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The Lost Parchment

FERGUS HUME

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THE LOST PARCHMENT

A Detective Story

BY

FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "THE MYSTERY QUEEN," "THE RAINBOW FEATHER," "RED MONEY," "THE SEALED MESSAGE," "THE SECRET PASSAGE," "THE STEEL CROWN," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

SCHOOLFELLOWS

"SO this is your kingdom, Hendle?" said the visitor, looking round the garden which glowed with rainbow tints in the hot July sunshine; "and a very jolly kingdom it is. When did you enter into it?"

"When I was fifteen, twelve years ago," replied the Squire, smiling. "Don't you remember how I wrote and told you of the death of my father? You had just left school for the 'Varsity. Those were capital days at Rugby, weren't they, Carrington?"

"They were. I have had few capital days since."

"But surely at Oxford——"

Carrington shrugged his shoulders and made a frank admission. "Oh, yes! Oxford was all right until my father died and left me without a sixpence. It was hard work, I can tell you, qualifying for the Bar on next to nothing. And I can't say that I have made my fortune as a barrister. You, lucky dog, don't need to bother about pounds, shillings, and pence."

"I have certainly nothing to complain of on that score," said Hendle in a satisfied tone and extending his cigarette case. "It was a pity we drifted apart,

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Carrington, as we were such chums at Rugby. I might have helped you."

"You were always a good chap, Hendle, and that is why I took to you, when we were in our teens. But we saw nothing of each other all these years because you had money and I hadn't. Besides, you went to Cambridge, while I patronized Oxford. It is my fault that our friendship has not continued unbroken, as I never answered your many letters. But you see I was always too much involved in law studies to bother. You, I presume, were looking after your snug little kingdom."

Hendle nodded. "I am a very stay-at-home person, and the place requires a good deal of supervision."

"Lucky dog!" repeated the barrister. "You have a fine income, too."

"So-so. Four thousand a year."

"The deuce! And, like Bottom, I support life on sixpence a day, which, unlike Bottom, I have to earn. There is no Theseus to give me a pension."

"You didn't seem to be so very hard up when I met you six months ago in the *Criterion Restaurant,*" said the young squire dryly.

"Oh, one has to keep up some sort of appearance and dress in purple and fine linen, even if one cannot afford to do so," answered Carrington easily. "It is only your rich man who can dispense with Solomon-in-all-his-glory raiment, old fellow. Anyhow, poor or rich, I was delighted to meet you again."

"Were you?" Hendle appeared to be a trifle sceptical. "You didn't hurry yourself to come down to Barship anyhow."

"I didn't; that's a fact. I thought you might fancy

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that I would borrow, if I came too speedily. Hence the six months' hesitation."

"Oh, rot! You know that I'm not the sort of fellow to grudge a loan to an old school chum if he asks for it."

"You were always a good chap, Hendle," said Carrington again. "But I am not going to ask. I have bread and butter, if not jam, and one must be grateful for the necessities of life in these hard times."

Hendle nodded with a lazy laugh and the young men lighted fresh cigarettes as they crossed the lawn to gain the avenue which sloped gradually for a quarter of a mile in the direction of the village. Behind them they left a delightfully ugly mansion of Georgian architecture mellowed by time into positive beauty. The Big House—its local name—draped itself majestically in dark trailing ivy, showing here and there the bland softened hue of its ruddy brick walls.

"My mind to me a kingdom is," quoted Carrington with a backward glance at the peace and beauty they were leaving. "A poetic, but truly unsatisfactory saying, Hendle. Your acres are a more tangible possession than the stuff of which dreams are made. Let us go hence."

The Squire in his simple honesty laughed at the fantastic remarks of his visitor, not guessing that a considerable amount of acid envy underlay the amiable compliments. Hendle was one of those honorable, good-natured creatures, who believed that his fellow-men were as open-minded and straightforward as he was himself. His florid complexion, fair crisp hair, big limbs and general air of latent strength revealed plainly his Saxon ancestry, and he resembled a good-natured bull content with plentiful grass and

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water and the freedom of wide meadows. He was markedly good-looking, with sleepy blue eyes and a heavy moustache of a russet hue, which he usually tugged at to help on his slow-moving thoughts. His name, Rupert, suggested swift dash and impetuous daring. But there was nothing of these things about this somewhat drowsy giant, although he had ample courage when necessary. It took much to rouse him, but once the dam of his self-restraint broke, everything and everyone were swept away like straws in a torrent of Berserk fury. When Rupert did fight, nothing could stand against his enormous physical power; and the use of this, being tempered by strong common-sense, invariably gained him the victory. But he usually preferred peace to war, and it took much to stimulate his passions to an outbreak.

Dean Carrington himself was to his friend like a Georgian rapier to a Crusader's sword. He was small and lean, quick-witted and nimble, with dark hair and dark eyes and a swarthy complexion. His clean-shaven face with its regular features and keen expression suggested the born intriguer, who gained his ends rather by cunning than force. Always perfectly dressed, always amiable, an accomplished squire-of-dames, well-read and yet a man-of-the-world, Carrington was the exact opposite of Hendle, and perhaps had made him his friend because of the vast difference in their natures. Having a more alert though not a stronger mind, he dominated Rupert in a most dexterous manner, never showing the iron hand without its velvet glove. Nevertheless, this ascendency had been achieved at Rugby, and owed its strength to the admiration of the dull boy for the

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clever boy; to the hero-worship of the younger for the older. But if Carrington was now thirty, Rupert was now twenty-seven, and might not be so easily mastered, presuming, as might be the case, the latter had developed qualities with which the former could not cope. This remained to be seen, and it was to see, that Carrington had come down for a Saturday to Monday rest. Now that he judged Rupert to be much the same and saw how luxurious were his surroundings, the astute barrister determined to reëstablish his sway over a wealthy friend too long neglected. Therefore he made himself delightfully agreeable. He had spent Saturday and Sunday with the Squire, and now was strolling through the village on Monday afternoon, before catching the evening train. So far, owing to Rupert's frank intimacy, he foresaw no obstacle to his making use of the young man. But there was one possibility to be reckoned with, which had to be looked into, and this Carrington approached in a roundabout manner, after his usual custom.

"A delightful place," said the barrister with a sigh of pleasure, as they sauntered along the cobblestone street, with its quaint houses on either side. "You are a king here. When you conduct the queen to the throne at the Big House, the serfs will lie down and allow you both to walk over them."

"I haven't any wish to walk over them," said Hendle, shrugging his mighty shoulders, "and I don't think the villagers would like to hear you call them serfs, Carrington."

"Pooh! They wouldn't know the meaning of the word. And, after all, it is only my picturesque way of speaking. But you evade my question."

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"I didn't know you asked any. You simply made a remark."

"The Lord mend your wit, then. I must be plain, I see. What about a wife?"

"Oh, that's all arranged for," replied the Squire stolidly, and with never a blush, so matter-of-fact was he.

"And you never told me," murmured Carrington reproachfully.

"You never asked me."

"No," said the other, wondering at this phlegmatic nature. "I didn't." Then he lapsed into musing, and Rupert, never a talker at the best of times, strode beside him silent and comfortably happy.

So the possibility had become a probability, and a feminine influence had to be reckoned with after all. This was what Carrington had dreaded, and he blamed himself for not having asked the question before. Had he done so, he might have been introduced to the lady and then would have been able to judge what sort of a marplot she would prove to be. However, he hoped to meet her when he next came down, which would be very soon, and meanwhile, true to his plan of campaign, he laughed amiably at Rupert's reticence.

"You always did take things stolidly at school, Hendle," he said, arching his finely penciled eyebrows, "and you have not changed in this respect. Who is she?"

"My cousin—a third or fourth cousin. We have known each other all our lives, and that is why we know we will be happy."

"Familiarity doesn't breed contempt in this case,

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then," said the barrister lightly. "As you have known her all her life, I presume she lives hereabouts?"

"Oh, yes. At the other end of the village."

"I should like to see her," suggested Carrington persuasively.

"Next time you come down you shall. I shall ask her father and Dorinda to dinner at the Big House."

"Who is her father?"

"A second or third cousin of mine."

"What is his name?"

"Mallien—Julius Mallien."

"I am little the wiser," said the barrister ironically, "and I don't want to exercise my profession of cross-examining people in the country. Can't you give me details?"

"I am," said the other, slightly surprised. "I am giving you details."

"Yes, when I ask you incessant questions. But make some sort of a speech. I want to know what kind of a person Mallien is; I want a description of the lady; I desire to learn what the father does, and if he will give his daughter a dowry. In fact, I wish to know all about it, as naturally I take the greatest interest in the welfare of my old school chum."

"Good old man," said Rupert, giving Carrington's arm so affectionate a squeeze that the barrister winced with the pain. "Well, Mallien's a beast, like Timon of Athens—you remember the play we read at school. I don't like Mallien, as he's always grousing at everyone and everything."

"You give me the key to his character by mentioning Timon. Your future father-in-law is a misanthrope."

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Rupert nodded. "Very much so. And Dorinda is——"

"An angel. I know what you are about to say."

"I don't think you do. Dorinda is a good sort."

"Is that all the praise you can bestow on your future wife?"

"It's all she wants. Dorinda doesn't like compliments."

"What an unnatural girl!" laughed Carrington, "and her looks?"

Hendle filled his pipe while he replied and halted in the village square while he did so. "She's got black hair and blue eyes and a ripping figure and is heaps cleverer than I am."

"What a bald description! Has she two eyes and a nose with a mouth under it?"

"How you chaff, Carrington. However, when you come down again, you will see Dorinda for herself. Hallo, here's Kit."

"Who is Kit?" questioned the other, as a smart motor car slipped easily out of the crooked street to halt in the square, as the village green was grandiloquently entitled.

"The son of my housekeeper, Mrs. Beatson."

"That sour-looking woman with the hard eye?"

"The same. She has been hammered hard by misfortune, but is a lady born and bred for all that. Morning, Kit."

"Good morning, Squire. Hot, isn't it? I can only get some sort of wind by running the machine at top speed."

"You'll be roped in by the police if you don't mind your eye, Kit. My friend, Mr. Dean Carrington. This is Mr. Christopher Beatson, Carrington. He's

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a reckless hero, who plays with the whiskers of death on all and every occasion."

"That is the habit of the present generation," said Carrington, with a nod to the handsome young fellow in the car. "Motors, aeroplanes, scenic railways and looping-the-loop. Youth enjoys nothing nowadays unless it has in it an element of danger. To go out and never know if you will be home to supper, Mr. Beatson: that is your delight."

"There is much truth in what you say, Mr. Carrington," returned Kit, laughing. "After all, it's life."

"This is the frantic age," said Hendle sententiously. "How's business, Kit?"

"Ripping! I sold three cars last week on behalf of the firm. One to a lady."

"Who was taken with your good looks, I suppose. Take care Miss Tollart doesn't grow jealous, Kit."

"You will have your joke, Mr. Hendle," answered Beatson, his bronzed skin growing crimson and his brown eyes sparkling. "But Sophy knows that I have to play up to the customers to get the stuff sold." He turned from the wheel to look round generally. "Have you seen her? She's to meet me here and go with me for a spin."

Just then Miss Tollart appeared hurrying to the rendezvous as fast as her hobble-skirt would permit. She revealed herself as a fine-looking and decidedly flamboyant young woman with an independent air which suggested the suffragist. It could easily be seen, and by a less observant person than Carrington, that Kit would be known as "Mrs. Beatson's husband" when the ring was on the lady's finger. His chin betrayed a rather weak nature, and his eyes had much too kind a look in them to hint at mastery, while the

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tall black-browed young woman, who swung toward the group with the air of conquering Semiramis, appeared quite capable of dominating an empire, much less a husband. Carrington did not envy Kit's approaching connubial bliss.

"Mr. Carrington, Miss Tollart," said the Squire, introducing his friend to the new arrival. "Carrington, Miss Tollart is the daughter of our doctor."

Sophy winced at the mention of her father and Carrington wondered why she should. However, the emotion passed in a flash and Miss Tollart inspected the barrister much as a naturalist inspects a microbe under the microscope. The sniff with which she concluded her scrutiny hinted at dissatisfaction, if not at contempt. But then Sophy as an ardent suffragist never did think much of the male, and straightway flew her colors in the face of this particular one. "I am going to Elbowsham to speak at a meeting, Squire. Have I your good wishes?"

"That you will come home safe and sound?" queried Hendle with twinkling eyes. "You have. Don't insult the crowd more than you can help, Miss Tollart."

"I shall not conceal my opinions," retorted the lady, tightening her lips.

"Ah!" Carrington looked her up and down, "in that case I am glad Mr. Beatson and his car will be at hand to rescue you."

"I can fight my own battles," said Miss Tollart coolly. "But I see that you don't believe in Votes for Women."

"My dear lady," replied Carrington smoothly, "when I am in your presence I believe in anything you like to advance."

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Sophy sniffed. "Hedging!" she observed aggressively. "Men never can give a straight answer. I only wish," she continued as she turned to Hendle, "that I could infect Dorinda with my ardor. But she won't uphold the banner, and sulks in her tent."

"I am afraid that I have exhausted all my persuasive power in inducing her to join me as my future wife," said the Squire politely.

Sophy nodded her approval. "Dorinda's a nice girl and a good girl, and a very pretty girl," she said, in her deep-toned voice, "but she is as weak as any man in this village. As weak as you are, Squire, as the vicar, as my father, and you know what he is." She winced again, then turned aggressively on Kit. "But I can't stay here all day, as the meeting at Elbowsham is waiting. Five miles, Kit; you must do it in five minutes."

"What about the police?" asked Carrington.

"I despise the police," cried Miss Tollart, as she was borne away hurriedly by her lover to prevent further trouble. "They know me."

Carrington looked leisurely after the machine until it vanished and Sophy's trumpet tones of defiance died away. "What an uncomfortable young woman," he observed, turning toward his friend.

"Oh, Sophy's a good sort," said Hendle soberly. "She's had heaps of trouble."

"It doesn't seem to have knocked much sense into her, anyway. Trouble. Bother, I see. Her father, I expect?"

The Squire looked astonished. "Yes. But how you guessed——"

"I saw her wince when you and she mentioned Dr. Tollart," explained the barrister.

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They crossed the green, passing an ancient cross of worn stone, which stood in the center of a vast expanse of grass burnt brown with the long-enduring heat. Round the square were various cottages with white-washed walls and thatched roofs, each standing in its own tiny garden brilliant with flowers. *The Hendle Inn,* with the arms of the family swinging from a signpost, was the largest building in sight, and presented an attractive sight to an artist, since it dated from Tudor times, and its upper story overhung the lower. With its red-tiled roof and dark oaken beams deeply embedded in its flint and stone walls it caught the eye of Carrington straightway. He had seen it before, but its quaint beauty lured him again to contemplation.

"That's a delightful old inn," he said, looking backward as they passed out of the square. "Quite the place for an adventure."

"There are no adventures in Barship," replied the Squire heavily. "We are very dull people hereabouts. Leigh is our bright and shining light, as he goes in for old manuscripts and ancient buildings and queer customs and——"

"In a word, Leigh is an archæologist," interrupted Carrington, who found Rupert somewhat prolix. "And who is Leigh?"

"If we had gone to church yesterday, you would have seen him in the pulpit, Carrington. He is the vicar, and, if you don't mind being blamed for non-attendance, we are going to look him up now."

"Oh, I don't mind in the least," said the barrister briskly. "If he talks religion, I can talk science. Argument is always amusing with a fanatic."

"I don't think Leigh is a fanatic. He is fonder

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of his hobby than of his profession. But he's all right as a parson, although he doesn't visit his parishioners as often as I could wish. Yonder's the church where all my people are buried. Picturesque?"

The barrister gave the building his grave approval. "But everything is picturesque about here in the best style of art. You ought to be happy."

"I am. Very happy. But I shall be happier when I marry Dorinda!"

"Amen to that. And let me be your best man," said Carrington gaily.

"If Dorinda doesn't mind, yes," replied Hendle, exasperatingly matter of fact.

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CHAPTER II

THE VICAR

By this time the Squire and his friend were approaching a rickety five-barred gate which stood wide open, as the hinges being useless, it could not easily be shut. Passing through this, they advanced up a wide untidy drive overgrown with grass, and this dismal path conducted them to a weedy stony expanse, girdled by an uncultivated jungle. Flowers, shrubs, herbs, trees, docks and darnels were all mixed up together in a way, suggesting only too clearly the sluggard's garden and almost aggressively presented an aspect of decay. The vicarage thoroughly matched this desolation, although in skilful hands it could have been made into a most charming residence. Carrington viewed this deadly solitude with disgust.

"Are you taking me to see the ruins of Babylon?" he asked, noting that even the blazing sunshine could not impart an aspect of cheerfulness to the place. "Is your vicar an owl or a jackal that he can live here?"

Hendle laughed deeply and pulled at his pipe. "Leigh is too much wrapped up in his hobby to care about the necessaries of life."

"He might care for the decencies, anyway," retorted the barrister. "As the lord of the manor, why don't you insist upon his keeping the place in repair?"

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"The living is not in my gift, Carrington, and I have no right to interfere in any way. Leigh is the last descendant of an old family who camped ages ago in this parish. The living is all that remains of what they once possessed, and the vicar exists on a miserable stipend of two hundred a year."

"And you have four thousand per annum.—What about your tithes?"

"Tithes come from land, and save the park I have no land. My grandfather sold what we owned and invested the proceeds in various companies. My income is derived from stocks and shares. My tithe represents a small amount."

"Still, you might house your spiritual adviser better, Hendle."

"I don't think so. I look after the poor in the parish, and as one of the churchwardens I see that the church is all right. If Leigh choses to live in this way I can't prevent him. He's quite happy so long as he has a bed and a fire and a roof, with bread and cheese and his beloved books. What is the use of my giving him money to buy more volumes?"

Carrington nodded comprehendingly. "I understand. There are some people you cannot help, however much you may wish to."

"Precisely," murmured the big man indolently. "Leigh knows that I am willing to do anything in reason, but that I don't hold with his wasting money on books. His time also. The parson is here to look after his cure of souls; not to encourage a selfish hobby. Leigh loves books and dreams books and lives books and would spend a fortune in buying books. There is nothing he would not do to purchase more."

"A kind of clerical Eugene Aram?"

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"Oh, no," replied Rupert hastily. "Leigh would never do wrong even to gratify his craze for books. He is a gentle soul."

"A character at all events, if nothing else," observed the barrister dryly.

In response to Hendle's loud rapping on the rusty panels of the door with the knob of his walking stick a slovenly, fat, old female waddled into sight, wiping her hands on a coarse apron. Her stout looks were in direct contradiction to the lean appearance of the place; but, judging from her inflamed countenance, these might have been due to a constant consumption of beer. She was arrayed in a dingy cotton gown, so dirty that it was difficult to guess at its original color, and her gray hair was as dishevelled as her shoes and stockings were untidy. This frowzy lady, who answered to the odd name of Selina Jabber, received the visitors with a good-natured smile which twinkled all over her plump face.

"To think, sir, that you should find me like this before I'm smartened for the afternoon," she cried, volubly addressing Rupert; "but washing has to be done, say what you like, though I do say that the master don't give me more to do than my weakness can deal with."

Talking all the time, the housekeeper had conducted the amused men through an entrance hall, narrowed by books heaped on the oilcloth, through a passage lined with crowded shelves and into a large bare room which appeared to be built up of many volumes. The walls could not be seen for these, and they were also piled in little heaps on the uncarpeted floor. The only articles of furniture were a large round table covered with green baize, standing directly

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in front of the undraped window, and a chair before it in which Mr. Leigh sat with a heavy tome on his knee. In spite of the sunshine pouring in, the apartment looked bleak and dreary, as there was no fireplace and no adornments or comforts of any sort. The vicar, a tall, lean, dreamy man with an ascetic, clean-shaven face and calm blue eyes, raised his head in response to the continuous ding-dong of Mrs. Jabber's voice:

"Mr. Hendle and a gent from London, sir; Mr. Hendle and a gent from London, sir; Mr. Hendle and——"

"That will do, Mrs. Jabber," interrupted the vicar in a dignified manner, and revealing the pundit in tone and accent. "You can go."

"You mustn't mind Mrs. Jabber, Rupert," said the vicar mildly. "She is quite a character. And this——"

"Is my friend, Mr. Carrington. I wished him to meet you before he went away."

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Carrington," said Leigh, offering a dry, cold hand and giving the barrister a more searching glance than one would have expected from so mild a man. "I fancy I remember Rupert mentioning you as an old schoolfellow of Rugby days."

"Oh, yeş. We were great friends at school, and I am glad to renew our acquaintance, as you may guess, Mr. Leigh."

"Quite so, quite so. And what's doing in London?" inquired the vicar in a weary manner as if he felt it incumbent upon him to manufacture conversation in which he took not the slightest interest.

Rupert sat down on one pile of books—as there

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were no chairs—and Carrington on another pile, while the barrister gave the latest metropolitan gossip and the squire smoked stolidly. Mr. Leigh drew up his threadbare black trousers, showing socks of different color and pattern, and sat down to take his book again on his knee. His face was handsome in a refined and gentle way: he had scanty white hair and excellent teeth, which looked genuine: hands and feet slender and elegant, suggested race, and he had the stooping shoulders of a student. Carrington, observing him narrowly while he talked in a desultory manner, saw that here was the last withered branch of an ancient family tree. The sap of the race was exhausted in Simon Leigh, and he looked as though his frail organization could not last much longer. There was no fire in him: only the slowly fading heat of dying ashes. Remembering what Hendle had said about the vicar's craze for books he attempted to interest him in that direction, as Mr. Leigh appeared to be wholly indifferent to news of the busy world.

"You are fond of archæology, I believe, sir," mentioned the barrister, glancing round the truly scholarly room.

"I am devoted to it, Mr. Carrington," replied the student, his calm eyes flashing into vivid life. "Antiquities, ancient customs, the usages of the Middle Ages and Classic times, together with the traditions of religious belief and ceremony appeal more to my understanding than anything else."

"Humph!" grunted the Squire pointedly, "surely as a parson——"

"We have frequently argued on the subject you hint at, Rupert," said Mr. Leigh hastily. "But as

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your views differ from mine, we have, as yet, not arrived at any agreement. As a parson I trust that I do my duty, though it may be that I am not the ideal of a parish priest."

Hendle colored at this dignified rebuke. "I apologize, sir, but you rather mistake my true meaning. What I implied was that you are more of a scholar than a parson."

"I admit that, Rupert. Had I lived in monastic days, I should have been a hermit or a monk. My wants are few, and I do not seek the loaves and fishes of ecclesiastical preferment. The services of the church; occasional visits to my parishioners and giving of what alms my small means allow are my duties as a Clerk in Holy Orders. But what time otherwise is at my disposal I give to books, to the examination of old buildings, to the study of ancient customs, and such-like matters. You see I am frank, Mr. Carrington."

"And very original," said the barrister heartily, "it is a great pleasure to meet one whose views are other than commonplace. And what a tremendous number of books you have."

"You are like that clergyman in Scott's novel, *St. Ronan's Well*," said Hendle, removing his pipe for a moment. "What's his name—Cargill."

"I never waste my hours reading novels," said Leigh loftily.

"I should think they would be more entertaining than these parchments," suggested Carrington, looking at the writing table, which was littered profusely with dusty documents covered with crabbed characters.

"No! No! No!" cried Leigh vivaciously, and laid

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a thin hand on his beloved dry-as-dust pamphlets. "Nothing can be more entertaining than deciphering these deeds. Leases and proclamations, accounts and registrations: all of various reigns and all written in the dog Latin of knightly days. And it ill becomes you, Rupert," added the vicar in a mildly jesting way, "to reproach me with my besetting sin, when you pander to it by permitting me access to your Muniment Room."

"Muniment Room," echoed the barrister.

"It would not interest you, Mr. Carrington, believe me," said the vicar jealously, "as young men do not care to inspect such treasures. I can tell you all about the most interesting documents and can show you what is worthy of note, if indeed you care for such lofty learning. But don't meddle with the chest and its contents, I beg. They are too valuable to be lightly handled."

Rupert laughed and nodded. "I believe that Mr. Leigh grudges even me meddling with the deeds and documents. He thinks that I am an unworthy guardian of such literary treasures."

"I think they are quite safe," said Carrington, looking with disdain on the time-worn and soiled parchments rustling under the vicar's thin fingers. "No one will seek to deprive Mr. Leigh of his weary delights."

"Weary! Ah, my dear sir, you don't know what joy it is to pore over these glorious relics of monkish days. They give in wonderful detail the history of Barship, when it was quite a noted port."

"Port? Why, it's an inland parish."

"Now it is," cried the vicar eagerly and now settled in the saddle of his hobby-horse, "but in the reign

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of Henry III, Barship was built round a commodious harbor. The sea has retired these many miles, and the village which was once a bustling town is now scarcely known."

"Well, I must say that information is very interesting," said Carrington.

"Isn't it? And there are many other things just as interesting. I am writing a history of our parish from these documents here and others which are in the Muniment Room of the Big House. It will take me years to complete, but when ready it will form a book of surpassing interest."

At this moment, Carrington heard the door open softly. He turned his head, as did Rupert at the sound, to see a stout, black-bearded man standing on the threshold. He came in with a padding step like a cat, and scowled when he saw that the vicar had visitors.

"How are you, Mr. Mallien?" said Hendle with a good-natured nod. "This is my friend Carrington, who was at school with me."

"How do," said Mallien gruffly, and with an air of resenting Carrington's return greeting. "Beastly day —far too hot. Pouf! how this room smells of sheepskin. Why don't you drag Leigh out for a walk, Rupert?"

"The age of miracles is past," said the young Squire dryly. "You see that even your entrance cannot rouse the vicar from his studies."

"Vicar! Vicar!" said Mallien gruffly and tapped the parson's shoulder.

"Go away! go away! I'm busy," said Leigh peevishly; then, keeping his finger on a line of crabbed

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writing he had reached, he looked up. "Oh, Mr. Mallien, I beg pardon. What do you want?"

"Dorinda has brought you some flowers for the altar," said Mallien, "so I came with her. She *would* drag me out, although I didn't want to tire myself on this hot day."

"Is the day hot?" inquired the vicar absently. "Flowers. Thank you. Mrs. Jabber has the key of the church."

"Is Dorinda here!" questioned Hendle, making for the door with alacrity; "I must go and see her. Look after Carrington," he called back as he disappeared, and the vicar shook his head irritably at the sound of his raised voice.

Mallien did not obey his cousin's request by making himself agreeable to the visitor who was thus given into his charge. He stared at Carrington and Carrington stared at him, while Mr. Leigh droned in an undertone like a bee over his newly discovered fact of military occupation. The barrister saw before him a little man, less in height than himself and considerably stouter, dressed comfortably in a suit of loosely fitting gray homespun. Mallien's most noticeable point was the extraordinary quantity of jewelry he wore, which suggested Jewish blood. And indeed his face with its hooked nose and deeply black eyes hinted at the Hebrew. His dark hair and dark beard were flecked with gray, but his fresh, unwrinkled complexion made him appear much younger than he really was. He did not look at all an amiable person. And Carrington quite believed that Rupert had spoken truly when he had hinted at his cousin's misanthropic nature. Here assuredly was Timon of Athens in modern dress, glaring at the barrister as if

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he wondered why he presumed to exist. The man's manner was disagreeable and when he spoke his speech was pointedly aggressive.

"I know why you are staring," said Mr. Mallien in abrupt and unfriendly tone. "Everyone stares in the same way, confound their insolence. It's my jewelry, isn't it?"

"Why, yes!" said Carrington, matching this insolence. "You are as bedizened as a Hindoo idol on its feast day."

"You speak plainly," growled Mallien with a crushing look.

"So do you," retorted Carrington, who was not to be crushed. "We are well matched, it seems."

"I am older than you and require to be treated politely," snapped the other.

"Because everyone has hitherto gone down before your bullying ways, confound you," replied the barrister, getting in his thrust. "Don't you find plain speech a refreshing novelty?"

"Ah! what," Mr. Leigh looked up. "Presently, Mrs. Jabber—presently. I am not yet hungry. Go away. Oh, Mallien, I beg your pardon! When did you arrive? Will you stop to luncheon?"

"And eat the potted tongue your housekeeper has been talking about to Dorinda?" queried Mallien with grim rudeness. "No thanks. I have more regard for my stomach."

The vicar scarcely heard the retort, as he had already returned to the study of his soiled parchment.

"Do you know of any spot in the parish where a circumvallation is discernible, Mr. Mallien?" he said, half to himself.

"No, sir, I don't. And as I have no aeroplane I

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can't soar to the clouds where your wits are at present. I shall take my leave straightway. Good day;" and he departed forthwith. Carrington, amused by Mallien's brusque leave-taking, picked up his cap to follow so judicious an example since the vicar, really being in the clouds, was unable to attend to chance visitors. "Good day, Mr. Leigh," he said, moving toward the door; but, no notice being taken, he repeated his farewell in louder tones. "Good day, Mr. Leigh."

"Oh, good day, good day, good day," snapped the student irritably.

Leaving Mr. Leigh murmuring comments, and fumbling amongst the flotsam and jetsam of the Middle Ages, the barrister walked leisurely along the book-lined passage, through the book-littered entrance hall and emerged into the desolation of the surrounding jungle. Rupert and Miss Mallien were conspicuous by their absence, and the gruff individual left in charge of Carrington was waiting restlessly. He waved his hand when the visitor appeared.

"Did you ever see such a pig sty?" he growled with the voice of an ourangoutang, which beast he greatly resembled, "and Leigh is exactly suited to it. As the man is so are his surroundings: his mind is as muddled as his garden. And this addle-pated parson is supposed to be the spiritual father of the parish. Pah! Come and look at the lordly pleasure grounds. Rupert asked me to look after you, so I must, I suppose. Did you ever see such a rotten place?" he asked contemptuously.

"Oh, yes! You are showing me nothing new," replied Carrington, who took a delight in exasperating the man's temper.

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"I shan't show you anything more," growled Mallien sullenly, "and after all I'm dashed silly to bother myself in this way."

"Oh, I don't quite see——Oh!" His face twisted with pain as he spoke.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Mallien crossly.

"Toothache! I have had a twinge or two lately and I expect that this damp place"—Carrington looked up at the dark overhanging boughs—"has brought back the pain. I shall have to see a doctor when I go to town."

"You can see a doctor here, if you like," said Mallien roughly, and pushed his way back to the avenue. "Dr. Tollart lives at the end of the village. Anyone will tell you where he is to be found."

"Thanks," said the barrister as they paused by the rickety gate. "You are kinder than you mean to be."

"I'm not. I want to get rid of you," fumed Mallien, turning on his heel. "You can go to the doctor or to the devil for all I care."

Carrington saw the little man vanishing with great speed round the corner and laughed at the oddity of his character. Then he walked through the village and soon found Tollart's house. The doctor proved to be within and speedily gave his patient something to take away the aching. It was only a makeshift of course, but Carrington was glad enough to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling. After paying half a crown he went away leisurely, and by the time he reached the gates of the park felt much better.

Strolling up the avenue, Carrington suddenly began to shiver in the warm sunshine, and was greatly sur-

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prised that he should do so. It seemed unreasonable and certainly was unexpected.

"Strange," he muttered with a shrug; "now a superstitious person would say that I was walking over my grave. Pooh!" he laughed, but nevertheless shivered again.

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CHAPTER III

LOVERS

In justice to Hendle, it must be said that he by no means intended to desert his friend, even though the enthralling society of Dorinda might have proved an excuse for his forgetfulness. But far from wishing for the barrister's absence, Rupert had left a message with his future father-in-law, requesting Carrington to see the church, after taking leave of the vicar. Out of what the Yankees term "sheer cussedness," Mallien had not delivered the message, and every moment Hendle expected the appearance of his friend, quite ignorant that Carrington was already on his way to The Big House. And thinking that the barrister was being entertained—as one of his cynical character would be—by Mallien's rudeness and Leigh's quaint ways, the young Squire forgot all about his old school chum for the time being. This was very natural, seeing that Dorinda was beside him, and he therefore had no eyes or ears save for her.

"Get a can of water," directed Dorinda, as they passed from the vicarage jungle into the trim slopes of the churchyard, "and bring it to me as soon as possible. You will find me in the porch arranging the flowers."

Readily consenting to this division of labor, the Squire went to find Mrs. Jabber and the necessary can, while Dorinda, already possessed of the key, unlocked the great oaken door under the porch. With

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her arms filled with roses, she entered into the chill twilight of the little fane: chill because the thick walls prevented the summer heat from penetrating into the interior of the building and twilight since the sunshine was more or less baffled by the stained glass of the windows. As the girl passed up the central aisle, round her were the squat Norman pillars, above her loomed the criss-cross rafters of time-darkened oak, and beneath her feet was the storied pavement inlaid with many a quaintly lettered brass plate praising the virtues of the dead in monkish Latin. Before her, under the glorious hues of the east window, rose the altar, draped in white and gold with single and triple silver candlesticks glittering on either side of the tall brass cross. The vases—also silver—were filled with mixed ill-chosen flowers gathered anyhow and arranged anyhow by Mrs. Jabber, whose eye was anything but artistic. After breathing a short prayer, Dorinda, who had left her roses on a convenient seat, took the vases off the altar and out of the church. Having shaken out the flowers, she brought her crimson blooms into the porch and sat down on the side seat to fulfil what was to her a very pleasant duty. Rupert arrived with the can of water, and the information—obtained from Mrs. Jabber—that both Mallien and Carrington had gone home.

"I expect your father forgot to deliver my message," said the Squire, setting down the green can and taking a seat opposite to the girl.

"It is more likely that my father never intended to give it," replied Dorinda with a shrug.

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Because it was a reasonable thing to do, and my father is never reasonable, as you know."

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"Carrington will think me rude."

"Not if he can see through a brick wall. And from what you have told me about him, Rupert, I think his eyes are quite keen enough to do so. There is one thing to be said," observed Miss Mallien, rather piqued by the barrister's neglect, "that your friend isn't anxious to see me."

"On the contrary, he is very eager," Rupert assured her hastily.

"Does his going back to the Big House look like it?"

"Ah, I expect he had some delicacy in interrupting our *tête-à-tête,* Dorinda."

"There's something in that," replied Miss Mallien, dexterously binding her bunches of roses loosely together, "and his action speaks well for him. Perhaps I shall like him better than I expect to, Rupert."

The Squire looked up in astonishment from his task of brimming the altar vases with spring water. "Why shouldn't you like him in any case?"

"Well," Dorinda placed a bunch of flowers in a vase and put her head on one side to note the effect, "you say that Mr. Carrington is cynical, and I don't like cynical people. I have had so much cynicism from my father that it is impossible to stand more of it from another person."

"Oh, it's only a pose with Carrington. He's really a good fellow."

"If he is, why can't he show that he is? My dear Rupert, I never did believe in those people, who have hearts of gold and bad manners: who lend you money with a blow, and with the best intentions bully you into cheerfulness."

"What odd things you say, Dorinda," murmured Rupert, not knowing if she was speaking in earnest

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or in fun. "Carrington hasn't bad manners unless his going away without seeing you——"

"No! No! That may be delicacy," she interrupted swiftly. "I dare say he's really a nice man, and I shall like him very much. But remember, dear, that knowing you has raised my standard. I shall expect him to be very, very nice."

"Oh, Dorinda, don't put me on a pedestal," said Hendle, at once dismayed and pleased. "I am a very prosaic person."

"Then I like prosaic persons."

"And Carrington is very brilliant," went on Rupert stolidly, as he tugged at his moustache to induce thoughts for his friend's defense.

"You are quite brilliant enough for me, my dear boy." She rose suddenly, and taking his face between her hands kissed him twice. "There and there. Why are you so exasperatingly modest?"

"Am I?" asked Rupert, wondering why he had received the caress.

Dorinda laughed. Indeed, she could do nothing else, since Hendle was so very literal in his acceptation of her remarks. "You're a sweet-tempered donkey, my dear," she said lightly. "Now you take those two vases and I'll take these two. Come along."

Shortly the altar glowed with the crimson splendor of the roses, and their delicate fragrance was wafted through the chancel. Then the lovers left the church and sauntered back to the Vicarage, with the key for Mrs. Jabber, with offended dignity.

Miss Mallien was well worth looking at, as she was a gracious and stately maiden, well fitted to be the mate of the Saxon giant. Dorinda was as tall for a woman as Rupert was for a man, and carried her-

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self with the same imposing dignity. Her dark hair and deeply blue eyes hinted at an Irish strain, and her vivacity was also Hibernian. But to this fascination, which had to do with the race of the sister isle, Dorinda added much English common sense, so that her romantic dreams never overrode her matter-of-fact instincts. She loved her cousin for his staunch honesty and attractive simplicity of character, since in these qualities he represented the exact opposite of her father. For this last-mentioned individual, whom she had the misfortune to call her parent, Dorinda did not entertain much respect, and hoped by marrying Rupert to escape from a companionship which was very disagreeable to her. It was only Hendle's wealth which induced Mallien to consent to the marriage; but, even had he objected, Dorinda would have held to her engagement. Rupert was her man of men, and, while he held her hands and looked at her with grave admiration, she thought how fortunate she was in securing such a mate. She esteemed his devotion more than much fine gold.

"My father will be waiting for me at the cottage," said Dorinda; as she strolled away again.

"A little disappointment won't harm him," said Hendle coolly, for he had not much sympathy with Mallien's selfish nature; "and I want you to meet Carrington. He leaves for London after dinner, and you won't meet him again for some time. Say yes."

"Yes," responded Dorinda, who really felt considerable curiosity concerning the object of Hendle's Rugby hero worship; "but father will be cross."

"I never knew father when he wasn't cross," retorted her lover, as they resumed their walk and entered the village square. "He's an infliction. I tell

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you what, Dorinda, the best thing we can do is to marry before the roses fade."

"Oh, Rupert, you are getting quite poetical."

"Am I?" asked Rupert, surprised. "That's strange, when I don't like poetry."

"I must teach you to like it, dear."

"Hum!" said Rupert, rather at sea, "you mean, I suppose, that we have much to learn from one another."

"Something of that sort."

"You shall do exactly as you like, dear," said her lover, as they came in sight of the house. "Why, here is Mrs. Beatson."

A tall, lean woman, with a sour and discontented face and an elegant figure issued from a side walk with a basket of flowers. Anyone could see that Hendle's housekeeper was a lady by birth, just as anyone could see that she was not an amiable woman. She was like Mallien, and had a tendency to look upon human beings as her mortal enemies, since, liking luxury, she had never been able to indulge her fancies. Left a widow with one son, she had taken the post of housekeeper some five years before Carrington's visit, and on the whole performed her duties admirably. But, being disappointed in not leading an idle life with sufficient money to gratify her whims, she always went about with an aggrieved air. It was only Rupert's kind-heartedness which permitted her to stay at The Big House, and visitors—Carrington among them—wondered how he could put up with such a wet blanket. Few people care to have a kind of Christian martyr at their elbow from morning to night.

"How are you, Miss Mallien?" said Mrs. Beatson, greeting Dorinda stiffly. "I am just gathering flowers

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for the dinner table. You will have an early dinner to-night, Mr. Hendle, will you not, as Mr. Carrington is leaving early?"

"Yes. I think I told you, Mrs. Beatson. We dine at six-thirty. By the way, I met Kit in the village; he looks well."

"He never comes near me to see if he's well or ill," rejoined the housekeeper bitterly. "He's a bad boy."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Beatson," chimed in Dorinda. "Kit is a very good boy. We are all very fond of him."

"Ah, you don't know him as well as I do," said Mrs. Beatson, shaking her head sadly. "He is—but I need not tell you, as you will find out soon enough for yourselves. Excuse me, Mr. Hendle, and you, Miss Mallien, but I must go in with my flowers. And there is Mr. Carrington at the drawing-room window."

With a stiff bow Mrs. Beatson disappeared, while Dorinda shrugged her shoulders. She never approved of Mrs. Beatson's martyr-like airs, which were wholly unnecessary, seeing what a comfortable situation she had. However, there was no time to think about the widow, for Carrington, slipping out of the front door, came down the terrace steps. He looked young and handsome and debonair, evidently presenting his very best side for the inspection of his friend's betrothed. Indeed, having caught sight of the couple from the drawing-room window, he had hastened to come out, with the intention of breaking the ice with the young lady in a light and airy manner. Mr. Carrington had a great belief in first impressions.

"I have eaten all the cakes and have drunk all the tea, Hendle," he said, gaily; "but, had I known that Miss Mallien was to honor the tea table, I should

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have restrained my appetite. How do you do, Miss Mallien? Since Hendle will not introduce me, I must do myself. Behold a briefless barrister, Dean Carrington by name, who is delighted to meet you."

"Thank you," replied Dorinda, shaking hands, and wondering why the man was so emphatically agreeable. Perhaps a touch of her father's misanthropy made her suspicious, or perhaps Carrington rather overdid his welcome. "I am glad to meet you. Rupert has often spoken about you."

"I hope he has said nice things," rattled on the barrister, as the trio returned to the house. "You see, he only remembers what a nice person I was at Rugby, and it is years since we met. I may have changed for the worse."

"I don't see any change in you," replied Hendle, with mild surprise. "Don't undervalue yourself, Carrington. Why didn't you come on to the church?"

"Perhaps you didn't know that we were there," suggested Dorinda. "My father may have forgotten to deliver Rupert's message."

"Oh no. The message was delivered right enough, Miss Mallien. But I have been young myself, and never, never, never spoil sport."

"You talk as if you were a hundred," remarked Hendle, as they began the meal.

"So I am, in experience of the seamy side of life. You, my dear fellow, are about five years of age. I expect you have found that out, Miss Mallien. He is the most unsophisticated youth, who has been wrapped up in cotton wool all his life, knowing disagreeables only from the newspapers and novels."

"I think that Rupert is less unsophisticated than you think," replied Dorinda, a trifle dryly, for she

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did not admire Carrington's easy tone of patronage toward her lover. "And why do you say that you expect I have found that out? I may be unsophisticated also."

"You are everything that is charming," said Carrington alertly, "but, having met your father, I think that you are not to be taken in by people."

Dorinda colored, knowing well what the keen-witted barrister meant. However, she endeavored to turn his point by altering slightly a well-worn quotation. "To know him is a liberal education, I suppose you mean," she said, lightly. "Don't take my father too seriously, Mr. Carrington. His bark is worse than his bite."

"Oh, I am sure of that," replied Carrington, who was sure of nothing of the sort. "We both barked at one another until the Vicarage jungle rang. We hope to meet again, Miss Mallien, and renew our contest of wits. By the way, to go to another subject—the Vicar. What a man, and what surroundings!"

"He is quite a character," laughed Dorinda, "but the dearest old man in the world."

The conversation continued, mostly in a bantering way, for some time, and then, tea finished, Rupert proposed to see Dorinda to the gates of the park. "If you don't mind being left alone, Carrington."

"Not at all; not at all. Gather ye rosebuds," said the barrister, lightly; "good day and good-bye until our next happy meeting, Miss Mallien."

With a smile which masked her true feelings—for she resented Carrington's manner; it seemed to her while having tea that he had attempted to make Rupert look small—Dorinda passed out of the drawing-room and into the hall. Hendle put on his cap and

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accompanied her down the avenue, while the barrister stood at the door and waved a farewell. But when they were far enough away to prevent seeing or hearing, his brow grew dark. "Confound that Hendle," he muttered; "he has all the good things of this world. A fine house; a large income; a delightful betrothed, and magnificent health. If I were an envious man—ha!" He drew a long breath, and then turned sharply, as some one passed through the hall.

It was Mrs. Beatson, who always had a habit of coming and going in a ghostly fashion. Carrington was not sure if she had overheard, as he always was suspicious of people's sharp ears. And he *had* spoken somewhat loud. However, if she had been eavesdropping, there was nothing for it but to risk the chance of her repeating his not very wise speech to Hendle. However, again, the barrister thought that if the housekeeper did babble, he would be quite able to deal with such a fool as the squire. Therefore he gave Mrs. Beatson a bland smile, which she returned with a sour one, and climbed up the stairs to his room.

Meanwhile, at the gate, Hendle was asking Dorinda a question. "I think you'll find me a dull sort of fellow after Carrington," he said ruefully.

"My dear," replied the girl, throwing her arms round his neck. "I would not exchange you for one hundred and ten Carringtons."

"You don't like him?" questioned Hendle, greatly surprised.

"No," answered Miss Mallien, "I don't. He's double-faced. We'll hand him over to father. He can deal with him," and in spite of Hendle's objections, she went away repeating her doubts of the brilliant barrister.

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CHAPTER IV

THE COTTAGE

For a widower with one grown-up daughter, Mr. Julius Mallien was very well off on an income of five hundred a year, for which he did not do a stroke of work. Like the lilies of the field he toiled not, neither did he spin, and, if not quite a Solomon-in-all-his-glory, he was quite comfortable, enjoying some of the luxuries of life as well as all the necessities. Born lazy and idle, he had never earned a single penny for himself during the fifty-odd years of his existence. First he had lived on his father and mother; afterward on his wife. Now that all three were dead, he managed to exist in a pleasantly easy way on the accumulated moneys they had left him. His picturesque six-roomed cottage, standing in a quarter acre of garden on the outskirts of Barship, was rented from the Squire at twenty pounds a year, yet he grumbled like an Irish tenant at the exactions of his landlord. Dorinda, with the aid of one small servant, looked after the house, and Mallien was quite untroubled with domestic details. His daughter catered for him in strict accordance with his tastes, wholly setting her own aside, and from one year to another there was no change in the economy of the establishment. It therefore came about in quite a natural manner that Mr. Mallien spent the greater part of his income on himself.

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"I shall allow you so much for housekeeping and so much to dress on," he said to Dorinda, when she returned from school to become his companion, or rather his domestic drudge. "One hundred pounds yearly must cover all expenses, food, servants, clothes and rent; and if you exceed that, you'll hear about it."

As it took Dorinda some time to get used to this scrimping, she frequently made mistakes, and did hear about it. In fact, she was scolded so often that she became quite callous to her father's tempers, and finally, when he went too far, the girl who was not lacking in spirit, told him what she thought of his selfish conduct. There was a royal row, in which Dorinda came off best, and when things were again settled Mallien was careful not to provoke her anger again more than his disagreeable temper could help. On the whole, father and daughter got on very well together, but there was little affection displayed by either of them: on Mallien's part because he hated what he called sentiment, and on Dorinda's because her egotistical parent always kept her at arm's length. The boy-and-girl love of Miss Mallien for her cousin, which had strengthened into the staunch love of man and woman, was the sole thing which enabled the girl to endure the drab existence at The Cottage. It was always something to look forward to that one day she would become Rupert's wife, and then would be quit forever of her father's uncomfortable whims.

Not that Mallien gave his daughter much of his society. His hobby was jewel collecting, and Dorinda took no interest in such things. For a woman, she was inexplicably indifferent to gems, and lace, and clothes and amusement, so that her father voted her

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a bore and went his own way. In his particular room —which was the most comfortable in the cottage— he remained, constantly arranging and polishing and admiring the precious stones in their many mahogany cases. Not being rich, his collection was necessarily a small one, although every jewel represented a bargain and had a history attached to it. But Mallien was always lamenting that he could not purchase historic gems, and envied the long purse of his cousin, the young Squire. However, he hoped to draw upon this when Dorinda became Mrs. Hendle, as Rupert had promised to double his income to make up for the loss of the girl. She objected.

"I feel as if father was selling me," she told Rupert when matters were settled on this basis. "He won't feel my being away a bit, except that he will miss his favorite dishes and the way in which I manage to make both ends meet. You shouldn't have agreed, Rupert."

"My dear," said her lover, with much common sense. "I think it is cheap at the price, to get rid of such a disagreeable man. What I give your father will enable him to indulge more freely in his expensive hobby; consequently, he will leave us alone."

"No, he won't," contradicted Dorinda, who knew her father's persistence. "When he hears of some particularly rare jewel, he will come and bother you for money to buy it."

"He won't get it," retorted Rupert, dryly. "I can be quite as obstinate as your father. With what he has, he will have one thousand a year, so he must do the best he can with that. I am doing my best to settle things fairly and peacefully, but if your father wants trouble, I am not the man to deny him any in reason."

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Dorinda laughed and gave way, although she still resented her father making money out of her marriage. But Mallien, being one of those men who is a curse to himself and to everyone around him, could not be treated in any other way, and could make himself very disagreeable when on his mettle. Besides, Dorinda knowing what Rupert's temper was when aroused, dreaded lest there should be an open quarrel. Mallien would certainly have come off worst in any encounter; but, as he was her father, she did not wish for such a *contretemps*. She and Rupert had been engaged for two years when Carrington came down to Barship, and hitherto all had gone smoothly. But a few days after the barrister's departure, Mallien began to make himself unpleasant. "I don't see why Rupert can't marry you next month," he said, fretfully, one morning at breakfast. "You've been engaged long enough."

"So we both think," replied Dorinda, who was pouring out the coffee, looking particularly fresh and charming in a white linen frock. "But you have always objected, you know."

"I don't wish to lose my daughter," growled the misanthrope, clutching at his black beard and scowling.

"That is very sweet of you, father, but you mustn't sacrifice five hundred a year for my society."

"What do you mean by that, you minx?"

"Is it so hard to understand?" asked Dorinda coolly.

"It's not what a daughter should say to a father."

"Well, you see, so much depends upon the sort of father one says it to."

"Honor your father and your mother," quoted Mallien, crossly.

"Parents, be mindful of your children," retorted

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the girl. "Oh, I can match you, quotation for quotation, if you like, father; I have been exercising my memory in this respect when talking to Mr. Carrington."

"Carrington! Carrington. I forbid you to mention his name. I have already given you my opinion of that impertinent pig——"

"Frequently," interpolated Dorinda crisply.

"——And I won't allow him to be spoken of. You have just mentioned the reason why I think you should get married straightway."

Dorinda set down the marmalade with surprise. "What can Mr. Carrington have to do with our marriage?" she inquired, staring.

Mallien wriggled. "Rupert's a fool to bring the fellow down here," he burst out furiously. "He's a sponge, and a son of the horse-leech, who will get all the money he can from Rupert."

"I don't see why you should say that," protested the girl. "Mr. Carrington did not give me that impression."

"Well, he gave it to me," grumbled her father, eating sullenly; "and if you allow him to get hold of Rupert—who is a fool, as I said before—your marriage will be indefinitely postponed. I won't have it; I won't have it, I tell you," cried the stout little man, jumping up in a fine rage. "If Rupert's money should be given to anyone, it should be given to me."

"Well, as soon as I am Rupert's wife, you will have five hundred a year," said Dorinda soothingly.

"What's five hundred a year?" said Mallien, contemptuously. "I want the whole four thousand. There's a blue sapphire in Paris I wish to get hold of."

Dorinda shrugged her shoulders calmly, being quite

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used to her father's explosive nature. "You can't expect Rupert to give you all his income," she observed in measured tones. "He is paying a good price for me, seeing that I go to him without a dowry."

"You shall have my jewels and my income when I die," growled her father, as he sat down again. "Any money he gives me, comes back to you. But if Rupert was to die——"

"Father!" Dorinda uttered a startled cry of pain.

"There! There!" snarled Mallien testily. "I don't mean that he is going to die, you silly girl. But he's mortal and *may* die."

"God forbid! But if he did——" she hesitated, then uttered the word faintly, "—die?"

"Then I would have The Big House and the four thousand a year," said Mallien brutally. "You seem to forget that we are both descended from John Hendle, who died in the Waterloo year."

"I have never given a thought to it," said Dorinda uneasily, as she did not approve of her father starting this hare.

"Well, you ought to think of it. We descend from the elder son of John Hendle, and are the older branch."

"But Rupert descends through the male line, while we come through the female, father," protested the girl, puzzled by this genealogical conversation.

"Pooh! Pooh! There's no entail. Don't look so astonished, Dorinda; I don't mean to say that I have any claim, though, if everyone had their rights, we should be at The Big House and Rupert in his beastly cottage. There would be no need for you to marry him then."

Dorinda rose with great dignity. "I marry Rupert

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because I love him, and if he was a pauper, I should still love him."

"Oh, you could love him as much as you like," said her father, carelessly, "but if he were really a pauper, you shouldn't marry him. I'd see to that."

Dorinda walked round the table and bent over her father with a look on her face which made him push back his chair. "You would see to nothing," she said, very distinctly, and bringing her face close to that of Mallien. "It is my will and pleasure to marry Rupert, and nothing you can say or do will prevent my becoming his wife. You understand?"

"Who said anything otherwise," growled Mallien savagely, yet retreating dexterously. "As things stand, I am willing you should marry him. And, as you talk to me in that way, the sooner you become his wife and leave me alone the better it will be. Marry to-morrow if you like."

"I see," said Dorinda, whose face was perfectly colorless. "You want the extra five hundred a year to buy this blue sapphire you speak of."

"Partly. But I also want you to marry Rupert before Carrington—the beast—squeezes him like a lemon."

"There is no chance of any squeezing," said Dorinda coldly. "Rupert is quite capable of looking after himself, even if Mr. Carrington were after his money, which I see no reason to think that he is."

"I do! Carrington's a man on the market, if you know what that means."

"I don't. What does it mean?"

"One who lives from hand to mouth; one who is always on the make; one who doesn't mind what he does so long as he can extract a fiver. Rupert's a

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fool, and Carrington isn't. There, you have my opinion in a nutshell."

"I think you are making a great fuss over nothing, father," said Dorinda, with disdain. "But I am glad that Mr. Carrington's visit is likely to hasten our marriage. We can get married next month, and then you can buy the sapphire when we are on our honeymoon."

"Sensible girl!" Mallien stood up and wiped his bearded mouth. "Well, now that we understand one another——?"

"Do we understand one another?" asked Dorinda, irritated by the whole unnecessary conversation.

"Yes!" replied her father, tartly. "I have given my consent to your marriage taking place at an early date——"

"Because you want the five hundred a year to buy the blue sapphire."

"Don't be silly. And I have warned you against letting that flipperty-flap Carrington gain too much influence over Rupert."

"A quite unnecessary warning," said the girl, coldly. "You don't like Mr. Carrington, because he held his own against you."

"Insolent beast!" growled Mallien, bristling. "And I think you said that you did not like him yourself."

"I said that I did not trust him; but he is amusing enough to like as a companion for all that."

"You'll find him very amusing when he rifles Rupert's pockets," sneered the gentle parent, fuming at her opposition.

"I don't think that there is the least chance of his doing that, as Rupert—I said this before—is well able to look after himself. Besides, you have no grounds for saying that Mr. Carrington is a scamp."

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"A look is enough for me."

"It's not enough to take away a man's character. And this talk of our being descended from John Hendle? What do you mean by that?"

"I don't mean anything particular," responded Mallien, honestly enough. "It was Leigh who put it into my head."

"The vicar. And what does he know of our family history?"

"Much more than we do. He has been scrambling through the papers in the Muniment Room at The Big House."

"Well, Rupert gave him permission to look out any documents likely to prove necessary for writing the history of the parish. You know he is writing a book."

Mallien nodded. "He found letters, written by John Hendle, which showed how much our ancestor regretted that the estates should go to Frederick Hendle."

"That is the younger son from whom Rupert is descended?"

"Exactly. He was a bad lot apparently, Leigh says. Walter, who was the eldest son and our progenitor, was killed in the Battle of Waterloo, and he seems to have been the old man's favorite. If Walter had lived, we should have inherited The Big House and the estates."

"Well, father," answered Dorinda with a shrug; "Walter didn't live, and we did not inherit the estates, so I don't see what is the use of talking."

"I didn't say that there was any use," retorted Mallien crossly, "only I thought that the piece of fam-

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ily history discovered by Mr. Leigh might interest you."

"It does in a way. But, after all, these family troubles happened nearly one hundred years ago." Dorinda was looking out of the window as she made this remark, and broke off suddenly. "Strange!" she said, staring into the garden.

"What is strange?"

"That we should have been talking of Mr. Leigh, for here he is with Titus Ark as his shadow, as usual. I wonder why he always has Titus at his heels?"

"It's a very necessary precaution," said Mallien, grimly; "otherwise, Leigh is so absent-minded that he would get lost. Leigh has only come to look again at that Yucatan diary, which my father left me."

"Does he want to see it?" asked Dorinda, forgetting that Leigh had seen the diary before.

"Yes. Your grandfather, as you know, was something of an explorer, and searched for hidden treasure among the buried cities of Central America. I was telling Leigh about the diary, and he wants to have another look at it," Mallien chuckled. "I shouldn't wonder if the old man wanted to go to Yucatan himself, since he is cracked on old buildings."

By this time, the vicar was knocking at the door, and Titus Ark was staring sourly round the garden. He was the sexton and the vicar's shadow, a dour ancient, who said little and thought much. Dorinda, not wishing to see the vicar, who rather bored her with his archeological discourses, went into the kitchen to attend to her domestic duties, while her father opened the front door to receive his visitors in his usual ungracious manner.

"What on earth brings you here, vicar?" he de-

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manded brusquely, although he had just explained to his daughter why the visit had been made; "and why do you always have that old ass at your heels, Mr. Simon Leigh, parson of Barship Parish, God help the people?" grumbled Mallien, as he pushed his visitor into a chair and banged the door.

"Titus," said Leigh in his precise tones. "Oh, we were boys together—that is, he was a young man when I was a boy. Poor fellow, his generation lies under the ground, so I take him about to comfort him with talk about old times. He quite brightens up when we have our talks and walks."

"I'd brighten him if I had the power," growled the gracious host. "He ought to be under the turf with his confounded generation, or in the workhouse. I don't see any use for such a stiff-jointed old skeleton being above ground."

"He is eighty," said Mr. Leigh, placidly. "Great age. A comfortable room this, Mr. Mallien; there is something of the sybarite about you."

"Don't call names, vicar. The room is less like a pig sty than yours, and that is the best to be said about it."

"I often wonder, Mr. Mallien, that with your bringing up, you have not learned better manners," said Leigh, putting on his pince-nez and blinking. "You are certainly a most ill-conducted person. You should marry, and see if the softening influence of the feminine nature——"

Mallien turned from a cupboard of black oak, in which he was rummaging, and answered viciously. "I have been married."

"Dear me," mused the vicar, as if aware of this for

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the first time, "so you have been. And how is Miss Dorinda?"

"I believe his wits are going," grumbled Mallien to himself: then raised his voice. "She's busy, and can't waste her time in seeing you. Here"—he flung a heavy sheaf of papers on the table—"this is the diary kept by my silly father when he was treasure hunting in Yucatan. Old fool, he got nothing but rheumatism. If he'd found gold and jewels, there would have been some sense in his explorations. Don't you think so? don't you think so? don't you? Oh, hang you, vicar; one might as well call the dead."

Leigh nodded absently, for the sound rather than the sense of this polite speech had reached him. Already he had opened the manuscript diary at random and, with his nose close to the pages, was pouring over the faded writing. Mr. Mallien growled as usual, and walked across to the mantelpiece to pick up his pipe for a morning smoke. When blue clouds made a haze round the eagerly reading parson, Mr. Mallien brought out a handful of precious stones of little value from his trousers pocket, and began to fiddle with them, after his ordinary fashion. He strewed ruby and emerald and moonstone about the table, where a shaft of sunlight struck across the room, and watched the many colored sparkles, emitted by the tiny gems. Leigh, taking no notice, turned over page after page with great interest. After a long while he grunted and spoke, maliciously anxious to spoil the scholar's pleasure if he could.

"Dull stuff my father wrote, didn't he?"

"Dear me, Mr. Mallien, are you there? Dull stuff. Oh, dear me, no. Most interesting. These Maya buildings are quite fascinating, and the manuscripts

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he discovered, and the stone carvings, and the hieroglyphics, similar to those of Egypt. Yes," went on the vicar dreamily, "I must go there."

"Go there; go to Yucatan," cried Mallien, staring; "an old buffer like you?"

"Yes, sir," said the vicar with dignity. "For quite a year since you mentioned the diary of your father, it has been in my mind to fit out an expedition to so interesting a place."

"How can you fit out an expedition on your income?"

"Money. Ah yes, I shall require money, of course."

"And a jolly lot, too. Expeditions are not fitted out for nothing."

"I believe not," murmured Mr. Leigh, again dipping into the manuscript. "Well, well, the money will be forthcoming."

"Who will give it to you?" asked Mallien contemptuously.

"I thought that Rupert——?"

"Pooh! You might as well try and get blood out of a stone, Mr. Leigh. And why the dickens should he give you money to go on a wild-goose chase? Rupert is a wise man, and keeps his cash in his pocket, as I'd do if I had his income."

"Would you not give me the money if you had four thousand a year?" asked the vicar, with an extraordinarily keen look.

Mallien stared, quite unable to speak, so indignant was he at the audacity of the parson. "Give it to you?" he burst out. "I'd give it to nobody."

"Ah, then I hope you'll never get money," said Mr. Leigh, placidly, "you would make bad use of it."

"I would," retorted the gracious host, "if I gave it

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to you to make ducks and drakes of in expeditions. You can be buried less expensively in England than in Yucatan, believe me."

"I have no idea of being buried anywhere," said the vicar with dignity, and yet with a scared look which puzzled Mallien. "I am old, it is true, but my health is good and I live a reasonable life."

"You wouldn't if you went exploring Yucatan," retorted the other.

"I would take the risk of that, Mr. Mallien. The place is so interesting"—his nose was glued to the manuscript again—"that I really must raise the money and go. I have plans—oh yes, I have plans to get it."

"You won't from Rupert."

"Nor from you, apparently," said Leigh, who appeared to be much more alert than usual, "but I prefer Rupert's youth to your avaricious age. However, I shall come again and resume my reading of this manuscript—unless you will let me take it away."

"I'll do nothing of the kind, nor help your expedition," said Mallien grimly, "nor even give you the rubbish my father wrote."

"Rubbish," cried the parson indignantly; "that diary is worth all the property which John Hendle left to the son he didn't love. Well! Well, it's a case of pearls before swine," and, paying back Mallien in his own coin, by making this remark, the vicar departed with his shadow at his heels.

"Old fool," commented Mallien; "but I wish John Hendle had made that will."

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CHAPTER V

A REVELATION

It was with joy and relief that Dorinda communicated her father's decision to Rupert, and he was as pleased as she was at the prospect of their speedy marriage. Hitherto Mallien, not wishing to make himself uncomfortable by losing his housekeeper—which Dorinda really was—had always objected to the performance of the ceremony. Certainly he gained five hundred a year when the two became one; but, during the twenty-four months of the official engagement, this fond parent had not been in particular want of money, and in any case had always borrowed what small sums he required from his liberal-minded cousin, at intervals. But now his heart was set upon purchasing the blue sapphire which he had mentioned to Dorinda, and it was not likely that Rupert would give him the price of that. Therefore, to get his new income assured, he allowed the young couple to have their own way. Also—and this had a good deal to do with the granted permission—he really dreaded lest Carrington should obtain any influence over the young Squire, and thought that the gaining of such could best be prevented by giving Rupert his desire. With Dorinda beside him, it was unlikely that Hendle would allow Carrington to draw on his purse.

Seeing that Miss Mallien had a small opinion of her

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father, and spoke to him pretty freely on subjects of dispute between them, it seemed strange that she should have laid such stress on obtaining his consent to the marriage. But Dorinda, considering that her father *was* her father, in spite of his unamiable nature, wished him to exercise this last act of paternal authority. She would not have been happy had she provoked a quarrel by going contrary to his views, and so had waited until he thought fit to issue his commands. Had Mallien, indeed, wholly forbidden the marriage taking place, Dorinda would have rebelled, but she gave way on the minor point of an unusually long engagement. She saw Rupert almost daily; they understood one another thoroughly, and, as both were young, there was no particular hurry. Nevertheless, the girl was pleased at the lordly permission of her irritating parent, and set about her preparations straightway. It was now July, and after a conversation with Rupert, it was decided that the Rev. Simon Leigh should make them man and wife toward the end of August. And Dorinda confessed to her future husband, that she would be glad to escape from the constant society of her father, who of late had been unusually trying. On his side, Rupert was extremely glad to get the dearest girl in the world all to himself. So the important matter was settled, and Hendle returned to The Big House very contented with the world in general and with himself in particular.

In his delight he called in Mrs. Beatson to the library to inform her of his intended change of life, although he rather dreaded the woeful looks and sad words with which she would receive his communication. Mrs. Beatson made her appearance, looking more like a Christian martyr than ever, but assumed

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her most gracious and lady-like manner to hear what her young master had to say. She greatly resembled that painfully well-bred gentlewoman, Mrs. Sparsit, in Dickens' story, and, like her, was a housekeeper very much against her will.

"Wish me joy, Mrs. Beatson," said Rupert gaily, when the martyr made her sour appearance. "I am going to be married."

"So I have understood for two years, Mr. Hendle."

"Quite so. I have been engaged to Miss Mallien for quite that time. But we are to be married toward the end of next month."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Beatson looked dismayed. "Isn't that rather sudden?"

"Sudden!" Rupert swung round his chair and looked puzzled. "How can it be sudden after my being engaged for twenty-four months?"

"I only mean, Mr. Hendle, that I should have thought it necessary for you to consider the matter carefully for six months before fixing the day. Marriage, Mr. Hendle, is a serious matter."

"It is a very delightful matter, Mrs. Beatson, considering who the lady is."

"Ah!" Mrs. Beatson crossed her hands and cast up her eyes with a melancholy expression, "so we all say until we are married. I suppose, Mr. Hendle, you intend to give me notice?"

"Indeed, I intend to give you nothing of the sort," said Rupert bluffly. "All the difference will be that my wife will give you orders instead of me."

Mrs. Beatson looked as though this would make a very great difference indeed, as she much preferred to have a master than a mistress. All the same, she looked relieved when she learned that her situation

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was not in danger. "I am glad to stay on, Mr. Hendle," she said, with the air of making a concession. "I look on The Big House as in some sense my home."

"That's all right. Continue to look upon it as your home, until Kit marries Miss Tollart and you go to live with them."

"Pardon me, Mr. Hendle," said Mrs. Beatson with icy scorn; "but you little know my nature when you suggest such a thing. I don't approve of Sophy Tollart, whose views regarding our sex are anything but pacific. Besides, young people rarely take the advice of those who are older and wiser than they are; consequently, it is best for them to live by themselves. Would you like Mr. Mallien to dwell at The Big House when you wed with his daughter?"

"Good Lord, no," replied Hendle hastily. "It is the last thing either I or Miss Mallien would desire. We can manage our own affairs."

"So you think, Mr. Hendle; but the mistakes you will make will be endless."

"Nonsense, I am not a fool, and Miss Mallien has plenty of good sense."

"Sense isn't experience," lamented Mrs. Beatson, shaking her head and smiling in a most dreary manner. "However, I am no prophetess of evil, and wish you and Miss Mallien well. But mistakes you will make, say what you will, and sorrow will come to you as it comes to all."

"There! There! Don't croak any more, Mrs. Beatson."

"Me croak," repeated the lady in surprise. "Why, I am trying to look on the bright side of things, for whatever you may say there is always a black side."

"Well, well," observed Rupert testily, for her words

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and manner irritated his usually steady nerves. "We'll wait and see what happens. Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you, is a very good proverb."

"I annoy you by speaking the truth," remarked the good lady with a superior smile. "Ah, that is always the way with the young, sir. However, you have only to say the word and I go."

"I don't want you to go."

"You may not, Mr. Hendle, but Miss Mallien will."

"Not at all. She is quite willing that you should stay."

"So she says, but I have my doubts;" and Mrs. Beatson groaned, being quite sure in her own mind that Dorinda wished to turn her out to die by the wayside. "However, this is a world of sorrow, and when I am starved to death, perhaps you may be sorry for your harsh treatment."

"Wait until the harsh treatment takes place," retorted Rupert, who would have liked to shake her into common sense. "Meanwhile, I have told you of my intention to get married next month."

"There's many a slip between the cup and the lip," said Mrs. Beatson, mysteriously; "but the less talked about is the soonest forgotten." After which cryptic speech she drifted toward the door, as if her legs were taking her in a direction contrary to that expressed by her will. "The Rev. Mr. Leigh is in the Muniment Room, Mr. Hendle," she said, pausing on the threshold, "and expressed a wish to see you."

"You might ask him to stay to dinner," said Rupert, glancing at his watch.

Mrs. Beatson departed firmly convinced that her master really intended to dismiss her and had only broken the ice with his information about the mar-

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riage, so that she might be prepared to be turned out to die. With this in her mind, she hovered uneasily about the dining-room and drawing-room both before and after dinner, in the hope of catching some stray word, which might reveal Rupert's expected treachery.

Meanwhile Rupert, after a hearty laugh at Mrs. Beatson's cheerful manner of looking at the future, went upstairs to dress for dinner.

"Hang Mrs. Beatson," he thought, when he descended to the drawing-room. "I do wish she would keep her dismals to herself. She's about as cheerful as tombs, and not at all the person to have in the house of a young married couple," and from this mental speech it may be guessed that the dreary old lady was within an ace of being dismissed, as she dreaded, although such an idea had never entered her master's mind until she began her wailing.

Mr. Leigh, who had brushed and washed at Mrs. Beatson's request, for he was dusty and grimy after his work in the Muniment Room, was wandering about the big drawing-room, peering at pictures and statues and old silver through his pince-nez. He turned to greet Rupert in his usual mild absent-minded way, when the young Squire, smartly groomed and eminently handsome, entered.

"Quite Greek," murmured the vicar, balancing himself on his toes and with his hands behind his back. "I must say that your looks are in your favor, Rupert. For the well-being of the race you should marry and beget children."

"Well, I am going to," said Hendle, used to the vicar's eccentric speeches. "I make Dorinda my wife next month."

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"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Leigh alertly. "Dorinda is a very desirable damsel. I hope you will be happy."

"You seem to have your doubts, from the tone you use," remarked Rupert dryly.

Mr. Leigh shook his head. "Life has its troubles," he observed sententiously.

"For heaven's sake, vicar, don't croak. I have had enough of that from Mrs. Beatson," a remark which the housekeeper, hovering outside the door, overheard and registered in her mind as a bad omen for her future continuance at The Big House. "I beg your pardon," went on the Squire, rather ashamed of his momentary irritability, "but I do wish people would look on marriage as marriage and not as a funeral."

"Of course, of course," ruminated Mr. Leigh. "One is always sure of a funeral, though not of a marriage."

"Vicar!" burst out the young man, much vexed at this persistent lamentation, "you are—well." He linked his arm in that of Mr. Leigh, knowing it was useless to argue, "you are hungry and there's the gong."

"Am I hungry?" Mr. Leigh asked, when he was being conducted into the dining-room. "Really I believe I am. For three or four hours I have been busy in the Muniment Room."

"I wonder you don't grow tired of fumbling amongst those dusty parchments."

"No! No! No! They are most interesting. Yet," went on the vicar, as he spread his napkin across his spare knees. "I may have to postpone my history of Barship Parish after all—until I return from Yucatan, that is."

"Yucatan!" Rupert nodded to the butler that he should fill Mr. Leigh's glass with sherry, for the vicar

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was too absent-minded to give the order. "Where is Yucatan?"

Mr. Leigh devoted his attention to the soup, and then looked up dreamily. "Yucatan," he repeated. "Dear me, Rupert, your geographical knowledge is limited."

"I never was a particularly good scholar," said the squire apologetically, "and Yucatan is some out-of-the-way place, I take it."

"It is in Central America, and is concerned with the Maya civilization."

"Oh, now I know what you are talking about. You refer to that diary of old Frank Mallien, which his son has. Dorinda told me that you went occasionally to see it at my cousin's cottage."

"Yes," said Mr. Leigh, more wide awake than usual; "and, although I have been many times for the last year, Mallien always tells me over again that it is his father's manuscript when he explored Central America. He thinks that I am wanting in common sense, I fancy. But I let him talk on rudely, as he does talk, Rupert. After all, the diary is so interesting, that Mallien's brusque manners are well worth putting up with for the sake of my acquiring the information it contains."

"What does it contain?" asked Rupert, more for the sake of promoting conversation than because he cared.

"An account of a dead and gone civilization," said the vicar in a dreamy tone, and scarcely knowing that fish had been placed before him. "Tombs, cities, stone carvings and manuscripts, deposited with mummies. Yes, there certainly must have been some communication between Yucatan and Egypt. Le Plongue says —dear me, I forget what he does say. However, I

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can see into the matter for myself when I go there."

"Go to Yucatan—to Central America," said Hendle staring. "Why, at your age, it is dangerous to attempt such an expedition."

Mr. Leigh only caught the last word. "Expedition! Yes! It will be costly, as Mallien, in his rude way, observed. But I have arranged how to get the money, Rupert. A thousand pounds—perhaps more. Really I am not sure what it will cost. But we can arrange the sum later."

"We?" Rupert stared harder than ever.

"You and I," said Leigh placidly. "After all, I am glad you have the money and not Mallien, as you are more likely to do what I want than he is. A dour man, grasping and avaricious."

Rupert glanced at the butler and the footman. "I don't quite understand," he said, in a puzzled way. "Perhaps you will explain."

In his turn Leigh, following Hendle's eyes, glanced at the servants. "When we are alone I can tell you all about it over our coffee."

More bewildered than ever and, in a vague way, sensing danger, Rupert would have asked for an explanation. But the servants being present, he decided to wait until he was alone with his erratic friend. Therefore the conversation passed on to other subjects connected with Mr. Leigh's discoveries in the Muniment Room, of various documents connected with the behavior of dead and buried Hendles toward the parish. Rupert said very little. What with Mrs. Beatson's gloom and the vicar's cryptic utterances, he felt as though some storm were approaching, and was anxious for the meal to end, so that he could go to the root of the matter. All the same, he laughed

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at himself for entertaining such a wild fancy. There was no quarter of the heavens from which any storm, big or little, could blow, as all was serene and bright. And, as Hendle happened to be one of those very material persons who only believe in what can be seen, heard or touched, he scouted the idea of any premonition heralding any possible evil. Yet the premonition was in his consciousness sure enough, and the young man, prosaic as ever, put it down to indigestion. A weaker explanation considering his splendid health can scarcely be imagined.

When the dinner was over, Mr. Leigh, who had contented himself with a single glass of port wine to round off the entertainment, rose more briskly than usual, and announced his wish to go.

"You must not mind my speedy departure, Rupert," he said, slipping his pince-nez into his waistcoat pocket; "but I have much work to do in connection with my proposed expedition. I hope Titus Ark is waiting to accompany me home. I told him to call for me about half-past six."

"Ark is waiting in the kitchen," said Rupert, after a quiet word with the pompous butler. "He came at six and has stayed on. There is no hurry for you to go, Mr. Leigh. Remember you have something to tell me," and Hendle, taking the old man's arm, led him gently but firmly into the drawing room.

"Something to tell you," repeated the vicar puzzled; then suddenly his face cleared. "Oh, dear me, yes; how fortunate you reminded me, Rupert. It has to do with John Hendle."

"John Hendle. Do you mean my great-great-grandfather——"

"Who died in the Waterloo year. Yes, I do. When

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we are alone,"—Mr. Leigh broke off and glanced meaningly at the footman who was bringing in the coffee. "It is lucky you reminded me," he ended aimlessly, "very lucky. My expedition, ah yes, this hangs on that and that on this."

"What on earth are you talking about?" questioned Hendle, much vexed at all this unnecessary mystery. "Sit down and drink your coffee and tell me all about it. You don't smoke, I know, but I shall."

"Certainly, certainly," murmured Leigh vaguely, "of course, your marriage with your cousin will bring together the two branches of the family. That, in the long run, will put things right."

"Put what things right?"

"Money matters."

Hendle echoed the word and stared. "I wish you would talk plainly," he said, with some irritation.

"Oh, certainly. I am rather apt to wander in worldly matters." Leigh cleared his throat and sat up briskly with all his wits about him for once in his dreamy life. "Mallien is descended from Walter Hendle, and you from Frederick Hendle, their father John being your common ancestor."

"Yes, that is so. But Mallien descends through the female line, although he is the elder branch of the family."

"There is no entail?"

"No. If there was, it would be in my favor, as I descend through the male heirs. But what does all this mean?"

"I shall tell you if you will allow me to collect my thoughts. While searching in the Muniment Room, Rupert, I came across letters of John Hendle, which show that he loved his elder son Walter and greatly

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disliked his younger son Frederick. Walter was a brave man, who fought for his country and who died at Waterloo. Frederick, as the letters say, was a scamp—what in those days was known as a blood. Reckless, extravagant and evil, he alienated his father's affections, and John Hendle desired to disinherit him."

"It is the first time I have heard of Frederick's iniquity," said Rupert with a shrug, "and I see little use in raking up the evil done by a man who lived about one hundred years ago."

Leigh took no notice of this observation. "John desired that his granddaughter Eunice, the child of his favorite son Walter, should inherit. As the property was entirely at his own disposal, he made a will in her favor."

Rupert jumped up so suddenly that he upset his coffee. "What?"

"Pray don't act in so excitable a manner, Rupert," protested the vicar, raising his thin hand. "You irritate my nerves."

"But—but—what you say—oh, it's absurd," stammered the Squire. "There was never any question about Frederick's inheriting the property. I don't know much about the matter, as the thing didn't interest me. But, if Frederick inherited wrongly, surely the question would have been raised before."

"How could it be when the will in favor of Eunice was missing?"

"Missing?"

"Yes. John made the will and apparently died suddenly before he could make it public. I found it," said Mr. Leigh slowly, "in the chest."

"In the Muniment Room?"

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"Yes. It is a will drawn up quite legally on parchment as was the case in those days, although I don't think wills are drawn up now on——"

"Oh, never mind these minor points," broke in Rupert hastily. "You say that you found a will, made by John Hendle, leaving the property to Eunice, from whom my cousin Mallien is descended?"

"I did. Some weeks ago I came across the document. But I did not say anything until I ascertained for myself as to which of you two was the right person to have the money. I am inclined to think that you had better keep it, Rupert, since Mallien is so avaricious, and will not help anyone—not even me, when I desire money for my expedition to forward the cause of science."

"If this will is in order," said Rupert, rising to pace the long room, and feeling painfully agitated. "Mallien should have the property."

"I fear so; I fear so," murmured the vicar uncomfortably. "The same leaves the property unreservedly to his grandmother Eunice. I have not told Mallien, who would undoubtedly contest your right to the estates, as I do not consider him a fit and proper person to have much money."

"Right is right," said Hendle, whose face was pale and whose lips were dry. "If Mallien is the rightful heir, he must be placed in possession. But all this may be a mistake on your part. Where is the will?"

Mr. Leigh looked nervous and distressed. "Dear me, Rupert, I am afraid I have mislaid it. I took it home to study it at my convenience, so as to make sure that it really gave the property to Eunice. I did examine it, and became quite positive that Mallien is the rightful heir. Then, somehow—you know how ab

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sent-minded I am—I laid it aside and since have not been able to find it. I have searched without result."

"You should have given it to me at once," said Hendle, severely.

"But, my dear boy, I had your interest at heart," protested the vicar, wiping his forehead. "I know how quixotic you are, and guessed that you would give the property to Mallien without demur, if the will was correct, which I fear it is. For your own sake I took time to consider the discovery I had made."

"You must find the will at once," commanded Rupert manfully, "and it must be submitted to the lawyers. If Mallien is the heir, Mallien gets the money."

Mr. Leigh rose, much agitated. "I don't think he should get it, Rupert. He is a greedy man, who would only hoard up gold and make a bad use of newly acquired wealth. I tell you he declined to help me to fit out my expedition. I know you will, so you ought to keep the money."

"How can you advise me to be so dishonest," cried the Squire, indignantly, "you who are a clergyman of the Church of England?"

"I have the greater sense of right from being so," rejoined the vicar, quite tartly for so amiable a man. "And when I remember that you and yours have enjoyed the property for one hundred years, it seems ridiculous to hand it over to another man."

"Who belongs to the elder branch, remember," said Rupert swiftly. "And who is, according to your reading of this newly discovered will, the rightful heir." He took a turn up and down the room, then stopped to face the vicar who was fidgeting on the hearth rug. "You must turn your house upside down to find the will, Mr. Leigh, and it must be handed over

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to our family lawyers, so that Mallien may be placed in possession of the property forthwith."

"Rupert, I implore you not to act hastily or foolishly. "Say nothing about this belated testament, which will do Mallien more harm than good considering his greedy and misanthropic nature. I will look for it and will give it to you. Throw it into the chest again."

"No! no! no! I would never have a moment's peace if I did that. I know that Mallien is not the man to have too much money, but I can't help that. If he is the rightful heir, he must enter into his kingdom. Besides, if I marry Dorinda, the property will come back to me, representing the younger branch."

"If Mallien gets the property," said Mr. Leigh deliberately, "he will not allow you to marry Dorinda."

"I can trust her," said Rupert curtly.

"Quite so. But you will have no money to marry her, and Mallien will cut her off with a shilling. He is quite capable of doing so."

Hendle knew this well enough and reflected for a few moments. "Say nothing to Mallien or to anyone," he remarked finally, "until you find the will and we can look over it together."

"Oh, I shall certainly hold my tongue," said the vicar quickly. "Believe me, it is only my esteem for you which makes me urge you not to notice the will. Sleep on the question, Rupert, for the morning is wiser than the night. This matter will remain strictly between ourselves. Now good night; good night."

Hendle shook hands, not objecting to the vicar's abrupt departure, and when alone groaned over the unexpected fulfilment of his premonition.

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CHAPTER VI

COUNSEL'S OPINION

When Hendle, having a weight on his mind, woke shortly after dawn, he remembered the vicar's proverb, and thought that it might be true. Morning certainly was wiser than the night with him, as he began to ask himself why he should be so much disturbed over an unproven matter. Leigh certainly asserted positively that he had found a hundred-year-old will, made in favor of the elder branch of the Hendle family, and, undoubtedly, he spoke in a way which appeared to be genuine. But then, the vicar was a queer, eccentric person, who sometimes believed his visions to be facts, and who had on occasions some difficulty in distinguishing between the real and the unreal. In a perfectly honest way he might be making a mistake, and Rupert, turning over the matter before rising, hoped fervently that such might prove to be the case.

On the other hand, unless Mr. Leigh's statement had some foundation, in fact, it seemed improbable that he would even think of such a thing. There had never been any question as to the legitimacy of Hendle holding the property, and after a whole century had elapsed, it seemed strange that such an odd question should be raised. Assuredly the vicar must have found something which had to do with the inheritance

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of the estates by the elder branch, else the fantastic idea would not have entered his rather wavering mind. But the will might not be good in law; it might have been signed and not witnessed, or there might be some flaw in its drawing up which would nullify its provisions. If this was the case, Rupert was far too sensible to think of surrendering his lands and income to a man, who, on the face of it, would make a bad use of the same. On the other hand, if the will was quite in order, the Squire was honest enough to step down from his throne and allow the rightful king to take his seat thereon, evil as might prove to be his rule. The whole question of right or wrong turned on the production of the will.

Having reached this point in his meditations, Rupert arose, and cleared his brain by a cold bath. It would be foolish to say that he was not worried, for he felt very much upset, as was natural, seeing there was a chance of his being reduced to the condition of a pauper. Mallien was not rich, but he had enough to live on, so the acquisition of more money would only result in his greater extravagance in the purchase of jewels. But if the will proved to be legal, Hendle foresaw that he—the Squire of Barship—would be turned out of his pleasant home without a single penny and without any means of earning one. He had no profession; he had no trade; he was not over-clever, and Mallien—he was sure of this—would not allow him anything out of the estate. This was uncomfortable enough in itself for a young man who liked the good things of this life, but there was worse to follow. He would lose Dorinda, since her father would undoubtedly prevent the marriage with a pauper. The girl herself, as Rupert had said to the vicar,

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would remain true; but how could he ask her to become his wife, when he could not support himself, much less a helpmate? It was all very painful and very disagreeable, and Rupert descended to breakfast with a bad appetite.

"You don't look at all well, Mr. Hendle," remarked Mrs. Beatson, when she came for orders after breakfast. "Perhaps you are sickening for a fever."

"Not at all," replied her master, more crossly than he was accustomed to speak to this dismal woman. "I have had a wakeful night, that's all."

"Ah well, sir, it's natural, considering you are going to take such a serious step as marriage without thinking about it."

Rupert allowed Mrs. Beatson a certain amount of latitude, but here she overstepped the mark. He passed over her observation in silence, and gave his orders for the day. "I shall have dinner at eight," he remarked, having arranged matters, "as I am going to town and will not be back until late."

"Going to see the lawyers, I suppose, sir," mentioned the housekeeper with an odd look on her dreary face.

Rupert looked up suddenly, wondering why she had made such a pertinent observation, for it was in his mind to do what she had suggested. "Why do you suppose that, Mrs. Beatson?"

"Well, sir, it's only natural, as no doubt there are marriage settlements to be prepared, and all must be in order for the ceremony."

Mrs. Beatson said this glibly enough, and her reason appeared to be very plausible. Nevertheless, her glance was so significant that Hendle wondered if she had guessed his trouble It seemed to be incredible,

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since Leigh had promised to hold his tongue until the matter was properly threshed out. Yet there was a certain malicious triumph lurking in the housekeeper's look, which hinted that she was rejoicing at his approaching downfall. After swift reflection Rupert thought that he was mistaken, and was in the position of a man who sees a bird in every bush. He therefore ignored Mrs. Beatson's remark and merely repeated that he would return late to dine. The woman hesitated for a moment, as if she wished to speak more plainly, then tossed her head and glided out in her ghostly way. Rupert frowned, for her behavior made him uncomfortable. Yet it was impossible that she should know anything of the thunderbolt which had struck him.

And after all, as the Squire reflected when he started to walk to the railway station, the thunderbolt had not yet reached its mark and might not reach it at all. Only an examination of the will would prove if he was a rich man or a pauper, and in his anxiety to learn this, Hendle called in at the Vicarage as he passed the rickety gate. Strange to say, Mr. Leigh proved to be absent, as he had gone to see a dying parishioner.

It was only a short walk to the little wayside station, at which the London trains stopped occasionally during the day. Rupert caught the ten o'clock train easily, and, although it was very full, managed to secure a compartment to himself. Here, when the engine started, he gave himself up to meditation, not, as it may be guessed, of the most pleasant kind.

Hendle, as Mrs. Beatson ignorantly or knowingly had suggested, really intended to consult lawyers. But, before going to his family solicitors, he thought that

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he would ask the opinion of counsel in the person of Carrington, as it struck him that there might be a Statute of Limitations in connection with long-lost wills. Even if there were, Rupert knew, in his own heart, that if Mallien proved to be the rightful owner of the property, he—the present owner—would never be able to take advantage of any law quibble. It all depended on the will, for, if not produced, he would not be required—even by his own uneasy conscience—to surrender his house and income. He wondered if Leigh had lost the will forever, in which case things could remain as they were; he wondered if there was a will at all, or, if there was, whether the vicar might not have made a mistake; he wondered if the will were found, if it would be all ship-shape, so as to deprive him of his kingdom. Indeed, Hendle wondered in a more or less worried way throughout the journey to town, and stepped out onto the platform of the Liverpool Street station in anything but a happy frame of mind. Carrington had envied him his wealth and quiet existence; it was anything but quiet now, and the wealth—if the vicar proved to be correct—was about to take wings to itself and fly away into Mallien's gaping pockets. In a dismal frame of mind, Rupert took a taxi to Friars Inn.

It was in this set of tall buildings that Carrington had his chambers for business purposes.

"Hendle!" said the barrister, when his visitor was ushered into a bare room sparsely furnished and looking very business-like, "this is a surprise. How are you, old chap; not up to much, from the look of you."

"I'm bothered out of my life," replied Hendle, taking the cane chair—a most uncomfortable one—which was pointed out to him.

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"Oh, I think there is sufficient life left in you to stand a trifle more strain," was Carrington's flippant observation, as he resumed his seat at a very business-like desk. "I can't guess in any way what can bother you."

"No one, but the wearer, knows where the shoe pinches," quoted Hendle grimly.

"Quite so, and no one ever will know unless the wearer explains the bad fit, my friend. Bothered? You! With beeves and lands and money, and the promise of a beautiful and desirable damsel to be your wife."

"That's just it," said the visitor, seizing the opening. "I may lose all these things, Carrington."

The barrister wheeled his chair round to stare, and his keen dark face was alive with curiosity. "Have you been outrunning the constable?" he asked; "has the lady changed her mind? Has——"

"You are wide of the mark. To put the matter in a nutshell, it's a will."

"A will! What about it?"

"This much. It exists and may disinherit me."

"The deuce. In whose favor?"

"In favor of Julius Mallien, my cousin."

"Then he will have his rights, if he has a leg to stand on," said Carrington grimly. "Mallien struck me as a man who would go through fire and water for himself. Why did your father make a will in his favor?"

"He did not. The will was made one hundred years ago, by John Hendle, from whom Mallien and I are descended."

"One hundred years ago," echoed the barrister puz-

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zled. "Then how comes it you have to do with it now?"

"Leigh found it in the Muniment Room."

"Confound his zeal. But still I don't quite understand. Perhaps you will tell me the whole story from the beginning. I suppose you have come to ask my advice as a friend?"

"Yes, and as a barrister."

"My best forensic lore is at your disposal. Well?"

Hendle at once began his explanation, and, as he proceeded, became much too restless to remain seated. Midway in the recital he started to his feet and began to pace the narrow limits of the office. Shading his eyes with his hand and drawing figures on the blotting paper, Carrington listened to the rather amazing story of Leigh's discovery, and when in possession of the facts looked rather skeptical. "I understand that you have not seen the will?"

"No. Leigh, as is natural with so untidy a man, has mislaid it."

"Then how do you know the will exists?"

"Leigh says so."

"Humph!" Carrington threw down his pencil and leaned back with a doubtful look. "I think the vicar's wits must be wool-gathering. He has no enmity against you, I suppose?"

"Enmity?" Hendle stopped in his walk and stared.

"I mean he is your friend."

"Oh, yes. Leigh and I are great friends."

"And his attitude toward Mallien?"

"He doesn't like him overmuch. Mallien is so rude to him."

"And to everyone," finished Carrington with a shrug. "A most disagreeable person. Well, as Leigh

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