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ENSIGN KNIGHTLEY

AND

OTHER STORIES

By

A. E. W. MASON

Author of "The Courtship of Morrice Buckler," "The Watchers," "Parson Kelly," etc.

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ENSIGN KNIGHTLEY.

IT was eleven o'clock at night when Surgeon Wyley of His Majesty's ship *Bonetta* washed his hands, drew on his coat, and walked from the hospital up the narrow cobbled street of Tangier to the Main-Guard by the Catherine Port. In the upper room of the Main-Guard he found Major Shackleton of the Tangier Foot taking a hand at bassette with Lieutenant Scrope of Trelawney's Regiment and young Captain Tessin of the King's Battalion. There were three other officers in the room, and to them Surgeon Wyley began to talk in a prosy, medical strain. Two of his audience listened in an uninterested stolidity for just so long as the remnant of manners, which still survived in Tangier, commanded, and then strolling through the open window on to the balcony, lit their pipes.

Overhead the stars blazed in the rich sky of Morocco; the riding-lights of Admiral Herbert's fleet sprinkled the bay; and below them rose the hum of an unquiet town. It was the night of May 13th, 1680, and the life of every Christian in Tangier hung in the balance. The Moors had burst through the outposts to the west, and were now entrenched beneath the walls. The Henrietta Redoubt had fallen that day; to-morrow the little fort at Devil's Drop, built on the edge of the sand where the sea rippled up to the pali-

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sades, must fall; and Charles Fort, to the south-west, was hardly in a better case. However, a sortie had been commanded at daybreak as a last effort to relieve Charles Fort, and the two officers on the balcony speculated over their pipes on the chances of success.

Meanwhile, inside the room Surgeon Wyley lectured to his remaining auditor, who, too tired to remonstrate, tilted his chair against the wall and dozed.

"A concussion of the brain," Wyley went on, "has this curious effect, that after recovery the patient will have lost from his consciousness a period of time which immediately preceded the injury. Thus a man may walk down a street here in Tangier; four, five, six hours afterwards, he mounts his horse, is thrown on to his head. When he wakes again to his senses, the last thing he remembers is—what? A sign, perhaps, over a shop in the street he walked down, or a leper pestering him for alms. The intervening hours are lost to him, and forever. It is no question of an abeyance of memory. There is a gap in the continuity of his experience, and that gap he will never fill up."

"Except by hearsay?"

The correction came from Lieutenant Scrope at the bassette table. It was quite carelessly uttered while the Lieutenant was picking up his cards. Surgeon Wyley shifted his chair towards the table, and accepted the correction.

"Except, of course, by hearsay."

Wyley was a new-comer to Tangier, having sailed into the bay less than a week back; but he had béen long enough in the town to find in Scrope a subject at once of interest and perplexity. Scrope was in years

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nearer forty than thirty, dark of complexion, aquiline of feature, and though a trifle below the middle height he redeemed his stature by the litheness of his figure. What interested Wyley was that he seemed a man in whom strong passions were always desperately at war with a strong will. He wore habitually a mask of reserve; behind it, Wyley was aware of sleeping fires. He spoke habitually in a quiet, decided voice, like one that has the soundings of his nature; beneath it, Wyley detected, continually recurring, continually subdued, a note of turbulence. Here, in a word, was a man whose hand was against the world but who would not strike at random. What perplexed Wyley, on the other hand, was Scrope's subordinate rank of lieutenant in a garrison where, from the frequency of death, promotion was of the quickest. He sat there at the table, a lieutenant; a boy of twenty-four faced him, and the boy was a captain and his superior.

It was to the Lieutenant, however, that Wyley resumed his discourse.

"The length of time lost is proportionate to the severity of the concussion. It may be only an hour; I have known it to be a day." He leaned back in his chair and smiled. "A strange question that for a man to ask himself—What did he do during those hours?—a question to appal him."

Scrope chose a card from his hand and played it. Without looking up from the table, he asked: "To appal him? Why?"

"Because the question would be not so much what did he do, as what may he not have done. A man rides through life insecurely seated on his passions.

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Within a few hours the most honest man may commit a damnable crime, a damnable dishonour."

Scrope looked quietly at the Surgeon to read the intention of his words. Then: "I suppose so," he said carelessly. "But do you think that question would press?"

"Why not?" asked Wyley.

Scrope shrugged his shoulders. "I should need an example before I believed you."

The example was at the door. The corporal of the guard at the Catherine Port knocked and was admitted. He told his story to Major Shackleton, and as he told it the two officers lounged back into the room from the balcony, and the other who was dozing against the wall brought the legs of his chair with a bang to the floor and woke up.

