's nearest, though it's dull at whiles.' Where did she fall?"

"We can give you that, anyway, sir." Bell took him to the edge of the cliff. "She was found there, below the broken bushes. I suppose she sort of bounced there, poor lady, and you can see the rocks under the water. It's a bit deeper close by. But she went into the shallow part. Don't know if you call that luck."

"Yes, I think so," Reggie murmured. "There's a lot of luck going, Bell. But it's bein' looked after so careful. Very confusin' to the simple mind. Well. Any known reason why Mrs. Heath was walkin' here?"

"She always walked up here fine evenings," said the Inspector. "Everybody in Tavington knew that."

"Yes. Anybody in Tavington with a grudge against her?"

"Lord, no, sir. I don't say Mrs. Heath is well liked. She has her tempers. But nothing to signify." The Inspector hesitated. "Well, not unless you count Dr. Smithson. A bit o' feeling there. He didn't like her leaving him and having young Dillon for her doctor."

"No. Why did she?"

"The talk is he said something to her about Dr. Dillon going with Miss Caryll and she wouldn't take it from him."

"Oh yes, and does Dr. Dillon go with Miss Caryll?"

The Inspector sniggered. "I should say so.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Fair gone on each other, those two. I don't mean to say but it's all quite regular. Only nothing's given out and there's a bit o' gossip. The young lady's thought rather hot stuff, sir."

"And what do you think of Dr. Smithson down here?"

"Well, not so much. He goes for a bit of an old woman, you know."

"Yes. Yes. This bein' thus, you must have been rather surprised Smithson got called in when Mrs. Heath was hurt."

The Inspector considered that. "I don't know —in a manner of speaking, may be—kind of comic. But it happened quite natural. When Mr. Brett came down and found her in a bad way he sent for Dr. Smithson. You see, he was brought up here and he'd always been used to the Smithsons attending the family, he wouldn't know much about Dr. Dillon."

"Yes. Rather passing it on, aren't they?" Reggie sighed. "Brett sends for Smithson and Smithson sends for me and Smithson sends for you. And we can't send for anybody, so we have to nurse the baby ourselves. Well, well, 'Do noble things, not dream them all day long.' She did fall and this is where she fell. Nobody yet visible had a grudge against her except Smithson. Was anybody about in the park when she fell?"

"Ah! That's where it gets tricky, Mr. Fortune," said the Inspector. "I thought you'd work your way to that some time. That's what I went for at first."

"Yes, I'm not clever," Reggie sighed. "I told

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

you. Only laborious. The brain is almost negligible."

"Well, Miss Caryll and Dr. Dillon they come here pretty often. Dr. Dillon takes it on the way home from his rounds. Leaves his car out on the road—that path goes down to a stile—and meets the young lady for a bit of spooning." The Inspector winked.

Reggie considered him with sad dreamy eyes. "Makes a habit of it?"

"These things get talked about in a little place," the Inspector grinned. "Don't you see, when I heard Mrs. Heath had fallen into the pool, first thing I said to myself was 'Where was Dr. Dillon?' I said."

"Yes. Very acute. Yes. And where was he?"

"Ah! He was here that evening. Him and Miss Caryll. Down in that hollow. I've got a lad that saw 'em. Going on towards seven. And just after seven the gardener found her in the pool. They were here or hereabouts just when it happened. And they never said a word about it."

"I wonder," Reggie murmured.

"Did they tell you they were here, sir?" Bell said quickly.

"Oh no. No. They don't like me."

"And that looks nasty too, don't it?" the Inspector frowned. "I say, sir, you're having her watched careful?"

Reggie smiled. "Oh yes. Yes. I'm not clever, but I am careful. Nobody's meddling with her any more. But if she does speak, she may not tell us who did it. She may not know."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"There's that," said the Inspector gloomily. "You said that. Then it beats me. I don't know what more we can do."

Bell was watching his Mr. Fortune. "What do you think yourself, sir?"

"I don't think," Reggie moaned. "The brain is wholly inactive. I am not happy, Bell. Je n'ai pas de courage. And I want my lunch. Oh my aunt!" he mourned. "How I want my lunch. Why did I think of that!" he clutched Bell's arm. "I've not had any food for one long awful day."

"Good Lord, sir!" Bell was deeply affected, knowing his habits. "Are you ill?"

"Not ill. No. Only down-hearted. It began with the cat's milk, you know. But then there was the veal at dinner. And the scrambled eggs at breakfast. Very lingering. The intellect is confused. I wish you could hang the cook."

The Inspector laughed. "Sorry, sir. You come along down to the *Forester*. They'll do you well."

Reggie considered him dreamily. "The simple life," he murmured. "The plain cold joint. And a green salad. Nothing made. And perhaps a little fruit. Could it be done?" His round eyes were pathetic. "In Tavington?" he sighed.

"You'll get the best cut o' beef in England," the Inspector chuckled. "You come along and see."

"My dear fellow," said Reggie affectionately, and began to talk about the perfection of beef: not, for English cooking, the undercut: the sterner side of the sirloin: not crudely under-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

done. . . . The Inspector also had thoughts about beef. . . .

But Superintendent Bell meditated in silence, and when they came to the town and the Inspector went in to order the lunch, "Something queer about the house, Mr. Fortune?" he said.

Reggie groaned. "Oh my Bell! How can you? I was beginning to be happy. I wonder if they have any tarragon."

The *Forester* is Georgian red brick without and grim. But within there is one of the staircases up which Queen Elizabeth went to bed. Their table was spread in a little upper room of black oak walls, which looked over an orchard, and upon the table was a sirloin and two bowls of salad. Reggie looked. Reggie smiled. "Oh my dear fellow!" Reggie cooed.

"I told them not to mix it, sir."

"How wise! How gracious!" Reggie purred and investigated the bowls. "I wonder—could there be a touch of chives? And a sprig of mint perhaps. Oh, tarragon!" He began to mix it, rapt and reverent. He gazed at the sirloin. "'Land of hope and glory,'" he smiled. "Beer, I think. Only beer." . . .

He drank the last of his tankard. He contemplated the Inspector benignantly. "My dear fellow!" he murmured. "Not coffee, perhaps? It would break the harmony. Is their brandy worthy of them? Yes, brandy then. One small cigar?" He offered his case.

"I like my pipe, sir."

You're always right," Reggie smiled.

The brandy was drunk. The pipes were lit.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN