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The Eye of Osiris

R. Austin Freeman

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Books by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

THE BLUE SCARAB
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THE D'ARBLAY MYSTERY
THE MAGIC CASKET
THE CAT'S EYE
A CERTAIN DR. THORNDYKE
AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

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THE EYE OF OSIRIS

A DETECTIVE STORY

By R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

AUTHOR *of*

"As a Thief in the Night," "The Cat's Eye," "A Certain Dr. Thorndyke," "The D'Arblay Mystery," "The Mystery of Angelina Frood," "The Puzzle Lock," "The Shadow of the Wolf," "The Singing Bone," etc.

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CHAPTER I

THE VANISHING MAN

THE school of St. Margaret's Hospital was fortunate in its lecturer on Medical Jurisprudence, or Forensic Medicine, as it is sometimes described. At some schools the lecturer on this subject is appointed apparently for the reason that he lacks the qualifications to lecture on any other. But with us it was very different: John Thorndyke was not only an enthusiast, a man of profound learning and great reputation, but he was an exceptional teacher, lively and fascinating in style and of endless resources. Every remarkable case that had ever been reported he appeared to have at his fingers' ends; every fact—chemical, physical, biological, or even historical—that could in any way be twisted into a medico-legal significance, was pressed into his service; and his own varied and curious experiences seemed as inexhaustible as the widow's cruse. One of his favorite devices for giving life and interest to a rather dry subject was that of analyzing and commenting upon contemporary cases as reported in the papers (always, of course, with a due regard to the legal and social proprieties); and it was in this way that I first became introduced to the astonishing series of events that was destined to exercise so great an influence on my own life.

The lecture which had just been concluded had dealt with the rather unsatisfactory subject of survivorship.

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Most of the students had left the theater, and the remainder had gathered round the lecturer's table to listen to the informal comments that Dr. Thorndyke was wont to deliver on these occasions in an easy, conversational manner, leaning against the edge of the table and apparently addressing his remarks to a stick of blackboard chalk that he held in his fingers.

"The problem of survivorship," he was saying, in reply to a question put by one of the students, "ordinarily occurs in cases where the bodies of the parties are producible, or where, at any rate, the occurrence of death and its approximate time are actually known. But an analogous difficulty may arise in a case where the body of one of the parties is not forthcoming, and the fact of death may have to be assumed on collateral evidence.

"Here, of course, the vital question to be settled is, what is the latest instant at which it is certain that this person was alive? And the settlement of that question may turn on some circumstance of the most trivial and insignificant kind. There is a case in this morning's paper which illustrates this. A gentleman has disappeared rather mysteriously. He was last seen by the servant of a relative at whose house he had called. Now, if this gentleman should never reappear, dead or alive, the question as to what was the latest moment at which he was certainly alive will turn upon the further question: 'Was he or was he not wearing a particular article of jewelry when he called at the relative's house?' "

He paused with a reflective eye bent upon the stump of chalk he still held; then, noting the expectant interest with which we were regarding him, he resumed:

"The circumstances in this case are very curious; in

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fact, they are highly mysterious; and if any legal issues should arise in respect of them, they are likely to yield some very remarkable complications. The gentleman who has disappeared, Mr. John Bellingham, is a man well known in archeological circles. He recently returned from Egypt, bringing with him a very fine collection of antiquities—some of which, by the way, he has presented to the British Museum, where they are now on view—and having made this presentation, he appears to have gone to Paris on business. I may mention that the gift consisted of a very fine mummy and a complete set of tomb-furniture. The latter, however, had not arrived from Egypt at the time when the missing man left for Paris, but the mummy was inspected on the fourteenth of October at Mr. Bellingham's house by Dr. Norbury of the British Museum, in the presence of the donor and his solicitor, and the latter was authorized to hand over the complete collection to the British Museum authorities when the tomb-furniture arrived; which he has since done.

"From Paris he seems to have returned on the twenty-third of November, and to have gone direct to Charing Cross to the house of a relative, a Mr. Hurst, who is a bachelor and lives at Eltham. He appeared at the house at twenty minutes past five, and as Mr. Hurst had not yet come down from town and was not expected until a quarter to six, he explained who he was and said he would wait in the study and write some letters. The housemaid accordingly showed him into the study, furnished him with writing materials, and left him.

"At a quarter to six Mr. Hurst let himself in with his latchkey, and before the housemaid had time to

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speak to him he had passed through into the study and shut the door.

"At six o'clock, when the dinner bell was rung, Mr. Hurst entered the dining-room alone, and observing that the table was laid for two, asked the reason.

" 'I thought Mr. Bellingham was staying to dinner, sir,' was the housemaid's reply.

" 'Mr. Bellingham!' exclaimed the astonished host. 'I didn't know he was here. Why was I not told?'

" 'I thought he was in the study with you, sir,' said the housemaid.

"On this a search was made for the visitor, with the result that he was nowhere to be found. He had disappeared without leaving a trace, and what made the incident more odd was that the housemaid was certain that he had not gone out by the front door. For since neither she nor the cook was acquainted with Mr. John Bellingham, she had remained the whole time either in the kitchen, which commanded a view of the front gate, or in the dining-room, which opened into the hall opposite the study door. The study itself has a French window opening on a narrow grass plot, across which is a side-gate that opens into an alley; and it appears that Mr. Bellingham must have made his exit by this rather eccentric route. At any rate—and this is the important fact—he was not in the house, and no one had seen him leave it.

"After a hasty meal Mr. Hurst returned to town and called at the office of Mr. Bellingham's solicitor and confidential agent, a Mr. Jellicoe, and mentioned the matter to him. Mr. Jellicoe knew nothing of his client's return from Paris, and the two men at once took the train down to Woodford, where the missing man's brother, Mr. Godfrey Bellingham, lives. The servant

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who admitted them said that Mr. Godfrey was not at home, but that his daughter was in the library, which is a detached building situated in a shrubbery beyond the garden at the back of the house. Here the two men found, not only Miss Bellingham, but also her father, who had come in by the back gate.

"Mr. Godfrey and his daughter listened to Mr. Hurst's story with the greatest surprise, and assured him that they had neither seen nor heard anything of John Bellingham.

"Presently the party left the library to walk up to the house; but only a few feet from the library door Mr. Jellicoe noticed an object lying in the grass and pointed it out to Mr. Godfrey.

"The latter picked it up, and they all recognized it as a scarab which Mr. John Bellingham had been accustomed to wear suspended from his watch-chain. There was no mistaking it. It was a very fine scarab of the eighteenth dynasty fashioned of lapis lazuli and engraved with the cartouche of Amenhotep III. It had been suspended by a gold ring fastened to a wire which passed through the suspension hole, and the ring, though broken, was still in position.

"This discovery of course only added to the mystery, which was still further increased when, on inquiry, a suit-case bearing the initials J. B. was found to be unclaimed in the cloak-room at Charing Cross. Reference to the counterfoil of the ticket-book showed that it had been deposited about the time of the arrival of the Continental express on the twenty-third of November, so that its owner must have gone straight on to Eltham.

"That is how the affair stands at present, and, should the missing man never reappear or should his body never be found, the question, as you see, which will be

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required to be settled is, 'What is the exact time and place, when and where, he was last known to be alive!' As to the place, the importance of the issues involved in that question is obvious and we need not consider it. But the question of time has another kind of significance. Cases have occurred, as I pointed out in the lecture, in which proof of survivorship by less than a minute has secured succession to property. Now, the missing man was last seen alive at Mr. Hurst's house at twenty minutes past five on the twenty-third of November. But he appears to have visited his brother's house at Woodford, and, since nobody saw him at that house, it is at present uncertain whether he went there before calling on Mr. Hurst. If he went there first, then twenty minutes past five on the evening of the twenty-third is the latest moment at which he is known to have been alive; but if he went there after, there would have to be added to this time the shortest time possible in which he could travel from the one house to the other.

"But the question as to which house he visited first hinges on the scarab. If he was wearing the scarab when he arrived at Mr. Hurst's house, it would be certain that he went there first; but if it was not then on his watch-chain, a probability would be established that he went first to Woodford. Thus, you see, a question which may conceivably become of the most vital moment in determining the succession of property turns on the observation or non-observation by this housemaid of an apparently trivial and insignificant fact."

"Has the servant made any statement on this subject, sir?" I ventured to inquire.

"Apparently not," replied Dr. Thorndyke; "at any rate, there is no reference to any such statement in the

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newspaper report, though otherwise, the case is reported in great detail; indeed, the wealth of detail, including plans of the two houses, is quite remarkable and well worth noting as being in itself a fact of considerable interest."

"In what respect, sir, is it of interest?" one of the students asked.

"Ah," replied Dr. Thorndyke, "I think I must leave you to consider that question yourself. This is an untried case, and we mustn't make free with the actions and motives of individuals."

"Does the paper give any description of the missing man, sir?" I asked.

"Yes; quite an exhaustive description. Indeed, it is exhaustive to the verge of impropriety, considering that the man may turn up alive and well at any moment. It seems that he has an old Pott's fracture of the left ankle, a linear, longitudinal scar on each knee—origin not stated, but easily guessed at—and that he has tattooed on his chest in vermilion a very finely and distinctly executed representation of the symbolical Eye of Osiris—or Horus or Ra, as the different authorities have it. There certainly ought to be no difficulty in identifying the body. But we hope that it will not come to that.

"And now I must really be running away, and so must you; but I would advise you all to get copies of the paper and file them when you have read the remarkably full details. It is a most curious case, and it is highly probable that we shall hear of it again. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

Dr. Thorndyke's advice appealed to all who heard it, for medical jurisprudence was a live subject at St. Margaret's, and all of us were keenly interested in it.

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As a result, we sallied forth in a body to the nearest news-vendor's, and, having each provided himself with a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*, adjourned together to the Common room to devour the report and thereafter to discuss the bearings of the case, unhampered by those considerations of delicacy that afflicted our more squeamish and scrupulous teacher.

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CHAPTER II

THE EAVESDROPPER

It is one of the canons of correct conduct, scrupulously adhered to (when convenient) by all well-bred persons, that an acquaintance should be initiated by a proper introduction. To this salutary rule, which I have disregarded to the extent of an entire chapter, I now hasten to conform; and the more so inasmuch as nearly two years have passed since my first informal appearance.

Permit me then, to introduce Paul Berkeley, M.B., etc., recently—very recently—qualified, faultlessly attired in the professional frock-coat and tall hat, and, at the moment of introduction, navigating with anxious care a perilous strait between a row of well-filled coal-sacks and a colossal tray piled high with kidney potatoes.

The passage of this strait landed me on the terra firma of Fleur-de-Lys Court, where I halted for a moment to consult my visiting list. There was only one more patient for me to see this morning, and he lived at 49, Nevill's Court, wherever that might be. I turned for information to the presiding deity of the coal shop.

"Can you direct me, Mrs. Jablett, to Nevill's Court?"

She could and she did, grasping me confidentially by the arm (the mark remained on my sleeve for weeks) and pointing a shaking forefinger at the dead wall ahead. "Nevill's Court," said Mrs. Jablett, "is a alley,

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and you goes into it through a archway. It turns out on Fetter Lane on the right 'and as you goes up, oppersight Bream's Buildings."

I thanked Mrs. Jablett and went on my way, glad that the morning round was nearly finished, and vaguely conscious of a growing appetite and of a desire to wash in hot water.

The practice which I was conducting was not my own. It belonged to poor Dick Barnard, an old St. Margaret's man of irrepressible spirits and indifferent physique, who had started only the day before for a trip down the Mediterranean on board a tramp engaged in the currant trade; and this, my second morning's round, was in some sort a voyage of geographical discovery.

I walked on briskly up Fetter Lane until a narrow arched opening, bearing the superscription "Nevill's Court," arrested my steps, and here I turned to encounter one of those surprises that lie in wait for the traveler in London by-ways. Expecting to find the gray squalor of the ordinary London court, I looked out from under the shadow of the arch past a row of decent little shops through a vista full of light and color—a vista of ancient, warm-toned roofs and walls relieved by sunlit foliage. In the heart of London a tree is always a delightful surprise; but here were not only trees, but bushes and even flowers. The narrow footway was bordered by little gardens, which, with their wooden palings and well-kept shrubs, gave to the place an air of quaint and sober rusticity; and even as I entered, a bevy of workgirls, with gaily-colored blouses and hair aflame in the sunlight, brightened up the quiet background like the wild flowers that spangle a summer hedgerow.

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In one of the gardens I noticed that the little paths were paved with what looked like circular tiles, but which, on inspection, I found to be old-fashioned stone ink-bottles, buried bottom upwards; and I was meditating upon the quaint conceit of the forgotten scrivener who had thus adorned his habitation—a law-writer perhaps or an author, or perchance even a poet—when I perceived the number that I was seeking inscribed on a shabby door in a high wall. There was no bell or knocker, so, lifting the latch, I pushed the door open and entered.

But if the court itself had been a surprise, this was a positive wonder, a dream. Here, within earshot of the rumble of Fleet Street, I was in an old-fashioned garden enclosed by high walls and, now that the gate was shut, cut off from all sight and knowledge of the urban world that seethed without. I stood and gazed in delighted astonishment. Sun-gilded trees and flower beds gay with blossom; lupins, snapdragons, nasturtiums, spiry foxgloves, and mighty hollyhocks formed the foreground; over which a pair of sulphur-tinted butterflies flitted, unmindful of a buxom and miraculously clean white cat which pursued them, dancing across the borders and clapping her snowy paws fruitlessly in mid-air. And the background was no less wonderful; a grand old house, dark-eaved and venerable, that must have looked down on this garden when ruffled dandies were borne in sedan chairs through the court, and gentle Izaak Walton, stealing forth from his shop in Fleet Street, strolled up Fetter Lane to "go a-angling" at Temple Mills.

So overpowered was I by this unexpected vision that my hand was on the bottom knob of a row of bell-pulls before I recollected myself; and it was not until a most

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infernal jangling from within recalled me to my business that I observed underneath it a small brass plate inscribed "Miss Oman."

The door opened with some suddenness and a short, middle-aged woman surveyed me hungrily.

"Have I rung the wrong bell?" I asked—foolishly enough, I must admit.

"How can I tell?" she demanded. "I expect you have. It's the sort of thing a man would do—ring the wrong bell and then say he's sorry."

"I didn't go as far as that," I retorted. "It seems to have had the desired effect, and I've made your acquaintance into the bargain."

"Whom do you want to see?" she asked.

"Mr. Bellingham."

"Are you the doctor?"

"I'm *a* doctor."

"Follow me upstairs," said Miss Oman. "and don't tread on the paint."

I crossed the spacious hall, and preceded by my conductress, ascended a noble oak staircase, treading carefully on a ribbon of matting that ran up the middle. On the first-floor landing Miss Oman opened a door and, pointing to the room, said, "Go in there and wait; I'll tell her you're here."

"I said *Mr.* Bellingham—" I began; but the door slammed on me, and Miss Oman's footsteps retreated rapidly down the stairs.

It was at once obvious to me that I was in a very awkward position. The room into which I had been shown communicated with another, and though the door of communication was shut, I was unpleasantly aware of a conversation that was taking place in the adjoining room. At first, indeed, only a vague mutter,

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with a few disjointed phrases, came through the door, but suddenly an angry voice rang out clear and painfully distinct.

"Yes, I did! And I say it again. Bribery! Collusion! That's what it amounts to. You want to square me!"

"Nothing of the kind, Godfrey," was the reply in a lower tone; but at this point I coughed emphatically and moved a chair, and the voices subsided once more into an indistinct murmur.

To distract my attention from my unseen neighbors I glanced curiously about the room and speculated upon the personalities of its occupants. A very curious room it was, with its pathetic suggestion of decayed splendor and old-world dignity; a room full of interest and character and of contrasts and perplexing contradictions. For the most part it spoke of unmistakable though decent poverty. It was nearly bare of furniture, and what little there was was of the cheapest—a small kitchen table and three Windsor chairs (two of them with arms); a threadbare string carpet on the floor, and a cheap cotton cloth on the table; these, with a set of bookshelves, frankly constructed of grocer's boxes, formed the entire suite. And yet, despite its poverty, the place exhaled an air of homely if rather ascetic comfort, and the taste was irreproachable. The quiet russet of the table-cloth struck a pleasant harmony with the subdued bluish green of the worn carpet; the Windsor chairs and the legs of the table had been carefully denuded of their glaring varnish and stained a sober brown: and the austerity of the whole was relieved by a ginger jar filled with fresh-cut flowers and set in the middle of the table.

But the contrasts of which I have spoken were most

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singular and puzzling. There were the bookshelves, for instance, home made and stained at the cost of a few pence, but filled with recent and costly new works on archeology and ancient art. There were the objects on the mantelpiece: a facsimile in bronze—not bronze plaster—of the beautiful head of Hypnos and a pair of fine Ushabti figures. There were the decorations of the walls, a number of etchings—signed proofs, every one of them—of Oriental subjects, and a splendid facsimile reproduction of an Egyptian papyrus. It was incongruous in the extreme, this mingling of costly refinements with the barest and shabbiest necessaries of life, of fastidious culture with manifest poverty. I could make nothing of it. What manner of man, I wondered, was this new patient of mine? Was he a miser, hiding himself and his wealth in this obscure court? An eccentric savant? A philosopher? Or—more probably—a crank? But at this point my meditations were interrupted by the voice from the adjoining room, once more raised in anger.

"But I say that you *are* making an accusation! You are implying that I made away with him."

"Not at all," was the reply; "but I repeat that it is your business to ascertain what has become of him. The responsibility rests upon you."

"Upon me!" rejoined the first voice. "And what about you? Your position is a pretty fishy one if it comes to that."

"What!" roared the other. "Do you insinuate that I murdered my own brother?"

During this amazing colloquy I had stood gaping with sheer astonishment. Suddenly I recollected myself, and dropping into a chair, set my elbows on my knees and clapped my hands over my ears; and thus

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I must have remained for a full minute when I became aware of the closing of a door behind me.

I sprang to my feet and turned in some embarrassment (for I must have looked unspeakably ridiculous) to confront the somber figure of a rather tall and strikingly handsome girl, who, as she stood with her hand on the knob of the door, saluted me with a formal bow. In an instantaneous glance I noted how perfectly she matched her strange surroundings. Black-robed, black-haired, with black-gray eyes and a grave sad face of ivory pallor, she stood, like one of old Terborch's portraits, a harmony in tones so low as to be but one step removed from monochrome. Obviously a lady in spite of the worn and rusty dress, and something in the poise of the head and the set of the straight brows hinted at a spirit that adversity had hardened rather than broken.

"I must ask you to forgive me for keeping you waiting," she said; and as she spoke a certain softening at the corners of the austere mouth reminded me of the absurd position in which she had found me.

I murmured that the trifling delay was of no consequence whatever; that I had, in fact, been rather glad of the rest; and I was beginning somewhat vaguely to approach the subject of the invalid when the voice from the adjoining room again broke forth with hideous distinctness.

"I tell you I'll do nothing of the kind! Why, confound you, it's nothing less than a conspiracy that your proposing!"

Miss Bellingham—as I assumed her to be—stepped quickly across the floor, flushing angrily, as well she might; but, as she reached the door, it flew open and a small, spruce, middle-aged man burst into the room.

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"Your father is mad, Ruth!" he exclaimed; "absolutely stark mad! And I refuse to hold any further communication with him."

"The present interview was not of his seeking," Miss Bellingham replied coldly.

"No, it was not," was the wrathful rejoinder; "it was my mistaken generosity. But there—what is the use of talking? I've done my best for you and I'll do no more. Don't trouble to let me out; I can find my way. Good-morning." With a stiff bow and a quick glance at me, the speaker strode out of the room, banging the door after him.

"I must apologize for this extraordinary reception," said Miss Bellingham; "but I believe medical men are not easily astonished. I will introduce you to your patient now." She opened the door and, as I followed her into the adjoining room, she said: "Here is another visitor for you, dear. Doctor——"

"Berkeley," said I. "I am acting for my friend Doctor Barnard."

The invalid, a fine-looking man of about fifty-five, who sat propped up in bed with a pile of pillows, held out an excessively shaky hand, which I grasped cordially, making a mental note of the tremor.

"How do you do, sir?" said Mr. Bellingham. "I hope Doctor Barnard is not ill."

"Oh, no," I answered; "he has gone for a trip down the Mediterranean on a currant ship. The chance occurred rather suddenly, and I bustled him off before he had time to change his mind. Hence my rather unceremonious appearance, which I hope you will forgive."

"Not at all," was the hearty response. "I'm delighted to hear that you sent him off; he wanted a

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holiday, poor man. And I am delighted to make your acquaintance, too."

"It is very good of you," I said; whereupon he bowed as gracefully as a man may who is propped up in bed with a heap of pillows; and having thus exchanged broadsides of civility, so to speak, we—or, at least, I—proceeded to business.

"How long have you been laid up?" I asked cautiously, not wishing to make too evident the fact that my principal had given me no information respecting his case.

"A week to-day," he replied. "The *fons et origo mali* was a hansom-cab which upset me opposite the Law Courts—sent me sprawling in the middle of the road. My own fault, of course—at least, the cabby said so, and I suppose he knew. But that was no consolation to me."

"Were you hurt much?"

"No, not really; but the fall bruised my knee rather badly and gave me a deuce of a shake up. I'm too old for that sort of thing, you know."

"Most people are," said I.

"True; but you can take a cropper more gracefully at twenty than at fifty-five. However, the knee is getting on quite well—you shall see it presently—and you observe that I am giving it complete rest. But that isn't the whole of the trouble or the worst of it. It's my confounded nerves. I'm as irritable as the devil and as nervous as a cat. And I can't get a decent night's rest."

I recalled the tremulous hand that he had offered me. He did not look like a drinker, but still——

"Do you smoke much?" I inquired diplomatically.

He looked at me slyly and chuckled. "That's a very

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delicate way to approach the subject, Doctor," he said. "No, I don't smoke much, and I don't crook my little finger. I saw you look at my shaky hand just now—oh, it's all right; I'm not offended. It's a doctor's business to keep his eyelids lifting. But my hand is steady enough as a rule, when I'm not upset, but the least excitement sets me shaking like a jelly. And the fact is that I have just had a deucedly unpleasant interview——"

"I think," Miss Bellingham interrupted, "Doctor Berkeley and, indeed, the neighborhood at large, are aware of the fact."

Mr. Bellingham laughed rather shamefacedly. "I'm afraid I did lose my temper," he said; "but I am an impulsive old fellow, Doctor, and when I'm put out I'm apt to speak my mind—a little too bluntly perhaps."

"And audibly," his daughter added. "Do you know that Doctor Berkeley was reduced to the necessity of stopping his ears?" She glanced at me as she spoke, with something like a twinkle in her solemn gray eyes.

"Did I shout?" Mr. Bellingham asked, not very contritely, I thought, though he added: "I'm very sorry, my dear; but it won't happen again. I think we've seen the last of that good gentleman."

"I am sure I hope so," she rejoined, adding: "And now I will leave you to your talk; I shall be in the next room if you should want me."

I opened the door for her, and when she had passed out with a stiff little bow I seated myself by the bedside and resumed the consultation. It was evidently a case of nervous breakdown, to which the cab accident had, no doubt, contributed. As to the other antecedents,

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they were of no concern of mine, though Mr. Bellingham seemed to think otherwise, for he resumed: "That cab business was the last straw, you know, and it finished me off, but I have been going down the hill for a long time. I've had a lot of trouble during the last two years. But I suppose I oughtn't to pester you with the details of my personal affairs."

"Anything that bears on your present state of health is of interest to me if you don't mind telling it," I said.

"Mind!" he exclaimed. "Did you ever meet an invalid who didn't enjoy talking about his own health? It's the listener who minds, as a rule."

"Well, the present listener doesn't," I said.

"Then," said Mr. Bellingham, "I'll treat myself to the luxury of telling you all my troubles; I don't often get the chance of a confidential grumble to a respon-

sible man of my own class. And I really have some excuses for railing at Fortune, as you will agree when I tell you that, a couple of years ago, I went to bed one night a gentleman of independent means and excellent prospects and woke up in the morning to find myself practically a beggar. Not a cheerful experience that, you know, at my time of life, eh?"

"No," I agreed, "nor at any other."

"And that was not all," he continued; "for at the same moment I lost my brother, my dearest, kindest friend. He disappeared—vanished off the face of the earth; but perhaps you have heard of the affair. The confounded papers were full of it at the time."

He paused abruptly, noticing, no doubt, a sudden change in my face. Of course I recollected the case now. Indeed, ever since I had entered the house some

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chord of memory had been faintly vibrating, and now his last words had struck out the full note.

"Yes," I said, "I remember the incident, though I don't suppose I should but for the fact that our lecturer on medical jurisprudence drew my attention to it."

"Indeed," said Mr. Bellingham, rather uneasily, as I fancied. "What did he say about it?"

"He referred to it as a case that was calculated to give rise to some very pretty legal complications."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bellingham, "that man was a prophet! Legal complications, indeed! But I'll be bound he never guessed at the sort of infernal tangle that has actually gathered round the affair. By the way, what was his name?"

"Thorndyke," I replied. "Doctor John Thorndyke."

"Thorndyke," Mr. Bellingham repeated in a musing, retrospective tone. "I seem to remember the name. Yes, of course. I have heard a legal friend of mine, a Mr. Marchmont, speak of him in reference to the case of a man whom I knew slightly years ago—a certain Jeffrey Blackmore, who also disappeared very mysteriously. I remember now that Dr. Thorndyke unraveled that case with most remarkable ingenuity."

"I daresay he would be very much interested to hear about your case," I suggested.

"I daresay he would," was the reply; "but one can't take up a professional man's time for nothing, and I couldn't afford to pay him. And that reminds me that I'm taking up your time by gossiping about purely personal affairs."

"My morning round is finished," said I, "and, moreover, your personal affairs are highly interesting. I

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suppose I mustn't ask what is the nature of the legal entanglement?"

"Not unless you are prepared to stay here for the rest of the day and go home a raving lunatic. But I'll tell you this much: the trouble is about my poor brother's will. In the first place it can't be administered because there is not sufficient evidence that my brother is dead; and in the second place, if it could, all the property would go to people who were never intended to benefit. The will itself is the most diabolically exasperating document that was ever produced by the perverted ingenuity of a wrongheaded man. That's all. Will you have a look at my knee?"

As Mr. Bellingham's explanation (delivered in a rapid *crescendo* and ending almost in a shout) had left him purple-faced and trembling, I thought it best to bring our talk to an end. Accordingly I proceeded to inspect the injured knee, which was now nearly well, and to overhaul my patient generally; and having given him detailed instructions as to his general conduct, I rose and took my leave.

"And remember," I said as I shook his hand, "No tobacco, no coffee, no excitement of any kind. Lead a quiet, bovine life."

"That's all very well," he grumbled, "but supposing people come here and excite me?"

"Disregard them," said I, "and read *Whitaker's Almanack*." And with this parting advice I passed out into the other room.

Miss Bellingham was seated at the table with a pile of blue-covered notebooks before her, two of which were open, displaying pages closely written in a small, neat handwriting. She rose as I entered and looked at me inquiringly.

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"I heard you advising my father to read *Whitaker's Almanack*," she said. "Was that a curative measure?"

"Entirely," I replied. "I recommended it for its medicinal virtues, as an antidote to mental excitement."

She smiled faintly. "It certainly is not a highly emotional book," she said, and then asked: "Have you any other instructions to give?"

"Well, I might give the conventional advice—to maintain a cheerful outlook and avoid worry; but I don't suppose you would find it very helpful."

"No," she answered bitterly; "it is a counsel of perfection. People in our position are not a very cheerful class, I'm afraid; but still they don't seek out worries from sheer perverseness. The worries come unsought. But, of course, you can't enter into that."

"I can't give any practical help, I fear, though I do sincerely hope that you father's affairs will straighten themselves out soon."

She thanked me for my good wishes and accompanied me down to the street door, where, with a bow and a rather stiff handshake, she gave me my *congé*.

Very ungratefully the noise of Fetter Lane smote on my ears as I came out through the archway, and very squalid and unrestful the little street looked when contrasted with the dignity and monastic quiet of the old garden. As to the surgery, with its oilcloth floor and walls made hideous with gaudy insurance show-cards in sham gilt frames, its aspect was so revolting that I flew to the day-book for distraction, and was still busily entering the morning's visits when the bottle-boy, Adolphus, entered stealthily to announce lunch.

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CHAPTER III

JOHN THORNDYKE

THAT the character of an individual tends to be reflected in his dress is a fact familiar to the least observant. That the observation is equally applicable to aggregates of men is less familiar, but equally true. Do not the members of fighting professions, even to this day, deck themselves in feathers, in gaudy colors and gilded ornaments, after the manner of the African war-chief or the Redskin "brave," and thereby indicate the place of war in modern civilization? Does not the Church of Rome send her priests to the altar in habiliments that were fashionable before the fall of the Roman Empire, in token of her immovable conservatism? And, lastly, does not the Law, lumbering on in the wake of progress, symbolize its subjection to precedent by head-gear reminiscent of the good days of Queen Anne?

I should apologize for intruding upon the reader these somewhat trite reflections; which were set going by the quaint stock-in-trade of the wig-maker's shop in the cloisters of the Inner Temple, whither I strayed on a sultry afternoon in quest of shade and quiet. I had halted opposite the little shop window, and, with my eyes bent dreamily on the row of wigs, was pursuing the above train of thought when I was startled by a deep voice saying softly in my ear: "I'd have the full-bottomed one if I were you."

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I turned swiftly and rather fiercely, and looked into the face of my old friend and fellow student, Jervis, behind whom, regarding us with a sedate smile, stood my former teacher, Dr. John Thorndyke. Both men greeted me with a warmth that I felt to be very flattering, for Thorndyke was quite a great personage, and even Jervis was several years my academic senior.

"You are coming in to have a cup of tea with us, I hope," said Thorndyke; and as I assented gladly, he took my arm and led me across the court in the direction of the Treasury.

"But why that hungry gaze at those forensic vanities, Berkeley?" he asked. "Are you thinking of following my example and Jervis's—deserting the bedside for the Bar?"

"What! Has Jervis gone in for the law?" I exclaimed.

"Bless you, yes!" replied Jervis. "I have become parasitical on Thorndyke! 'The big fleas have little fleas,' you know. I am the additional fraction trailing after the whole number in the rear of a decimal point."

"Don't you believe him, Berkeley," interposed Thorndyke. "He is the brains of the firm. I supply the respectability and moral worth. But you haven't answered my question. What are you doing here on a summer afternoon staring into a wig-maker's window?"

"I am Barnard's locum; he is in practise in Fetter Lane."

"I know," said Thorndyke; "we meet him occasionally, and very pale and peaky he has been looking of late. Is he taking a holiday?"

"Yes. He has gone for a trip to the Isles of Greece in a currant ship."

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"Then," said Jervis, "you are actually a local G.P. I thought you were looking beastly respectable."

"And judging from your leisured manner when we encountered you," added Thorndyke, "the practise is not a strenuous one. I suppose it is entirely local?"

"Yes," I replied. "The patients mostly live in the small streets and courts within a half-mile radius of the surgery, and the abodes of some of them are pretty squalid. Oh! and that reminds me of a very strange coincidence. It will interest you, I think."

"Life is made up of strange coincidences," said Thorndyke. "Nobody but a reviewer of novels is ever really surprised at a coincidence. But what is yours?"

"It is connected with a case that you mentioned to us at the hospital about two years ago, the case of a man who disappeared under rather mysterious circumstances. Do you remember it? The man's name was Bellingham."

"The Egyptologist? Yes, I remember the case quite well. What about it?"

"The brother is a patient of mine. He is living in Nevill's Court with his daughter, and they seem to be as poor as church mice."

"Really," said Thorndyke, "this is quite interesting. They must have come down in the world rather suddenly. If I remember rightly, the brother was living in a house of some pretentions standing in its own grounds."

"Yes, that is so. I see you recollect all about the case."

"My dear fellow," said Jervis, "Thorndyke never forgets a likely case. He is a sort of medico-legal camel. He gulps down the raw facts from the newspapers or elsewhere, and then, in his leisure moments,

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he calmly regurgitates them and has a quiet chew at them. It is a quaint habit. A case crops up in the papers or in one of the courts, and Thorndyke swallows it whole. Then it lapses and every one forgets it. A year or two later it crops up in a new form, and, to your astonishment, you find that Thorndyke has got it all cut and dried. He has been ruminating on it periodically in the interval.

"You notice," said Thorndyke, "that my learned friend is pleased to indulge in mixed metaphors. But his statement is substantially true, though obscurely worded. You must tell us more about the Bellinghams when we have fortified you with a cup of tea."

Our talk had brought us to Thorndyke's chambers, which were on the first floor of No. 5A, King's Bench Walk, and as we entered the fine, spacious, paneled room we found a small, elderly man, neatly dressed in black, setting out the tea-service on the table. I glanced at him with some curiosity. He hardly looked like a servant, in spite of his neat, black clothes; in fact, his appearance was rather puzzling, for while his quiet dignity and his serious intelligent face suggested some kind of professional man, his neat, capable hands were those of a skilled mechanic.

Thorndyke surveyed the tea-tray thoughtfully and then looked at his retainer. "I see you have put three teacups, Polton," he said. "Now, how did you know I was bringing some one in to tea?"

The little man smiled a quaint, crinkly smile of gratification as he explained:

"I happened to look out of the laboratory window as you turned the corner, sir."

"How disappointingly simple," said Jervis. "We were hoping for something abstruse and telepathic."

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"Simplicity is the soul of efficiency, sir," replied Polton as he checked the tea-service to make sure that nothing was forgotten, and with this remarkable aphorism he silently evaporated.

"To return to the Bellingham case," said Thorndyke, when he had poured out the tea. "Have you picked up any facts relating to the parties—and facts, I mean, of course, that it would be proper for you to mention?"

"I have learned one or two things that there is no harm in repeating. For instance, I gather that Godfrey Bellingham—my patient—lost all his property quite suddenly about the time of the disappearance."

"That is really odd," said Thorndyke. "The opposite condition would be quite understandable, but one doesn't see exactly how this can have happened, unless there was an allowance of some sort."

"No, that was what struck me. But there seem to be some queer features in the case, and the legal position is evidently getting complicated. There is a will, for example, which is giving trouble."

"They will hardly be able to administer the will without either proof or presumption of death," Thorndyke remarked.

"Exactly. That's one of the difficulties. Another is that there seems to be some fatal defect in the drafting of the will itself. I don't know what it is, but I expect I shall hear sooner or later. By the way, I mentioned the interest that you have taken in the case, and I think Bellingham would have like to consult you, but, of course, the poor devil has no money."

"That is awkward for him if the other interested parties have. There will probably be legal proceedings of some kind, and as the law takes no account of

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poverty, he is likely to go to the wall. He ought to have advice of some sort."

"I don't see how he is to get it," said I.

"Neither do I," Thorndyke admitted. "There are no hospitals for impecunious litigants; it is assumed that only persons of means have a right to go to law. Of course, if we knew the man and the circumstances we might be able to help him; but for all we know to the contrary, he may be an arrant scoundrel."

I had recalled the strange conversation that I had overheard, and wondered what Thorndyke would have thought of it if it had been allowable for me to repeat it. Obviously it was not, however, and I could only give my own impressions.

"He doesn't strike me as that," I said; "but of course, one never knows. Personally, he impressed me rather favorably, which is more than the other man did."

"What other man?" asked Thorndyke.

"There was another man in the case, wasn't there? I forget his name. I saw him at the house and didn't much like the look of him. I suspect he's putting some sort of pressure on Bellingham."

"Berkeley knows more about this than he's telling us," said Jervis. "Let us look up the report and see who this stranger is." He took down from a shelf a large volume of newspaper cuttings and laid it on the table.

"You see," said he, as he ran his finger down the index. "Thorndyke files all the cases that are likely to come to something, and I know he had expectations regarding this one. I fancy he had some ghoulish hope that the missing gentleman's head might turn up in somebody's dust-bin. Here we are; the other man's

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name is Hurst. He is apparently a cousin, and it was at his house the missing man was last seen alive."

"So you think Mr. Hurst is moving in the matter?" said Thorndyke, when he had glanced over the report.

"That is my impression," I replied, "though I really know nothing about it."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "if you should learn what is being done and should have permission to speak of it, I shall be very interested to hear how the case progresses and if an unofficial opinion on any point would be of service, I think there would be no harm in giving it."

"It would certainly be of great value if the other parties are taking professional advice," I said; and then, after a pause, I asked: "Have you given this case much consideration?"

Thorndyke reflected. "No," he said, "I can't say that I have. I turned it over rather carefully when the report first appeared, and I have speculated on it occasionally since. It is my habit, as Jervis was telling you, to utilize odd moments of leisure (such as a railway journey, for instance) by constructing theories to account for the facts of such obscure cases as have come to my notice. It is a useful habit, I think, for, apart from the mental exercise and experience that one gains from it, an appreciable portion of these cases ultimately comes into my hands, and then the previous consideration of them is so much time gained."

"Have you formed any theory to account for the facts in this case?" I asked.

"Yes, I have several theories, one of which I especially favor, and I am awaiting with great interest such new facts as may indicate to me which of these theories is probably the correct one."

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"It's no use your trying to pump him, Berkeley," said Jervis. "He is fitted with an information valve that opens inward. You can pour in as much as you like, but you can't get any out."

Thorndyke chuckled. "My learned friend is, in the main, correct," he said. "You see, I may be called upon any day to advise on this case, in which event I should feel remarkably foolish if I had already expounded my views in detail. But I should like to hear what you and Jervis make of the case as reported in the newspapers."

"There now," exclaimed Jervis, "what did I tell you? He wants to suck our brains."

"As far as my brain is concerned," I said, "the process of suction isn't likely to yield much except a vacuum, so I will resign in favor of you. You are a full-blown lawyer, whereas I am only a simple G.P."

Jervis filled his pipe with deliberate care and lighted it. Then, blowing a slender stream of smoke into the air, he said:

"If you want to know what I make of the case from that report, I can tell you in one word—nothing. Every road seems to end in a cul-de-sac."

"Oh, come!" said Thorndyke, "this is mere laziness. Berkeley wants to witness a display of your forensic wisdom. A learned counsel may be in a fog—he very often is—but he doesn't state the fact baldly; he wraps it up in a decent verbal disguise. Tell us how you arrive at your conclusion. Show us that you have really weighed the facts."

"Very well," said Jervis, "I will give you a masterly analysis of the case—leading to nothing." He continued to puff at his pipe for a time with slight embarrassment, as I thought—and I fully sympathized

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with him. Finally he blew a little cloud and commenced:

"The position appears to be this: Here is a man seen to enter a certain house, who is shown into a certain room, and shut in. He is not seen to come out, and yet, when the room is next entered, it is found to be empty; and that man is never seen again, alive or dead. That is a pretty tough beginning.

"Now, it is evident that one of three things must have happened. Either he must have remained in that room, or at least in that house, alive; or he must have died, naturally or otherwise, and his body have been concealed; or he must have left the house unobserved. Let us take the first case. This affair happened nearly two years ago. Now, he couldn't have remained alive in the house for two years. He would have been noticed. The servants, for instance, when cleaning out the rooms, would have observed him."

Here Thorndyke interposed with an indulgent smile at his junior: "My learned friend is treating the inquiry with unbecoming levity. We accept the conclusion that the man did not remain in the house alive."

"Very well. Then did he remain in it dead? Apparently not. The report says that as soon as the man was missed, Hurst and the servants together searched the house thoroughly. But there had been no time or opportunity to dispose of the body, whence the only possible conclusion is that the body was not there. Moreover, if we admit the possibility of his having been murdered—for that is what concealment of the body would imply—there is the question: 'Who could have murdered him?' Not the servants, obviously, and as to Hurst—well, of course, we don't know what his

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relations with the missing man may have been—at least, I don't."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "I know nothing beyond what is in the newspaper report and what Berkeley has told us."

"Then we know nothing. He may have had a motive for murdering the man or he may not. The point is that he doesn't seem to have had the opportunity. Even if we suppose that he managed to conceal the body temporarily, still there was the final disposal of it. He couldn't have buried it in the garden with the servants about; neither could he have burned it. The only conceivable method by which he could have got rid of it would have been that of cutting it up into fragments and burying the dismembered parts in some secluded spots or dropping them into ponds or rivers. But no remains of the kind have been found, as some of them probably would have been by now, so that there is nothing to support this suggestion; indeed, the idea of murder, in this house at least, seems to be excluded by the search that was made the instant the man was missed.

"Then to take the third alternative: Did he leave the house unobserved? Well, it is not impossible, but it would be a queer thing to do. He may have been an impulsive or eccentric man. We can't say. We know nothing about him. But two years have elapsed and he has never turned up, so that if he left the house secretly he must have gone into hiding and be hiding still. Of course, he may have been the sort of lunatic who would behave in that manner or he may not. We have no information as to his personal character.

"Then there is the complication of the scarab that

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was picked up in the grounds of his brother's house at Woodford. That seems to show that he visited that house at some time. But no one admits having seen him there; and it is uncertain, therefore, whether he went first to his brother's house or to Hurst's. If he was wearing the scarab when he arrived at the Eltham house, he must have left that house unobserved and gone to Woodford; but if he was not wearing it he probably went from Woodford to Eltham, and there finally disappeared. As to whether he was or was not wearing the scarab when he was last seen alive by Hurst's housemaid, there is at present no evidence.

"If he went to his brother's house after his visit to Hurst, the disappearance is more understandable if we don't mind flinging accusations of murder about rather casually; for the disposal of the body would be much less difficult in that case. Apparently no one saw him enter the house, and, if he did enter, it was by a back gate which communicated with the library—a separate building some distance from the house. In that case it would have been physically possible for the Bellinghams to have made away with him. There was plenty of time to dispose of the body unobserved—temporarily, at any rate. Nobody had seen him come to the house, and nobody knew that he was there—if he *was* there; and apparently no search was made either at the time or afterward. In fact, if it could be shown that the missing man left Hurst's house alive, or that he was wearing the scarab when he arrived there, things would look rather fishy for the Bellinghams—for, of course, the girl must have been in it if the father was. But there's the crux: there is no proof that the man ever did leave Hurst's house alive. And if he

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didn't—but there! as I said at first, whichever turning you take, you find that it ends in a blind alley."

"A lame ending to a masterly exposition," was Thorndyke's comment.

"I know," said Jervis. "But what would you have? There are quite a number of possible solutions, and one of them must be the true one. But how are we to judge which it is? I maintain that until we know something of the parties and the financial and other interests involved we have no data."

"There," said Thorndyke, "I disagree with you entirely. I maintain that we have ample data. You say that we have no means of judging which of the various possible solutions is the true one; but I think that if you read the report carefully and thoughtfully you will find that the facts now known point to one explanation, and one only. It may not be the true explanation, and I don't suppose it is. But we are now dealing with the matter speculatively, academically, and I contend that our data yield a definite conclusion. What do you say, Berkeley?"

"I say that it is time for me to be off; the evening consultations begin at half-past six."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "don't let us keep you from your duties, with poor Barnard currant picking in the Grecian Isles. But come in and see us again. Drop in when you like after your work is done. You won't be in our way even if we are busy, which we very seldom are after eight o'clock."

I thanked Dr. Thorndyke most heartily for making me free of his chambers in this hospitable fashion and took my leave, setting forth homeward by way of Middle Temple Lane and the Embankment; not a very direct route for Fetter Lane, it must be confessed; but

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our talk had revived my interest in the Bellingham household and put me in a reflective vein.

From the remarkable conversation that I had overheard it was evident that the plot was thickening. Not that I supposed that these two respectable gentlemen really suspected one another of having made away with the missing man; but still, their unguarded words, spoken in anger, made it clear that each had allowed the thought of sinister possibilities to enter his mind—a dangerous condition that might easily grow into actual suspicion. And then the circumstances really were highly mysterious, as I realized with especial vividness now after listening to my friend's analysis of the evidence.

From the problem itself my mind traveled, not for the first time during the last few days, to the handsome girl, who had seemed in my eyes the high-priestess of this temple of mystery in the quaint little court. What a strange figure she had made against this strange background, with her quiet, chilly, self-contained manner, her pale face, so sad and worn, her black, straight brows and solemn gray eyes, so inscrutable, mysterious, Sibylline. A striking, even impressive, personality this, I reflected, with something in it somber and enigmatic that attracted and yet repelled.

And here I recalled Jervis's words: "The girl must have been in it if the father was." It was a dreadful thought, even though only speculatively uttered, and my heart rejected it; rejected it with indignation that rather surprised me. And this notwithstanding that the somber black-robed figure that my memory conjured up was one that associated itself with the idea of mystery and tragedy.

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CHAPTER IV

LEGAL COMPLICATIONS AND A JACKAL

My meditations brought me by a circuitous route, and ten minutes late, to the end of Fetter Lane, where, exchanging my rather abstracted air for the alert manner of a busy practitioner, I strode briskly forward and darted into the surgery with knitted brows, as though just released from an anxious case. But there was only one patient waiting, and she saluted me as I entered with a snort of defiance.

"Here you are, then?" said she.

"You are perfectly correct, Miss Oman," I replied; "in fact, you have put the case in a nutshell. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"Nothing," was the answer. "My medical adviser is a lady; but I've brought a note from Mr. Bellingham. Here it is," and she thrust the envelope into my hand.

I glanced through the note and learned that my patient had had a couple of bad nights and a very harassing day. "Could I have something to give me a night's rest?" it concluded.

I reflected for a few moments. One is not very ready to prescribe sleeping draughts for unknown patients, but still, insomnia is a very distressing condition. In the end I temporized with a moderate dose of bromide, deciding to call and see if more energetic measures were necessary.

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"He had better take a dose of this at once, Miss Oman," said I, as I handed her the bottle, "and I will look in later and see how he is."

"I expect he will be glad to see you," she answered, "for he is all alone to-night and very dumpy. Miss Bellingham is out. But I must remind you that he's a poor man and pays his way. You must excuse my mentioning it."

"I am much obliged to you for the hint, Miss Oman," I rejoined. "It isn't necessary for me to see him, but I should like just to look in and have a chat."

"Yes, it will do him good. You have your points, though punctuality doesn't seem to be one of them," and with this parting shot Miss Oman bustled away.

Half-past eight found me ascending the great, dim staircase of the house in Nevill's Court preceded by Miss Oman, by whom I was ushered into the room. Mr. Bellingham, who had just finished some sort of meal, was sitting hunched up in his chair gazing gloomily into the empty grate. He brightened up as I entered, but was evidently in very low spirits.

"I didn't mean to drag you out after your day's work was finished," he said, "though I am very glad to see you."

"You haven't dragged me out. I heard you were alone, so I just dropped in for a few minutes' gossip."

"That is really kind of you," he said heartily. "But I'm afraid you'll find me rather poor company. A man who is full of his own highly disagreeable affairs is not a desirable companion."

"You mustn't let me disturb you if you'd rather be alone," said I, with a sudden fear that I was intruding.

"Oh, you won't disturb me," he replied; adding, with a laugh: "It's more likely to be the other way

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about. In fact, if I were not afraid of boring you to death I would ask you to let me talk my difficulties over with you."

"You won't bore me," I said. "It is generally interesting to share another man's experiences without their inconveniences. 'The proper study of mankind is—man,' you know, especially to a doctor."

Mr. Bellingham chuckled grimly. "You make me feel like a microbe," he said. "However, if you would care to take a peep at me through your microscope, I will crawl on to the stage for your inspection, though it is not *my* actions that furnish the materials for your psychological studies. It is my poor brother who is the *Deus ex machina,* who, from his unknown grave, as I fear, pulls the strings of this infernal puppet-show."

He paused and for a space gazed thoughtfully into the grate as if he had forgotten my presence. At length he looked up and resumed:

"It is a curious story, Doctor—a very curious story. Part of it you know—the middle part. I will tell you it from the beginning, and then you will know as much as I do; for, as to the end, that is known to no one. It is written, no doubt, in the book of destiny, but the page has yet to be turned.

"The mischief began with my father's death. He was a country clergyman of very moderate means, a widower with two children, my brother John and me. He managed to send us both to Oxford, after which John went into the Foreign Office and I was to have gone into the Church. But I suddenly discovered that my views on religion had undergone a change that made this impossible, and just about this time my father came into a quite considerable property. Now,

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as it was his expressed intention to leave the estate equally divided between my brother and me, there was no need for me to take up any profession for a livelihood. Archeology was already the passion of my life, and I determined to devote myself henceforth to my favorite study, in which, by the way, I was following a family tendency; for my father was an enthusiastic student of ancient Oriental history, and John was, as you know, an ardent Egyptologist.

"Then my father died quite suddenly, and left no will. He had intended to have one drawn up, but had put it off until it was too late. And since nearly all the property was in the form of real estate, my brother inherited practically the whole of it. However, in deference to the known wishes of my father, he made me an allowance of five hundred a year, which was about a quarter of the annual income. I urged him to assign me a lump sum, but he refused to do this. Instead, he instructed his solicitor to pay me an allowance in quarterly instalments during the rest of his life; and it was understood that, on his death, the entire estate should devolve on me, or if I died first, on my daughter, Ruth. Then, as you know, he disappeared suddenly, and as the circumstances suggested that he was dead, and there was no evidence that he was alive, his solicitor—a Mr. Jellicoe—found himself unable to continue the payment of the allowance. On the other hand, as there was no positive evidence that my brother was dead, it was impossible to administer the will."

"You say the circumstances suggested that your brother was dead. What circumstances were they?"

"Principally the suddenness and completeness of the disappearance. His luggage, as you may remember,

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was found lying unclaimed at the railway station; and there was another circumstance even more suggestive. My brother drew a pension from the Foreign Office, for which he had to apply in person, or, if abroad, produce proof that he was alive on the date when the payment became due. Now, he was exceedingly regular in this respect; in fact, he had never been known to fail, either to appear in person or to transmit the necessary documents to his agent, Mr. Jellicoe. But from the moment when he vanished so mysteriously to the present day, nothing whatever has been heard of him."

"It's a very awkward position for you," I said, "but I should think there will not be much difficulty in obtaining the permission of the Court to presume death and to proceed to prove the will."

Mr. Bellingham made a wry face. "I expect you are right," he said, "but that doesn't help me much. You see, Mr. Jellicoe, having waited a reasonable time for my brother to reappear, took a very unusual but, I think, in the special circumstances, a very proper step; he summoned me and the other interested party to his office and communicated to us the provisions of the will. And very extraordinary provisions they turned out to be. I was thunderstruck when I heard them. And the exasperating thing is that I feel sure my poor brother imagined that he had made everything perfectly safe and simple."

"They generally do," I said, rather vaguely.

"I suppose they do," said Mr. Bellingham; "but poor John has made the most infernal hash of his will, and I am certain that he has utterly defeated his own intentions. You see, we are an old London family. The house in Queen Square where my brother nom-

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inally lived, but actually kept his collection, has been occupied by us for generations, and most of the Bellinghams are buried in St. George's burial-ground close by, though some members of the family are buried in other churchyards in the neighborhood. Now, my brother—who, by the way, was a bachelor—had a strong feeling for the family traditions, and he stipulated, not unnaturally, in his will that he should be buried in St. George's burial-ground among his ancestors, or, at least, in one of the places of burial appertaining to his native parish. But instead of simply expressing the wish and directing his executors to carry it out, he made it a condition affecting the operation of the will."

"Affecting it in what respect?" I asked.

"In a very vital respect," answered Mr. Bellingham. "The bulk of the property he bequeathed to me, or if I predeceased him, to my daughter Ruth. But the bequest was subject to the condition I have mentioned—that he should be buried in a certain place—and if that condition was not fulfilled, the bulk of the property was to go to my cousin, George Hurst."

"But in that case," said I, "as you can't produce the body, neither of you can get the property."

"I am not so sure of that," he replied. "If my brother is dead, it is pretty certain that he is not buried in St. George's or any of the other places mentioned, and the fact can easily be proved by production of the registers. So that a permission to presume death would result in the handing over to Hurst of almost the entire estate."

"Who is the executor?" I asked.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "there is another muddle. There are two executors; Jellicoe is one, and the other

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is the principal beneficiary—Hurst or myself, as the case may be. But, you see, neither of us can become an executor until the Court has decided which of us is the principal beneficiary."

"But who is to apply to the Court? I thought that was the business of the executors."

"Exactly, that is Hurst's difficulty. We were discussing it when you called the other day, and a very animated discussion it was," he added, with a grim smile. "You see, Jellicoe naturally refuses to move in the matter alone. He says he must have the support of the other executor. But Hurst is not at present the other executor; neither am I. But the two of us together are the co-executor, since the duty devolves upon one or other of us, in any case."

"It's a complicated position," I said.

"It is; and the complication has elicited a very curious proposal from Hurst. He points out—quite correctly, I am afraid—that as the conditions as to burial have not been complied with, the property must come to him, and he proposes a very neat little arrangement, which is this: That I shall support him and Jellicoe in their application for permission to presume death and to administer the will, and that he shall pay me four hundred a year for life; the arrangement to hold good *in all eventualities.*"

"What does he mean by that?"

"He means," said Bellingham, fixing me with a ferocious scowl, "that if the body should turn up at any future time, so that the conditions as to burial should be able to be carried out, he should still retain the property and pay me the four hundred a year."

"The deuce!" said I. "He seems to know how to drive a bargain."

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"His position is that he stands to lose four hundred a year for the term of my life if the body is never found, and he ought to stand to win if it is."

"And I gather that you have refused this offer?"

"Yes; very emphatically, and my daughter agrees with me; but I am not sure that I have done the right thing. A man should think twice, I suppose, before he burns his boats."

"Have you spoken to Mr. Jellicoe about the matter?"

"Yes, I have been to see him to-day. He is a cautious man, and he doesn't advise me one way or the other. But I think he disapproves of my refusal; in fact, he remarked that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, especially when the whereabouts of the bush is unknown."

"Do you think he will apply to the Court without your sanction?"

"He doesn't want to; but I suppose, if Hurst puts pressure on him, he will have to. Besides, Hurst, as an interested party, could apply on his own account, and after my refusal he probably will; at least, that is Jellicoe's opinion."

"The whole thing is a most astonishing muddle," I said, "especially when one remembers that your brother had a lawyer to advise him. Didn't Mr. Jellicoe point out to him how absurd the provisions were?"

"Yes, he did. He tells me that he implored my brother to let him draw up a will embodying the matter in a reasonable form. But John wouldn't listen to him. Poor old fellow! he could be very pig-headed when he chose."

"And is Hurst's proposal still open?"

"No, thanks to my peppery temper. I refused it very definitely, and sent him off with a flea in his ear.

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I hope I have not made a false step; I was quite taken by surprise when Hurst made the proposal and got rather angry. You remember, my brother was last seen alive at Hurst's house—but there, I oughtn't to talk like that, and I oughtn't to pester you with my confounded affairs when you come in for a friendly chat, though I gave you fair warning, you remember."

"Oh, but you have been highly entertaining. You don't realize what an interest I take in your case."

Mr. Bellingham laughed somewhat grimly. "My case!" he repeated. "You speak as if I were some rare and curious sort of criminal lunatic. However, I'm glad you find me amusing. It's more than I find myself."

"I didn't say amusing; I said interesting. I view you with deep respect as the central figure of a stirring drama. And I am not the only person who regards you in that light. Do you remember my speaking to you of Doctor Thorndyke?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Well, oddly enough, I met him this afternoon and we had a long talk at his chambers. I took the liberty of mentioning that I had made your acquaintance. Did I do wrong?"

"No. Certainly not. Why shouldn't you tell him? Did he remember my infernal case, as you call it?"

"Perfectly, in all its details. He is quite an enthusiast, you know, and uncommonly keen to hear how the case develops."

"So am I, for that matter," said Mr. Bellingham.

"I wonder," said I, "if you would mind my telling him what you have told me to-night? It would interest him enormously."

Mr. Bellingham reflected for a while with his eyes

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fixed on the empty grate. Presently he looked up, and said slowly:

"I don't know why I should. It's no secret; and if it were, I hold no monopoly in it. No; tell him, if you think he'd care to hear about it."

"You needn't be afraid of his talking," I said. "He's as close as an oyster; and the facts may mean more to him than they do to us. He may be able to give a useful hint or two."

"Oh, I'm not going to pick his brains," Mr. Bellingham said quickly and with some wrath. "I'm not the sort of man who goes round cadging for free professional advice. Understand that, Doctor."

"I do," I answered hastily. "That wasn't what I meant at all. Is that Miss Bellingham coming in? I heard the front door shut."

"Yes, that will be my girl, I expect; but don't run away. You're not afraid of her, are you?" he added as I hurriedly picked up my hat.

"I'm not sure that I'm not," I answered. "She is rather a majestic young lady."

Mr. Bellingham chuckled and smothered a yawn, and at that moment his daughter entered the room; and, in spite of her shabby black dress and a shabbier handbag that she carried, I thought her appearance and manner fully justified my description.

"You come in, Miss Bellingham," I said as she shook my hand with cool civility, "to find your father yawning and me taking my departure. So I have my uses, you see. My conversation is the infallible cure for insomnia."

Miss Bellingham smiled. "I believe I am driving you away," she said.

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"Not at all," I replied hastily. "My mission was accomplished, that was all."

"Sit down for a few moments, Doctor," urged Mr. Bellingham, "and let Ruth sample the remedy. She will be affronted if you run away as soon as she comes in."

"Well, you mustn't let me keep you up," I said.

"Oh, I'll let you know when I fall asleep," he replied, with a chuckle; and with this understanding I sat down again—not at all unwillingly.

At this moment Miss Oman entered with a small tray and a smile of which I should not have supposed her capable.

"You'll take your toast and cocoa while they're hot, dear, won't you?" she said coaxingly.

"Yes, I will, Phyllis, thank you," Miss Bellingham answered. "I am only just going to take off my hat," and she left the room, followed by the astonishingly transfigured spinster.

"She returned almost immediately as Mr. Bellingham was in the midst of a profound yawn, and sat down to her frugal meal, when her father mystified me considerably by remarking:

"You're late to-night, chick. Have the Shepherd Kings been giving trouble?"

"No," she replied; "but I thought I might as well get them done. So I dropped in at the Ormond Street library on my way home and finished them."

"Then they are ready for stuffing now?"

"Yes." As she answered she caught my astonished eye (for a stuffed Shepherd King is undoubtedly a somewhat surprising phenomenon) and laughed softly.

"We mustn't talk in riddles like this," she said, "before Doctor Berkeley, or he will turn us both into

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pillars of salt. My father is referring to my work," she explained to me.

"Are you a taxidermist, then?" I asked.

She hastily set down the cup that she was raising to her lips and broke into a ripple of quiet laughter.

"I am afraid my father has misled you with his irreverent expressions. He will have to atone by explaining."

"You see, Doctor," said Mr. Bellingham, "Ruth is a literary searcher——"

"Oh, don't call me a searcher!" Miss Bellingham protested. "It suggests the female searcher at a police station. Say investigator."

"Very well, investigator or investigatrix, if you like. She hunts up references and bibliographies at the Museum for people who are writing books. She looks up everything that has been written on a given subject, and then, when she has crammed herself to a bursting-point with facts, she goes to her client and disgorges and crams him or her, and he or she finally disgorges into the Press."

"What a disgusting way to put it!" said his daughter. "However, that is what it amounts to. I am a literary jackal, a collector of provender for the literary lions. Is that quite clear?"

"Perfectly. But I don't think that, even now, I quite understand about the stuffed Shepherd Kings."

"Oh, it was not the Shepherd Kings who were to be stuffed. It was the author! That was mere obscurity of speech on the part of my father. The position is this: A venerable Archdeacon wrote an article on the patriarch Joseph——"

"And didn't know anything about him," interrupted

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Mr. Bellingham, "and got tripped up by a specialist who did, and then got shirty——"

"Nothing of the kind," said Miss Bellingham. "He knew as much as venerable archdeacons ought to know; but the expert knew more. So the archdeacon commissioned me to collect the literature on the state of Egypt at the end of the seventeenth dynasty, which I have done; and to-morrow I shall go and stuff him, as my father expresses it, and then——"

"And then," Mr. Bellingham interrupted, "the archdeacon will rush forth and pelt that expert with Shepherd Kings and Sequenen-Ra and the whole tag-rag and bobtail of the seventeenth dynasty. Oh, there'll be wigs on the green, I can tell you."

"Yes, I expect there will be quite a skirmish," said Miss Bellingham. And thus dismissing the subject she made an energetic attack on the toast while her father refreshed himself with a colossal yawn.

I watched her with furtive admiration and deep and growing interest. In spite of her pallor, her weary eyes, and her drawn and almost haggard face, she was an exceedingly handsome girl; and there was in her aspect a suggestion of purpose, of strength and character that marked her off from the rank and file of womanhood. I noted this as I stole an occasional glance at her or turned to answer some remark addressed to me; and I noted, too, that her speech, despite a general undertone of depression, was yet not without a certain caustic, ironical humor. She was certainly a rather enigmatical young person, but very decidedly interesting.

When she had finished her repast she put aside the tray and, opening the shabby handbag, asked:

"Do you take any interest in Egyptian history? We

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are as mad as hatters on the subject. It seems to be a family complaint."

"I don't know much about it," I answered. "Medical studies are rather engrossing and don't leave much time for general reading."

"Naturally," she said. "You can't specialize in everything. But if you would care to see how the business of a literary jackal is conducted, I will show you my notes."

I accepted the offer eagerly (not, I fear, from pure enthusiasm for the subject), and she brought forth from the bag four blue-covered, quarto notebooks, each dealing with one of the four dynasties from the fourteenth to the seventeenth. As I glanced through the neat and orderly extracts with which they were filled we discussed the intricacies of the peculiarly difficult and confused period that they covered, gradually lowering our voices as Mr. Bellingham's eyes closed and his head fell against the back of his chair. We had just reached the critical reign of Apepa II when a resounding snore broke in upon the studious quiet of the room and sent us both into a fit of silent laughter.

"Your conversation has done its work," she whispered as I stealthily picked up my hat, and together we stole on tiptoe to the door, which she opened without a sound. Once outside, she suddenly dropped her bantering manner and said quite earnestly:

"How kind it was of you to come and see him tonight. You have done him a world of good, and I am most grateful. Good-night!"

She shook hands with me really cordially, and I took my way down the creaking stairs in a whirl of happiness that I was quite at a loss to account for.

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CHAPTER V

THE WATERCRESS-BED

BARNARD's practise, like most others, was subject to those fluctuations that fill the struggling practitioner alternately with hope and despair. The work came in paroxysms with intervals of almost complete stagnation. One of these intermissions occurred on the day after my visit to Nevill's Court, with the result that by half-past eleven I found myself wondering what I should do with the remainder of the day. The better to consider this weighty problem, I strolled down to the Embankment, and, leaning on the parapet, contemplated the view across the river; the gray stone bridge with its perspective of arches, the picturesque pile of the shot-towers, and beyond, the shadowy shapes of the Abbey and St. Stephen's.

It was a pleasant scene, restful and quiet, with a touch of life and a hint of sober romance, when a barge swept down through the middle arch of the bridge with a lugsail hoisted to a jury mast and a white-aproned woman at the tiller. Dreamily I watched the craft creep by upon the moving tide, noted the low freeboard, almost awash, the careful helmswoman, and the dog on the forecastle yapping at the distant shore—and thought of Ruth Bellingham.

What was there about this strange girl that had made so deep an impression on me? That was the question that I propounded to myself, and not for the first time,

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Of the fact itself there was no doubt. But what was the explanation? Was it her unusual surroundings? Her occupation and rather recondite learning? Her striking personality and exceptional good looks? Or her connection with the dramatic mystery of her lost uncle?

I concluded that it was all of these. Everything connected with her was unusual and arresting; but over and above these circumstances there was a certain sympathy and personal affinity of which I was strongly conscious and of which I dimly hoped that she, perhaps, was a little conscious too. At any rate, I was deeply interested in her; of that there was no doubt whatever. Short as our acquaintance had been, she held a place in my thoughts that had never been held by any other woman.

From Ruth Bellingham my reflections passed by a natural transition to the curious story that her father had told me. It was a queer affair, that ill-drawn will, with the baffled lawyer protesting in the background. It almost seemed as if there must be something behind it all, especially when I remembered Mr. Hurst's very singular proposal. But it was out of *my* depth; it was a case for a lawyer, and to a lawyer it should go. This very night, I resolved, I would go to Thorndyke and give him the whole story as it had been told to me.

And then there happened one of those coincidences at which we all wonder when they occur, but which are so frequent as to have become enshrined in a proverb. For even as I formed the resolution, I observed two men approaching from the direction of Blackfriars, and recognized in them my quondam teacher and his junior.

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"I was just thinking about you," I said as they came up.

"Very flattering," replied Jervis; "but I thought you had to talk of the devil."

"Perhaps," suggested Thorndyke, "he was talking to himself. But why were you thinking of us, and what was the nature of your thoughts?"

"My thoughts had reference to the Bellingham case. I spent the whole of last evening at Nevill's Court."

"Ha! And are there any fresh developments?"

"Yes, by Jove! there are. Bellingham gave me a full detailed description of the will; and a pretty document it seems to be."

"Did he give you permission to repeat the details to me?"

"Yes. I asked specifically if I might, and he had no objection whatever."

"Good. We are lunching at Soho to-day as Polton has his hands full. Come with us and share our table and tell us your story as we go. Will that suit you?"

It suited me admirably in the present state of the practise, and I accepted the invitation with undissembled glee.

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "then let us walk slowly and finish with matters confidential before we plunge into the maddening crowd."

We set forth at a leisurely pace along the broad pavement and I commenced my narration. As well as I could remember, I related the circumstances that had led up to the present disposition of the property and then proceeded to the actual provisions of the will; to all of which my two friends listened with rapt interest, Thorndyke occasionally stopping me to jot down a memorandum in his pocket-book.

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"Why, the fellow must have been a stark lunatic!" Jervis exclaimed, when I had finished. "He seems to have laid himself out with the most devilish ingenuity to defeat his own ends."

"That is not an uncommon peculiarity with testators," Thorndyke remarked. "A direct and perfectly intelligible will is rather the exception. But we can hardly judge until we have seen the actual document. I suppose Bellingham hasn't a copy?"

"I don't know," said I; "but I will ask him."

"If he has one, I should like to look through it," said Thorndyke. "The provisions are very peculiar, and, as Jervis says, admirably calculated to defeat the testator's wishes if they have been correctly reported. And, apart from that, they have a remarkable bearing on the circumstances of the disappearance. I daresay you noticed that."

"I noticed that it is very much to Hurst's advantage that the body has not been found."

"Yes, of course. But there are some other points that are very significant. However, it would be premature to discuss the terms of the will until we have seen the actual document or a certified copy."

"If there is a copy extant," I said, "I will try to get hold of it. But Bellingham is terribly afraid of being suspected of a desire to get professional advice gratis."

"That," said Thorndyke, "is natural enough, and not discreditable. But you must overcome his scruples somehow. I expect you will be able to. You are a plausible young gentleman, as I remember of old, and you seem to have established yourself as quite the friend of the family."

"They are rather interesting people," I explained;

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"very cultivated and with a strong leaning toward archeology. It seems to be in the blood."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; a family tendency, probably due to contact and common surroundings rather than heredity. So you like Godfrey Bellingham?"

"Yes. He is a trifle peppery and impulsive but quite an agreeable, genial old buffer."

"And the daughter," said Jervis, "what is she like?"

"Oh, she is a learned lady; works up bibliographies and references at the Museum."

"Ah!" Jervis exclaimed, with disfavor, "I know the breed. Inky fingers; no chest to speak of; all side and spectacles."

I rose artlessly at the gross and palpable bait.

"You're quite wrong," I exclaimed indignantly, contrasting Jervis's hideous presentment with the comely original. "She is an exceedingly good-looking girl, and her manners all that a lady's should be. A little stiff, perhaps, but then I am only an acquaintance—almost a stranger."

"But," Jervis persisted, "what is she like, in appearance I mean. Short? fat? sandy? Give us intelligible details."

I made a rapid mental inventory, assisted by my recent cogitations.

"She is about five feet seven, slim but rather plump, very erect in carriage and graceful in movements; black hair, loosely parted in the middle and falling very prettily away from the forehead; pale, clear complexion, dark gray eyes, straight eyebrows, straight, well-shaped nose, short mouth, rather full; round chin —what the deuce are you grinning at, Jervis?" For my friend had suddenly unmasked his batteries and

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now threatened, like the Cheshire cat, to dissolve into a mere abstraction of amusement.

"If there is a copy of that will, Thorndyke," he said, "we shall get it. I think you agree with me, reverend senior?"

"I have already said," was the reply, "that I put my trust in Berkeley. And now let us dismiss professional topics. This is our hostelry."

He pushed open an unpretentious glazed door, and we followed him into the restaurant, whereof the atmosphere was pervaded by an appetizing meatiness mingled with less agreeable suggestions of the destructive distillation of fat.

It was some two hours later when I wished my friends adieu under the golden-leaved plane trees of King's Bench Walk.

"I won't ask you to come in now," said Thorndyke, "as we have some consultations this afternoon. But come in and see us soon; don't wait for that copy of the will."

"No," said Jervis. "Drop in in the evening when your work is done; unless, of course, there is more attractive society elsewhere. Oh, you needn't turn that color, my dear child; we have all been young once; there is even a tradition that Thorndyke was young some time back in the pre-dynastic period."

"Don't take any notice of him, Berkeley," said Thorndyke. "The egg-shell is sticking to his head still. He'll know better when he is my age."

"Methuselah!" exclaimed Jervis. "I hope I shan't have to wait as long as that!"

Thorndyke smiled benevolently at his irrepressible junior, and, shaking my hand cordially, turned into the entry.

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From the Temple I wended northward, to the adjacent College of Surgeons, where I spent a couple of profitable hours examining the "pickles" and refreshing my memory on the subjects of pathology and anatomy; marveling afresh (as every practical anatomist must marvel) at the incredibly perfect technique of the dissections, and inwardly paying tribute to the founder of the collection. At length the warning of the clock, combined with an increasing craving for tea, drove me forth and bore me toward the scene of my not very strenuous labors. My mind was still occupied with the contents of the cases and the great glass jars, so that I found myself at the corner of Fetter Lane without a very clear idea of how I had got there. But at that point I was aroused from my reflections rather abruptly by a raucous voice in my ear.

" 'Orrible discovery at Sidcup!"

I turned wrathfully—for a London street-boy's yell, let off at point-blank range, is, in effect, like the smack of an open hand—but the inscription on the staring yellow poster that was held up for my inspection changed my anger to curiosity.

"Horrible discovery in a watercress-bed!"

Now, let prigs deny it if they will, but there is something very attractive in a "horrible discovery." It hints at tragedy, at mystery, at romance. It promises to bring into our gray and commonplace life that element of the dramatic which is the salt that our existence is savored withal. "In a watercress-bed," too! The rusticity of the background seemed to emphasize the horror of the discovery, whatever it might be.

I bought a copy of the paper, and, tucking it under my arm, hurried on to the surgery, promising myself

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a mental feast of watercress; but as I opened the door I found myself confronted by a corpulent woman of piebald and pimply aspect who saluted me with a deep groan. It was the lady from the coal shop in Fleur-de-Lys Court.

"Good evening, Mrs. Jablett," I said briskly; "not come about yourself, I hope."

"Yes, I have," she answered, rising and following me gloomily into the consulting-room; and then, when I had seated her in the patient's chair and myself at the writing table, she continued: "It's my inside, you know, doctor."

The statement lacked anatomical precision and merely excluded the domain of the skin specialist. I accordingly waited for enlightenment and speculated on the watercress-beds, while Mrs. Jablett regarded me expectantly with a dim and watery eye.

"Ah!" I said at length; "it's your—your inside, is it, Mrs. Jablett?"

"Yus. *And* my 'ead," she added, with a voluminous sigh that filled the apartment with odorous reminiscences of "unsweetened."

"Your head aches, does it?"

"Somethink chronic!" said Mrs. Jablett. "Feels as if it was a-opening and a-shutting, a-opening and a-shutting, and when I sit down I feel as if I should *bust*."

This picturesque description of her sensations—not wholly inconsistent with her figure—gave the clue to Mrs. Jablett's sufferings. Resisting a frivolous impulse to reassure her as to the elasticity of the human integument, I considered her case in exhaustive detail, coasting delicately round the subject of "unsweetened" and finally sent her away, revived in spirits and grasp-

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ing a bottle of Mist. Sodæ cum Bismutho from Barnard's big stock-jar. Then I went back to investigate the Horrible Discovery; but before I could open the paper, another patient arrived (*Impetigo contagiosa*, this time, affecting the "wide and archéd-front sublime" of a juvenile Fetter Laner), and then yet another, and so on through the evening until at last I forgot the watercress-beds altogether. It was only when I had purified myself from the evening consultations with hot water and a nail-brush and was about to sit down to a frugal supper, that I remembered the newspaper and fetched it from the drawer of the consulting-room table, where it had been hastily thrust out of sight. I folded it into a convenient form, and, standing it upright against the water-jug, read the report at my ease as I supped.

There was plenty of it. Evidently the reporter had regarded it as a "scoop," and the editor had backed him up with ample space and hair-raising head-lines.

"HORRIBLE DISCOVERY
IN A WATERCRESS-BED
AT SIDCUP!"

"A startling discovery was made yesterday afternoon in the course of clearing out a watercress-bed near the erstwhile rural village of Sidcup in Kent; a discovery that will occasion many a disagreeable qualm to those persons who have been in the habit of regaling themselves with this refreshing esculent. But before proceeding to a description of the circumstances of the actual discovery or of the objects found—which, however, it may be stated at once, are nothing more or less than the fragments of a dismembered human body—it will be interesting to trace the remarkable chain of

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coincidences by virtue of which the discovery was made.

"The beds in question have been laid out in a small artificial lake fed by a tiny streamlet which forms one of the numerous tributaries of the River Cray. Its depth is greater than usual in the watercress-beds, otherwise the gruesome relics could never have been concealed beneath its surface, and the flow of water through it, though continuous is slow. The tributary streamlet meanders through a succession of pasture meadows, in one of which the beds themselves are situated, and here throughout most of the year the fleecy victims of the human carnivore carry on the industry of converting grass into mutton. Now it happened some years ago that the sheep frequenting these pastures became affected with the disease known as 'liver-rot'; and here we must make a short digression into the domain of pathology.

" 'Liver-rot' is a disease of quite romantic antecedents. Its cause is a small, flat worm—the liver-fluke—which infests the liver and bile-ducts of the affected sheep.

"Now how does the worm get into the sheep's liver? That is where the romance comes in. Let us see.

"The cycle of transformation begins with the deposit of the eggs of the fluke in some shallow stream or ditch running through pasture lands. Now each egg has a sort of lid, which presently opens and lets out a minute, hairy creature who swims away in search of a particular kind of water-snail—the kind called by naturalists *Limnæa truncatula*. If he finds a snail, he bores his way into its flesh and soon begins to grow and wax fat. Then he brings forth a family—of tiny worms quite unlike himself, little creatures called *rediæ*, which soon

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give birth to families of young *rediæ*. So they go on for several generations, but at last there comes a generation of *rediæ* which, instead of giving birth to fresh *rediæ*, produce families of totally different offspring; big-headed, long-tailed creatures like miniature tadpoles, called by the learned *cercariæ*. The *cercariæ* soon wriggle their way out of the body of the snail, and then complications arise: for it is the habit of this particular snail to leave the water occasionally and take a stroll in the fields. Thus the *cercariæ*, escaping from the snail find themselves on the grass whereupon they promptly drop their tails and stick themselves to the grass-blades. Then comes the unsuspecting sheep to take his frugal meal, and, cropping the grass swallows it, *cercariæ* and all. But the latter, when they find themselves in the sheep's stomach, make their way straight to the bile-ducts, up which they travel to the liver. Here, in a few weeks, they grow up into full-blown flukes and begin the important business of producing eggs.

"Such is the pathological romance of the 'liver-rot'; and now what is its connection with this mysterious discovery? It is this. After the outbreak of 'liver-rot' above referred to, the ground landlord, a Mr. John Bellingham, instructed his solicitor to insert a clause in the lease of the beds directing that the latter should be periodically cleared and examined by an expert to make sure that they were free from the noxious water-snails. The last lease expired about two years ago, and since then the beds have been out of cultivation; but, for the safety of the adjacent pastures, it was considered necessary to make the customary periodical inspection, and it was in the course of cleaning the

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beds for this purpose that the present discovery was made.

"The operation began two days ago. A gang of three men proceeded systematically to grub up the plants and collect the multitudes of water-snails that they might be examined by the expert to see if any obnoxious species were present. They had cleared nearly half of the beds when, yesterday afternoon, one of the men working in the deepest part came upon some bones, the appearance of which excited his suspicion. Thereupon he called his mates, and they carefully picked away the plants piece-meal, a process that soon laid bare an unmistakable human hand lying on the mud amongst the roots. Fortunately they had the wisdom not to disturb the remains, but at once sent off a message to the police. Very soon, an inspector and a sergeant, accompanied by the divisional surgeon, arrived on the scene, and were able to view the remains lying as they had been found. And now another very strange fact came to light; for it was seen that the hand—a left one—lying on the mud was minus its third finger. This is regarded by the police as a very important fact as bearing on the question of identification, seeing that the number of persons having the third finger of the left hand missing must be quite small. After a thorough examination on the spot, the bones were carefully collected and conveyed to the mortuary, where they now lie awaiting further inquiries.

"The divisional surgeon, Dr. Brandon, in an interview with our representative, made the following statements:

" 'The bones are those of the left arm of a middle-aged or elderly man about five feet eight inches in height. All the bones of the arm are present, in-

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cluding the scapula, or shoulder-blade, and the clavicle, or collar-bone, but the three bones of the third finger are missing.'

"'Is this a deformity or has the finger been cut off?' our correspondent asked.

"'The finger has been amputated,' was the reply. 'If it had been absent from birth, the corresponding hand bone, or metacarpal, would have been wanting or deformed, whereas it is present and quite normal.'

"'How long have the bones been in the water?' was the next question.

"'More than a year, I should say. They are quite clean; there is not a vestige of the soft structures left.'

"Have you any theory as to how the arm came to be deposited where it was found?'

"'I should rather not answer that question,' was the guarded response.

"'One more question,' our correspondent urged. 'The ground landlord, Mr. John Bellingham; is he not the gentleman who disappeared so mysteriously some time ago?'

"'So I understand,' Dr. Brandon replied.

"'Can you tell me if Mr. Bellingham had lost the third finger of his left hand?'

"'I cannot say,' said Dr. Brandon; and he added with a smile, 'you had better ask the police.'

"That is how the matter stands at present. But we understand that the police are making active inquiries for any missing man who has lost the third finger of his left hand, and if any of our readers know of such a person, they are earnestly requested to communicate at once, either with us or the authorities.

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"Also we believe that a systematic search is to be made for further remains."

I laid the newspaper down and fell into a train of reflection. It was certainly a most mysterious affair. The thought that had evidently come to the reporter's mind stole naturally into mine. Could these remains be those of John Bellingham? It was obviously possible, though I could not but see that the fact of the bones having been found on his land, while it undoubtedly furnished the suggestion, did not in any way add to its probability. Then connection was accidental and in nowise relevant.

Then, too, there was the missing finger. No reference to any such deformity had been made in the original report of the disappearance, though it could hardly have been overlooked. But it was useless to speculate without facts. I should be seeing Thorndyke in the course of the next few days, and, undoubtedly, if the discovery had any bearing upon the disappearance of John Bellingham, I should hear of it. With such a reflection I rose from the table, and, adopting the advice contained in the spurious Johnsonian quotation, proceeded to "take a walk in Fleet Street" before settling down for the evening.

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CHAPTER VI

SIDELIGHTS

THE association of coal with potatoes is one upon which I have frequently speculated, without arriving at any more satisfactory explanation than that both products are of the earth, earthy. Of the connection itself Barnard's practise furnished several instances besides Mrs. Jablett's establishment in Fleur-de-Lys Court, one of which was a dark and mysterious cavern a foot below the level of the street, that burrowed under an ancient house on the west side of Fetter Lane—a crinkly, timber house of the three-decker type that leaned back drunkenly from the road as if about to sit down in its own back yard.

Passing this repository of the associated products about ten o'clock in the morning, I perceived in the shadows of the cavern no less a person than Miss Oman. She saw me at the same moment, and beckoned peremptorily with a hand that held a large Spanish onion. I approached with a deferential smile.

"What a magnificent onion, Miss Oman! and how generous of you to offer it to me——"

"I wasn't offering it to you. But there! Isn't it just like a man——"

"Isn't what just like a man?" I interrupted. "If you mean the onion——"

"I don't!" she snapped; "and I wish you wouldn't talk such a parcel of nonsense. A grown man and a

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member of a serious profession, too! You ought to know better."

"I suppose I ought," I said reflectively. And she continued:

"I called in at the surgery just now."

"To see me?"

"What else should I come for? Do you suppose that I called to consult the bottle-boy?"

"Certainly not, Miss Oman. So you find the lady doctor no use, after all?"

Miss Oman gnashed her teeth at me (and very fine teeth they were too).

"I called," she said majestically, "on behalf of Miss Bellingham."

My facetiousness evaporated instantly. "I hope Miss Bellingham is not ill," I said with a sudden anxiety that elicited a sardonic smile from Miss Oman.

"No," was the reply, "she is not ill, but she has cut her hand rather badly. It's her right hand too, and she can't afford to lose the use of it, not being a great, hulky, lazy, lolloping man. So you had better go and put some stuff on it."

With this advice, Miss Oman whisked to the right-about and vanished into the depths of the cavern like the witch of Wokey, while I hurried on to the surgery to provide myself with the necessary instruments and materials, and thence proceeded to Nevill's Court.

Miss Oman's juvenile maidservant, who opened the door to me, stated the existing conditions with epigrammatic conciseness.

"Mr. Bellingham is hout, sir; but Miss Bellingham is hin."

Having thus delivered herself she retreated toward the kitchen and I ascended the stairs, at the head of

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which I found Miss Bellingham awaiting me with her right hand encased in what looked like a white boxing-glove.

"I'm glad you have come," she said. "Phyllis—Miss Oman, you know—has kindly bound up my hand, but I should like you to see that it is all right."

We went into the sitting-room, where I laid out my paraphernalia on the table while I inquired into the particulars of the accident.

"It is most unfortunate that it should have happened just now," she said, as I wrestled with one of those remarkable feminine knots that, while they seem to defy the utmost efforts of human ingenuity to untie, yet have a singular habit of untying themselves at inopportune moments.

"Why just now in particular?" I asked.

"Because I have some specially important work to do. A very learned lady who is writing an historical book has commissioned me to collect all the literature relating to the Tell-el-Amarna letters—the cuneiform tablets, you know, of Amenhotep the Fourth."

"Well," I said soothingly, "I expect your hand will soon be well."

"Yes, but that won't do. The work has to be done immediately. I have to send in completed notes not later than this day week, and it will be quite impossible. I am dreadfully disappointed."

By this time I had unwound the voluminous wrappings and exposed the injury—a deep gash in the palm that must have narrowly missed a good-sized artery. Obviously the hand would be useless for fully a week.

"I suppose," she said, "you couldn't patch it up so that I could write with it?"

I shook my head.

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"No, Miss Bellingham. I shall have to put it on a splint. We can't run any risks with a deep wound like this."

"Then I shall have to give up the commission, and I don't know how my client will get the work done in time. You see, I am pretty well up in the literature of Ancient Egypt; in fact, I was to receive special payment on that account. And it would have been such an interesting task, too. However, it can't be helped."

I proceeded methodically with the application of the dressings, and meanwhile reflected. It was evident that she was deeply disappointed. Loss of work meant loss of money, and it needed but a glance at her rusty black dress to see that there was little margin for that. Possibly, too, there was some special need to be met. Her manner seemed almost to imply that there was. And at this point I had a brilliant idea.

"I'm not sure that it can't be helped," said I.

She looked at me inquiringly, and I continued: "I am going to make a proposition, and I shall ask you to consider it with an open mind."

"That sounds rather portentous," said she; "but I promise. What is it?"

"It is this: When I was a student I acquired the useful art of writing shorthand. I am not a lightning reporter, you understand, but I can take matter down from dictation at quite respectable speed."

"Yes."

"Well, I have several hours free every day—usually the whole afternoon up to six or half-past—and it occurs to me that if you were to go to the Museum in the mornings you could get out your books, look up passages (you could do that without using your right hand), and put in bookmarks. Then I could come

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along in the afternoon and you could read out the selected passages to me, and I could take them down in shorthand. We should get through as much in a couple of hours as you could in a day using long-hand."

"Oh, but how kind of you, Dr. Berkeley!" she exclaimed. "How very kind! Of course, I couldn't think of taking up all your leisure in that way; but I do appreciate your kindness very much."

I was rather chapfallen at this very definite refusal, but persisted feebly:

"I wish you would. It may seem rather a cheek for a comparative stranger like me to make such a proposal to a lady; but if you'd been a man—in those special circumstances—I should have made it all the same, and you would have accepted as a matter of course."

"I doubt that. At any rate, I am not a man. I sometimes wish I were."

"Oh, I am sure you are much better as you are!" I exclaimed, with such earnestness that we both laughed. And at this moment Mr. Bellingham entered the room carrying several large brand-new books in a strap.

"Well, I'm sure!" he exclaimed genially; "here are pretty goings on. Doctor and patient giggling like a pair of schoolgirls! What's the joke?"

He thumped his parcel of books down on the table and listened smilingly while my unconscious witticism was expounded.

"The doctor's quite right," he said. "You'll do as you are chick; but the Lord knows what sort of man you would make. You take his advice and let well alone."

Finding him in this genial frame of mind, I ven-

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tured to explain my proposition to him and to enlist his support. He considered it with attentive approval, and when I had finished turned to his daughter.

"What is your objection, chick?" he asked.

"It would give Doctor Berkeley such a fearful lot of work," she answered.

"It would give him a fearful lot of pleasure," I said. "It would really."

"Then why not?" said Mr. Bellingham. "We don't mind being under an obligation to the Doctor, do we?"

"Oh, it isn't that!" she exclaimed hastily.

"Then take him at his word. He means it. It is a kind action and he'll like doing it, I'm sure. That's all right, Doctor; she accepts, don't you, chick?"

"Yes, if you say so, I do; and most thankfully."

She accompanied the acceptance with a gracious smile that was in itself a large repayment on account, and when we had made the necessary arrangements, I hurried away in a state of the most perfect satisfaction to finish my morning's work and order an early lunch.

When I called for her a couple of hours later I found her waiting in the garden with the shabby handbag, of which I relieved her, and we set forth together, watched jealously by Miss Oman, who had accompanied her to the gate.

As I walked up the court with this wonderful maid by my side I could hardly believe in my good fortune. By her presence and my own resulting happiness the mean surroundings became glorified and the commonest objects transfigured into things of beauty. What a delightful thoroughfare, for instance, was Fetter Lane, with its quaint charm and medieval grace! I snuffed the cabbage-laden atmosphere and seemed to breathe the scent of the asphodel. Holborn was even as the

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Elysian Fields; the omnibus that bore us westward was a chariot of glory; and the people who swarmed verminously on the pavements bore the semblance of the children of light.

Love is a foolish thing judged by workaday standards, and the thoughts and actions of lovers foolish beyond measure. But the workaday standard is the wrong one, after all; for the utilitarian mind does but busy itself with the trivial and transitory interests of life, behind which looms the great and everlasting reality of the love of man and woman. There is more significance in a nightingale's song in the hush of a summer night than in all the wisdom of Solomon (who, by the way, was not without his little experiences of the tender passion).

The janitor in the little glass box by the entrance to the library inspected us and passed us on, with a silent benediction, to the lobby, whence (when I had handed my stick to a bald-headed demigod and received a talismanic disc in exchange) we entered the enormous rotunda of the reading-room.

I have often thought that, if some lethal vapor of highly preservative properties—such as formaldehyde, for instance—could be shed into the atmosphere of this apartment, the entire and complete collection of books and book-worms would be well worth preserving, for the enlightenment of posterity, as a sort of anthropological appendix to the main collection of the Museum. For, surely, nowhere else in the world are so many strange and abnormal human beings gathered together in one place. And a curious question that must have occurred to many observers is: Whence do these singular creatures come, and whither do they go when the very distinct-faced clock (adjusted to literary eyesight)

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proclaims closing time? The tragic-faced gentleman, for instance, with the corkscrew ringlets that bob up and down like spiral springs as he walks? Or the short, elderly gentleman in the black cassock and bowler hat, who shatters your nerves by turning suddenly and revealing himself at a middle-aged woman? Whither do they go? One never sees them elsewhere. Do they steal away at closing time into the depths of the Museum and hide themselves until morning in sarcophagi or mummy cases? Or do they creep through spaces in the book-shelves and spend the night behind the volumes in a congenial atmosphere of leather and antique paper? Who can say? What I do know is that when Ruth Bellingham entered the reading-room she appeared in comparison with these like a creature of another order; even as the head of Antinous, which formerly stood (it has since been moved) amidst the portrait-busts of the Roman Emperors, seemed like the head of a god set in a portrait gallery of illustrious baboons.

"What have we got to do?" I asked when we had found a vacant seat. "Do you want to look up the catalogue?"

"No, I have the tickets in my bag. The books are waiting in the 'kept books' department."

I placed my hat on the leather-covered shelf, dropped her gloves into it—how delightfully intimate and companionable it seemed!—altered the numbers on the tickets, and then we proceeded together to the "kept books" desk to collect the volumes that contained the material for our day's work.

It was a blissful afternoon. Two and a half hours of happiness unalloyed did I spend at that shiny, leather-clad desk, guiding my nimble pen across the

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pages of the notebook. It introduced me to a new world—a world in which love and learning, sweet intimacy and crusted archeology, were mingled into the oddest, most whimsical and most delicious confection that the mind of man can conceive. Hitherto, these recondite histories had been far beyond my ken. Of the wonderful heretic, Amenhotep the Fourth, I had already heard—at the most he had been a mere name; the Hittites a mythical race of undetermined habitat; while cuneiform tablets had presented themselves to my mind merely as an uncouth kind of fossil biscuit suited to the digestion of a prehistoric ostrich.

Now all this was changed. As we sat with our chairs creaking together and she whispered the story of those stirring times into my receptive ear—talking is strictly forbidden in the reading-room—the disjointed fragments arranged themselves into a romance of supreme fascination. Egyptian, Babylonian, Aramean, Hittite, Memphis, Babylon, Hamath, Megiddo—I swallowed them all thankfully, wrote them down, and asked for more. Only once did I disgrace myself. An elderly clergyman of ascetic and acidulous aspect had passed us with a glance of evident disapproval, clearly setting us down as intruding philanderers; and when I contrasted the parson's probable conception of the whispered communications that were being poured into my ear so tenderly and confidentially with the dry reality, I chuckled aloud. But my fair taskmistress only paused, with her finger on the page, smilingly to rebuke me, and then went on with the dictation. She was certainly a Tartar for work.

It was a proud moment for me when, in response to my interrogative "Yes?" my companion said "That is all" and closed the book. We had extracted the pith

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and marrow of six considerable volumes in two and a half hours.

"You have been better than your word," she said. "It would have taken me two full days of really hard work to make the notes that you have written down since we commenced. I don't know how to thank you."

"There's no need to. I've enjoyed myself and polished up my shorthand. What is the next thing? We shall want some books for to-morrow, shan't we?"

"Yes. I have made out a list, so if you will come with me to the catalogue desk I will look up the numbers and ask you to write the tickets."

The selection of a fresh batch of authorities occupied us for another quarter of an hour, and then, having handed in the volumes that we had squeezed dry, we took our way out of the reading-room.

"Which way shall we go?" she asked as we passed out of the gate, where stood a massive policeman, like the guardian angel at the gate of Paradise (only, thank Heaven! he bore no flaming sword forbidding re-entry).

"We are going," I replied, "to Museum Street, where is a milkshop in which one can get an excellent cup of tea."

She looked as if she would have demurred, but eventually followed obediently, and we were soon settled side by side at the little marble-topped table, retracing the ground we had covered in the afternoon's work and discussing various points of interest over a joint teapot.

"Have you been doing this sort of work long?" I asked, as she handed me my second cup of tea.

"Professionally," she answered, "only about two years; since we broke up our home, in fact. But long before that I used to come to the Museum with my

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Uncle John—the one who disappeared, you know, in that dreadfully mysterious way—and help him to look up references. We were good friends, he and I."

"I suppose he was a very learned man?" I suggested.

"Yes, in a certain way; in the way of the better-class collector he was very learned indeed. He knew the contents of every museum in the world, in so far as they were connected with Egyptian antiquities, and had studied them specimen by specimen. Consequently, as Egyptology is largely a museum science, he was a learned Egyptologist. But his real interest was in things rather than events. Of course, he knew a great deal—a very great deal—about Egyptian history, but still he was, before all, a collector."

"And what will happen to his collection if he is really dead?"

"The greater part of it goes to the British Museum by his will, and the remainder he has left to his solicitor, Mr. Jellicoe."

"To Mr. Jellicoe! Why, what will Mr. Jellicoe do with Egyptian antiquities?"

"Oh, he is an Egyptologist too, and quite an enthusiast. He has really a fine collection of scarabs and other small objects such as it is possible to keep in a private house. I have always thought that it was his enthusiasm for everything Egyptian that brought him and my uncle together on terms of such intimacy; though I believe he is an excellent lawyer, and he is certainly a very discreet, cautious man."

"Is he? I shouldn't have thought so, judging by your uncle's will."

"Oh, but that is not Mr. Jellicoe's fault. He assures us that he entreated my uncle to let him draw up

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a fresh document with more reasonable provisions. But he says Uncle John was immovable; and he really *was* a rather obstinate man. Mr. Jellicoe repudiates any responsibility in the matter. He washes his hands of the whole affair, and says that it is the will of a lunatic. And so it is, I was glancing through it only a night or two ago, and really I cannot conceive how a sane man could have written such nonsense."

"You have a copy then?" I asked eagerly, remembering Thorndyke's parting instructions.

"Yes. Would you like to see it? I know my father has told you about it, and it is worth reading as a curiosity of perverseness."

"I should very much like to show it to my friend, Doctor Thorndyke," I replied. "He said he would be interested to read it and learn the exact provisions; and it might be well to let him, and hear what he has to say about it."

"I see no objection," she rejoined; "but you know what my father is: his horror, I mean, of what he calls 'cadging for advice gratis.' "

"Oh, but he need have no scruples on that score. Doctor Thorndyke wants to see the will because the case interests him. He is an enthusiast, you know, and he put the request as a personal favor to himself."

"That is very nice and delicate of him, and I will explain the position to my father. If he is willing for Doctor Thorndyke to see the copy, I will send or bring it over this evening. Have we finished?"

I regretfully admitted that we had, and, when I had paid the modest reckoning, we sallied forth, turning back with one accord into Great Russell Street to avoid the noise and bustle of the larger thoroughfares.

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"What sort of man was your uncle?" I asked presently, as we walked along the quiet, dignified street. And then I added hastily: "I hope you don't think me inquisitive, but, to my mind, he presents himself as a kind of mysterious abstraction; the unknown quantity of a legal problem."

"My Uncle John," she answered reflectively, "was a very peculiar man, rather obstinate, very self-willed, what people call 'masterful,' and decidedly wrong-headed and unreasonable."

"That is certainly the impression that the terms of his will convey," I said.

"Yes, and not the will only. There was the absurd allowance that he made to my father. That was a ridiculous arrangement, and very unfair too. He ought to have divided the property up as my grandfather intended. And yet he was by no means ungenerous, only he would have his own way, and his own way was very commonly the wrong way."

"I remember," she continued, after a short pause, "a very odd instance of his wrong-headedness and obstinacy. It was a small matter, but very typical of him. He had in his collection a beautiful little ring of the eighteenth dynasty. It was said to have belonged to Queen Ti, the mother of our friend Amenhotep the Fourth; but I don't think that could have been so, because the device on it was the Eye of Osiris, and Ti, as you know, was an Aten-worshiper. However, it was a very charming ring, and Uncle John, who had a queer sort of devotion to the mystical eye of Osiris, commissioned a very clever goldsmith to make two exact copies of it, one for himself and one for me. The goldsmith naturally wanted to take the measurements of our fingers, but this Uncle John

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would not hear of; the rings were to be exact copies, and an exact copy must be the same size as the original. You can imagine the result; my ring was so loose that I couldn't keep it in my finger, and Uncle John's was so tight that though he did manage to get it on, he was never able to get it off. And it was only the circumstance that his left hand was decidedly smaller than his right that made it possible for him to wear it all."

"So you never wore your copy?"

"No. I wanted to have it altered to make it fit, but he objected strongly; so I put it away, and have it in a box still."

"He must have been an extraordinarily pig-headed old fellow," I remarked.

"Yes; he was very tenacious. He annoyed my father a good deal, too, by making unnecessary alterations in the house in Queen Square when he fitted up his museum. We have a certain sentiment with regard to that house. Our people have lived in it ever since it was built, when the square was first laid out in the reign of Queen Anne, after whom it was named. It is a dear old house. Would you like to see it? We are quite near it now."

I assented eagerly. If it had been a coal-shed or a fried-fish shop I would still have visited it with pleasure, for the sake of prolonging our walk; but I was also really interested in this old house as a part of the background of the mystery of the vanished John Bellingham.

We crossed into Cosmo Place, with its quaint row of the now rare, cannon-shaped iron posts, and passing through stood for a few moments looking into the peaceful, stately old square. A party of boys disported

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themselves noisily on the range of stone posts that form a bodyguard round the ancient lamp-surmounted pump, but otherwise the place was wrapped in dignified repose suited to its age and station. And very pleasant it looked on this summer afternoon with the sunlight gilding the foliage of its widespreading plane trees and lighting up the warm-toned brick of the house-fronts. We walked slowly down the shady west side, near the middle of which my companion halted.

"This is the house," she said. "It looks gloomy and forsaken now; but it must have been a delightful house in the days when my ancestors could look out of the windows through the open end of the square across the fields of meadows to the heights of Hampstead and Highgate."

She stood at the edge of the pavement looking up with a curious wistfulness at the old house; a very pathetic figure I thought, with her handsome face and proud carriage, her threadbare dress and shabby gloves, standing at the threshold of the home that had been her family's for generations, that should now have been hers, and that was shortly to pass away into the hands of strangers.

I, too, looked up at it with a strange interest, impressed by something gloomy and forbidding in its aspect. The windows were shuttered from basement to attic, and no sign of life was visible. Silent, neglected, desolate, it breathed an air of tragedy. It seemed to mourn in sackcloth and ashes for its lost master. The massive door within the splendid carven portico was crusted with grime, and seemed to have passed out of use as completely as the ancient lamp-irons or the rusted extinguishers wherein the footmen were wont to quench their torches when some Belling-

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ham dame was borne up the steps in her gilded chair, in the days of good Queen Anne.

It was in a somewhat sobered frame of mind that we presently turned away and started homeward by way of Great Ormond Street. My companion was deeply thoughtful, relapsing for a while into that somberness of manner that had so impressed me when I first met her. Nor was I without a certain sympathetic pensiveness; as if, from the great, silent house, the spirit of the vanished man had issued forth to bear us company.

But still it was a delightful walk, and I was sorry when at last we arrived at the entrance to Nevill's Court, and Miss Bellingham halted and held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said; "and many, many thanks for your invaluable help. Shall I take the bag?"

"If you want it. But I must take out the notebooks."

"Why must you take them?" she asked.

"Why, haven't I got to copy the notes out into longhand?"

An expression of utter consternation spread over her face; in fact, she was so completely taken aback that she forgot to release my hand.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "How idiotic of me! But it is impossible, Doctor Berkeley! It will take you hours!"

"It is perfectly possible, and it is going to be done; otherwise the notes would be useless. Do you want the bag?"

"No, of course not. But I am positively appalled. Hadn't you better give up the idea?"

"And this is the end of our collaboration?" I ex-

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claimed tragically, giving her hand a final squeeze (whereby she became suddenly aware of its position, and withdrew it rather hastily). "Would you throw away a whole afternoon's work? I won't certainly; so, good-by until to-morrow. I shall turn up in the reading-room as early as I can. You had better take the tickets. Oh, and you won't forget about the copy of the will for Doctor Thorndyke, will you?"

"No; if my father agrees, you shall have it this evening."

She took the tickets from me, and, thanking me yet again, retired into the court.

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CHAPTER VII

JOHN BELLINGHAM'S WILL

THE task upon which I had embarked so light-heartedly, when considered in cold blood, did certainly appear, as Miss Bellingham had said, rather appalling. The result of two and a half hours' pretty steady work at an average speed of nearly a hundred words a minute, would take some time to transcribe into longhand; and if the notes were to be delivered punctually on the morrow, the sooner I got to work the better.

Recognizing this truth, I lost no time, but, within five minutes of my arrival at the surgery, was seated at the writing-table with my copy before me busily converting the sprawling, inexpressive characters into good, legible round-hand.

The occupation was by no means unpleasant, apart from the fact that it was a labor of love; for the sentences, as I picked them up, were fragrant with the reminiscences of the gracious whisper in which they had first come to me. And then the matter itself was full of interest. I was gaining a fresh outlook on life, was crossing the threshold of a new world (which was *her* world); and so the occasional interruptions from the patients, while they gave me intervals of enforced rest, were far from welcome.

The evening wore on without any sign from Nevill's Court, and I began to fear that Mr. Bellingham's scruples had proved insurmountable. Not, I am afraid,

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that I was so much concerned for the copy of the will as for the possibility of a visit, no matter howsoever brief, from my fair employer; and when, on the stroke of half-past seven, the surgery door flew open with startling abruptness, my fears were allayed and my hopes shattered simultaneously. For it was Miss Oman who stalked in, holding out a blue foolscap envelope with a warlike air as if it were an ultimatum.

"I've brought you this from Mr. Bellingham," she said. "There's a note inside."

"May I read the note, Miss Oman?" I asked.

"Bless the man!" she exclaimed. "What else would you do with it? Isn't that what it's brought for?"

I supposed it was; and, thanking her for her gracious permission, I glanced through the note—a few lines authorizing me to show the copy of the will to Dr. Thorndyke. When I looked up from the paper I found her eyes fixed on me with an expression critical and rather disapproving.

"You seem to be making yourself mighty agreeable in a certain quarter," she remarked.

"I make myself universally agreeable. It is my nature to."

"Ha!" she snorted.

"Don't you find me rather agreeable?" I asked.

"Oily," said Miss Oman. And then with a sour smile at the open notebooks, she remarked:

"You've got some work to do now; quite a change for you."

"A delightful change, Miss Oman. 'For Satan findeth'—but no doubt you are acquainted with the philosophical works of Dr. Watts?"

"If you are referring to 'idle hands,'" she replied, "I'll give you a bit of advice. Don't you keep that

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hand idle any longer than is really necessary. I have my suspicions about that splint—oh, you know what I mean," and before I had time to reply, she had taken advantage of the entrance of a couple of patients to whisk out of the surgery with the abruptness that had distinguished her arrival.

The evening consultations were considered to be over by half-past eight; at which time Adolphus was wont with exemplary punctuality to close the outer door of the surgery. To-night he was not less prompt than usual; and having performed this, his last daily office, and turned down the surgery gas, he reported the fact and took his departure.

As his retreating footsteps died away and the slamming of the outer door announced his final disappearance, I sat up and stretched myself. The envelope containing the copy of the will lay on the table, and I considered it thoughtfully. It ought to be conveyed to Thorndyke with as little delay as possible, and, as it certainly could not be trusted out of my hands, it ought to be conveyed by me.

I looked at the notebooks. Nearly two hours' work had made a considerable impression on the matter that I had to transcribe, but still, a great deal of the task yet remained to be done. However, I reflected, I could put in a couple of hours or more before going to bed and there would be an hour or two to spare in the morning. Finally I locked the notebooks, open as they were, in the writing-table drawer, and slipping the envelope into my pocket, set out for the Temple.

The soft chime of the Treasury clock was telling out, in confidential tones, the third quarter as I rapped with my stick on the forbidding "oak" of my friends' chambers. There was no response, nor had I perceived

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any gleam of light from the windows as I approached, and I was considering the advisability of trying the laboratory on the next floor, when footsteps on the stone stairs and familiar voices gladdened my ear.

"Hallo, Berkeley!" said Thorndyke, "do we find you waiting like a Peri at the gates of Paradise? Polton is upstairs, you know, tinkering at one of his inventions. If you ever find the nest empty, you had better go up and bang at the laboratory door. He's always there in the evenings."

"I haven't been waiting long," said I, "and I was just thinking of rousing him up when you came."

"That was right," said Thorndyke, turning up the gas. "And what news do you bring? Do I see a blue envelope sticking out of your pocket?"

"You do."

"Is it a copy of the will?" he asked.

I answered "yes," and added that I had full permission to show it to him.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Jervis. "Didn't I say that he would get the copy for us if it existed?"

"We admit the excellence of your prognosis," said Thorndyke, "but there is no need to be boastful. Have you read through the document, Berkeley?"

"No, I haven't taken it out of the envelope."

"Then it will be equally new to us all, and we shall see if it tallies with your description."

He placed three easy-chairs at a convenient distance from the light, and Jervis, watching him with a smile, remarked:

"Now Thorndyke is going to enjoy himself. To him, a perfectly unintelligible will is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever; especially if associated with some kind of recondite knavery."

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"I don't know," said I, "that this will is particularly unintelligible. The mischief seems to be that it is rather too intelligible. However, here it is," and I handed it over to Thorndyke.

"I suppose that we can depend on this copy," said the latter, as he drew out the document and glanced at it. "Oh, yes," he added, "I see it is copied by Godfrey Bellingham, compared with the original and certified correct. In that case I will get you to read it out slowly, Jervis, and I will make a rough copy for reference. Let us make ourselves comfortable and light our pipes before we begin."

He provided himself with a writing-pad, and, when we had seated ourselves and got our pipes well alight, Jervis opened the document, and with a premonitory "hem!" commenced the reading.

"In the name of God Amen. This is the last will and testament of me John Bellingham of number 141 Queen Square in the parish of St. George Bloomsbury London in the county of Middlesex Gentleman made this twenty-first day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-two.

"1. I give and bequeath unto Arthur Jellicoe of number 184 New Square Lincoln's Inn London in the county of Middlesex Attorney-at-law the whole of my collection of seals and scarabs and those in my cabinets marked A, B, and D together with the contents thereof and the sum of two thousand pounds sterling free of legacy duty.

"Unto the trustees of the British Museum the residue of my collection of antiquities.

"Unto my cousin George Hurst of the Poplars Eltham in the county of Kent the sum of five thousand

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pounds free of legacy duty and unto my brother Godfrey Bellingham or if he should die before the occurrence of my death unto his daughter Ruth Bellingham the residue of my estate and effects real and personal subject to the conditions set forth hereinafter namely:

"2. That my body shall be deposited with those of my ancestors in the churchyard appertaining to the church and parish of St. George the Martyr or if that shall not be possible in some other churchyard cemetery burial ground church or chapel or other authorized place for the reception of the bodies of the dead situate within or appertaining to the parishes of St. Andrew above the Bars and St. George the Martyr or St. George Bloomsbury and St. Giles in the Fields. But if the conditions in this clause be not carried out then

"3. I give and devise the said residue of my estate and effects unto my cousin George Hurst aforesaid and I hereby revoke all wills and codicils made by me at any time heretofore and I appoint Arthur Jellicoe aforesaid to be the executor of this my will jointly with the principal beneficiary and residuary legatee that is to say with the aforesaid Godfrey Bellingham if the conditions set forth hereinbefore in clause 2 shall be duly carried out but with the aforesaid George Hurst if the said conditions in the said clause 2 be not carried out.

"JOHN BELLINGHAM.

"Signed by the said testator John Bellingham in the presence of us present at the same time who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses.

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"Frederick Wilton, 16 Medford Road, London, N., clerk.

"James Barber, 32 Wadbury Crescent, London, S.W., clerk."

"Well," said Jervis, laying down the document as Thorndyke detached the last sheet from his writing-pad, "I have met with a good many idotic wills, but this one can give them all points. I don't see how it is ever going to be administered. One of the two executors is a mere abstraction—a sort of algebraical problem with no answer."

"I think that difficulty could be overcome," said Thorndyke.

"I don't see how," retorted Jervis. "If the body is deposited in a certain place, A is executor; if it is somewhere else, B is the executor. But as you cannot produce the body, and no one has the least idea where it is, it is impossible to prove either that it is or that it is not in any specified place."

"You are magnifying the difficulty, Jervis," said Thorndyke. "The body may, of course, be anywhere in the entire world, but the place where it is lying is either inside or outside the general boundary of those two parishes. If it has been deposited within the boundary of those two parishes, the fact must be ascertainable by examining the burial certificates issued since the date when the missing man was last seen alive and by consulting the registers of those specified places of burial. I think that if no record can be found of any such interment within the boundary of those two parishes, that fact will be taken by the Court as proof that no such interment has taken place, and that therefore the body must have been deposited somewhere else. Such

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a decision would constitute George Hurst the co-executor and residuary legatee."

"That is cheerful for your friends, Berkeley," Jervis remarked, " for we may take it as pretty certain that the body has not been deposited in any of the places named."

"Yes," I agreed gloomily, "I'm afraid there is very little doubt of that. But what an ass that fellow must have been to make such a to-do about his beastly carcass! What the deuce could it have mattered to him where it was dumped, when he had done with it?"

Thorndyke chuckled softly. "Thus the irreverent youth of to-day," said he. "But yours is hardly a fair comment, Berkeley. Our training makes us materialists, and puts us a little out of sympathy with those in whom primitive beliefs and emotions survive. A worthy priest who came to look at our dissecting-room expressed surprise to me that the students, thus constantly in the presence of relics of mortality, should be able to think of anything but the resurrection and the life hereafter. He was a bad psychologist. There is nothing so dead as a dissecting-room 'subject'; and the contemplation of the human body in the process of being quietly taken to pieces—being resolved into its structural units like a worn-out clock or an old engine in the scrapper's yard—is certainly not conducive to a vivid realization of the doctrine of the resurrection."

"No; but this absurd anxiety to be buried in some particular place has nothing to do with religious belief; it is merely silly sentiment."

"It is sentiment, I admit," said Thorndyke, "but I wouldn't call it silly. The feeling is so widespread in time and space that we must look on it with respect as something inherent in human nature. Think—as

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doubtless John Bellingham did—of the ancient Egyptians, whose chief aspiration was that of everlasting repose for the dead. See the trouble they took to achieve it. Think of the great Pyramid, or that of Amenhotep the Fourth with its labyrinth of false passages and its sealed and hidden sepulchral chambers. Think of Jacob, borne after death all those hundreds of weary miles in order that he might sleep with his fathers and then remember Shakespeare and his solemn adjuration to posterity to let him rest undisturbed in his grave. No, Berkeley, it is not a silly sentiment. I am as indifferent as you as to what becomes of my body 'when I have done with it,' to use your irreverent phrase; but I recognize the solicitude that some other men display on the subject as a natural feeling that has to be taken seriously."

"But even so," I said, "if this man had a hankering for a freehold residence in some particular bone-yard, he might have gone about the business in a more reasonable way."

"There I am entirely with you," Thorndyke replied. "It is the absurd way in which this provision is worded that not only creates all the trouble but also makes the whole document so curiously significant in view of the testator's disappearance."

"How significant?" Jervis demanded eagerly.

"Let us consider the provisions of the will point by point," said Thorndyke; "and first note that the testator commanded the services of a very capable lawyer."

"But Mr. Jellicoe disapproved of the will," said I; "in fact, he protested strongly against the form of it."

"We will bear that in mind too," Thorndyke replied. "And now with reference to what we may call the contentious clauses: the first thing that strikes us is their

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preposterous injustice. Godfrey's inheritance is made conditional on a particular disposal of the testator's body. But this is a matter not necessarily under Godfrey's control. The testator might have been lost at sea, or killed in a fire or explosion, or have died abroad and been buried where his grave could not have been identified. There are numerous probable contingencies besides the improbable one that has happened that might prevent the body from being recovered.

"But even if the body had been recovered, there is another difficulty. The places of burial in the parishes have all been closed for many years. It would be impossible to reopen any of them without a special faculty, and I doubt whether such a faculty would be granted. Possibly cremation might meet the difficulty, but even that is doubtful; and, in any case, the matter would not be in the control of Godfrey Bellingham. Yet, if the required interment should prove impossible, he is to be deprived of his legacy."

"It is a monstrous and absurd injustice," I exclaimed.

"It is," Thorndyke agreed; "but this is nothing to the absurdity that comes to light when we consider clauses two and three in detail. Observe that the testator presumably wished to be buried in a certain place; also he wished his brother should benefit under the will. Let us take the first point and see how he has set about securing the accomplishment of what he desired. Now if we read clauses two and three carefully, we shall see that he has rendered it virtually impossible that his wishes can be carried out. He desires to be buried in a certain place and makes Godfrey responsible for his being so buried. But he gives Godfrey no power or authority to carry out the provision, and places insuperable obstacles in his way. For until Godfrey is

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an executor, he has no power or authority to carry out the provision; and until the provisions are carried out, he does not become an executor."

"It is a preposterous muddle," exclaimed Jervis.

"Yes, but that is not the worst of it," Thorndyke continued. "The moment John Bellingham dies, his dead body has come into existence; and it is 'deposited,' for the time being, wherever he happens to have died. But unless he should happen to have died in one of the places of burial mentioned—which is in the highest degree unlikely—his body will be, for the time being, 'deposited' in some place other than those specified. In that case clause two is—for the time being—not complied with, and consequently George Hurst becomes, automatically, the co-executor.

"But will George Hurst carry out the provisions of clause two? Probably not. Why should he? The will contains no instructions to that effect. It throws the whole duty on Godfrey. On the other hand, if he should carry out clause two, what happens? He ceases to be an executor and he loses some seventy thousand pounds. We may be pretty certain that he will do nothing of the kind. So that, on considering the two clauses, we see that the wishes of the testator could only be carried out in the unlikely event of his dying in one of the burial-places mentioned, or his body being conveyed immediately after death to a public mortuary in one of the said parishes. In any other event, it is virtually certain that he will be buried in some place other than that which he desired, and that his brother will be left absolutely without provision or recognition."

"John Bellingham could never have intended that," I said.

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"Clearly not," agreed Thorndyke; "the provisions of the will furnish internal evidence that he did not. You note that he bequeathed five thousand pounds to George Hurst, in the event of clause two being carried out; but he has made no bequest to his brother in the event of its not being carried out. Obviously, he had not entertained the possibility of this contingency at all. He assumed, as a matter of course, that the conditions of clause two would be fulfilled, and regarded the conditions themselves as a mere formality."

"But," Jervis objected, "Jellicoe must have seen the danger of a miscarriage and pointed it out to his client."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "There is the mystery. We understand that he objected strenuously, and that John Bellingham was obdurate. Now it is perfectly understandable that a man should adhere obstinately to the most stupid and perverse disposition of his property; but that a man should persist in retaining a particular form of words after it has been proved to him that the use of such form will almost certainly result in the defeat of his own wishes; that, I say, is a mystery that calls for very careful consideration."

"If Jellicoe had been an interested party," said Jervis, "one would have suspected him of lying low. But the form of clause two doesn't affect him at all."

"No," said Thorndyke; "the person who stands to profit by the muddle is George Hurst. But we understand that he was unacquainted with the terms of the will, and there is certainly nothing to suggest that he is in any way responsible for it."

"The practical question is," said I, "what is going to happen? and what can be done for the Bellinghams?"

"The probability is," Thorndyke replied, "that the

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next move will be made by Hurst. He is the party immediately interested. He will probably apply to the Court for permission to presume death and administer the will."

"And what will the Court do?"

Thorndyke smiled dryly. "Now you are asking a very pretty conundrum. The decisions of Courts depend on idiosyncrasies of temperament that no one can foresee. But one may say that a Court does not lightly grant permission to presume death. There will be a rigorous inquiry—and a decidedly unpleasant one, I suspect—and the evidence will be reviewed by the judge with a strong predisposition to regard the testator as being still alive. On the other hand, the known facts point very distinctly to the probability that he is dead; and, if the will were less complicated and all the parties interested were unanimous in supporting the application, I don't see why it might not be granted. But it will clearly be to the interest of Godfrey to oppose the application, unless he can show that the conditions of clause two have been complied with—which it is virtually certain he cannot; and he may be able to bring forward reasons for believing John to be still alive. But even if he is unable to do this, inasmuch as it is pretty clear that he was intended to be the chief beneficiary, his opposition is likely to have considerable weight with the Court."

"Oh, is it?" I exclaimed eagerly. "Then that accounts for a very peculiar proceeding on the part of Hurst. I have stupidly forgotten to tell you about it. He has been trying to come to a private agreement with Godfrey Bellingham."

"Indeed!" said Thorndyke. "What sort of agreement?"

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"His proposal was this: that Godfrey should support him and Jellicoe in an application to the Court for permission to presume death and to administer the will, that if it was successful, Hurst should pay him four hundred pounds a year for life: the arrangement to hold good in all eventualities."

"By which he means?"

"That if the body should be discovered at any future time, so that the conditions of clause two could be carried out, Hurst should still retain the property and continue to pay Godfrey the four hundred a year for life."

"Hey, ho!" exclaimed Thorndyke; "that is a queer proposal; a very queer proposal indeed."

"Not to say fishy," added Jervis. "I don't fancy the Court would look with approval on that little arrangement."

"The law does not look with much favor on any little arrangements that aim at getting behind the provisions of a will," Thorndyke replied; "though there would be nothing to complain of in this proposal if it were not for the reference to 'all eventualities.' If a will is hopelessly impracticable, it is not unreasonable or improper for the various beneficiaries to make such private arrangements among themselves as may seem necessary to avoid useless litigation and delay in administering the will. If, for instance, Hurst had proposed to pay four hundred a year to Godfrey so long as the body remained undiscovered on condition that, in the event of its discovery, Godfrey should pay him a like sum for life, there would have been nothing to comment upon. It would have been an ordinary sporting chance. But the reference to 'all eventualities' is an entirely different matter. Of course,

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