It appeared that a sentry at the stockade outside the Catherine Port had suddenly noticed a flutter of white on the ground a few yards from the stockade. He watched this white object, and it moved. He challenged it, and was answered by a whispered prayer for admission in the English tongue and in an English voice. The sentry demanded the password, and received as a reply, "Inchiquin. It is the last password I have knowledge of. Let me in! Let me in!"

The sentry called the corporal, the corporal admitted the fugitive and brought him to the Main-Guard. He was now in the guard-room below.

"You did well," said the Major. "The man has come from the Moorish lines, and may have news which will profit us in the morning. Let him up!"

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and as the corporal retired, " 'Inchiquin,' " he repeated thoughtfully: " I cannot call to mind that password."

Now Wyley had noticed that when the corporal first mentioned the word, Scrope, who was looking over his cards, had dropped one on the table as though his hand shook, had raised his head sharply, and with his head his eyebrows, and had stared for a second fixedly at the wall in front of him. So he said to Scrope:

"You can remember."

"Yes, I remember the password," Scrope replied simply. "I have cause to. 'Inchiquin' and 'Teviot' —those were password and countersign on the night which ruined me—the night of January 6th two years ago."

There was an awkward pause, an interchange of glances. Then Major Shackleton broke the silence, though to no great effect.

" H'm—ah—yes," he said. " Well, well," he added, and laying an arm upon Scrope's sleeve. " A good fellow, Scrope."

Scrope made no response whatever, but of a sudden Captain Tessin banged his fist upon the table.

" January 6th two years ago. Why," and he leaned forward across the table towards Scrope, " Knightley fell in the sortie that morning, and his body was never recovered. The corporal said this fugitive was an Englishman. What if——"

Major Shackleton shook his head and interrupted.

" Knightley fell by my side. I saw the blow; it must have broken his skull."

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, the door was opened and the fugitive appeared in the

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doorway. All eyes turned to him instantly, and turned from him again with looks of disappointment. Wyley remarked, however, that Scrope, who had barely glanced at the man, rose from his chair. He did not move from the table; only he stood where before he had sat.

The new-comer was tall; a beard plastered with mud, as if to disguise its colour, straggled over his burned and wasted cheeks, but here and there a wisp of yellow hair flecked with grey curled from his hood, a pair of blue eyes shone with excitement from hollow sockets, and he wore the violet-and-white robes of a Moorish soldier.

It was his dress at which Major Shackleton looked.

"One of our renegade deserters tired of his new friends," he said with some contempt.

"Renegades do not wear chains," replied the man in the doorway, lifting from beneath his long sleeves his manacled hands. He spoke in a weak, hoarse voice, and with a rusty accent; he rested a hand against the jamb of the door as though he needed support. Tessin sprang up from his chair, and half crossed the room.

The stranger took an uncertain step forward. His legs rattled as he moved, and Wyley saw that the links of broken fetters were twisted about his ankles.

"Have two years made so vast a difference?" he asked. "Well, they were years of the bastinado, and I do not wonder."

Tessin peered into his face. "By God, it is!" he exclaimed. "Knightley!"

"Thanks," said Knightley with a smile.

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Tessin reached out to take Knightley's hands, then instantly stopped, glanced from Knightley to Scrope and drew back.

"Knightley!" cried the Major in a voice of welcome, rising in his seat. Then he too glanced expectantly at Scrope and sat down again. Scrope made no movement, but stood with his eyes cast down on the table like a man lost in thought. It was evident to Wyley that both Shackleton and Tessin had obeyed the sporting instinct, and had left the floor clear for the two men. It was no less evident that Knightley remarked their action and did not understand it. For his eyes travelled from face to face, and searched each with a wistful anxiety for the reason of their reserve.

"Yes, I am Knightley," he said timidly. Then he drew himself to his full height. "Ensign Knightley of the Tangier Foot," he cried.

No one answered. The company waited upon Scrope in a suspense so keen that even the ringing challenge of the words passed unheeded. Knightley spoke again, but now in a stiff, formal voice, and slowly.

"Gentlemen, I fear very much that two years make a world of difference. It seems they change one who had your goodwill into a most unwelcome stranger."

His voice broke in a sob; he turned to the door, but staggered as he turned and caught at a chair. In a moment Major Shackleton was beside him.

"What, lad? Have we been backward? Blame our surprise, not us."

"Meanwhile," said Wyley, "Ensign Knightley's starving."

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The Major pressed Knightley into a chair, called for an orderly, and bade him bring food. Wyley filled a glass with wine from the bottle on the table, and handed it to the Ensign.

"It is vinegar," he said, "but——"

"But Tangier is still Tangier," said Knightley with a laugh. The Major's cordiality had strengthened him like a tonic. He raised the glass to his lips and drank; but as he tilted his head back his eyes over the brim of the glass rested on Scrope, who still stood without movement, without expression, a figure of stone, but that his chest rose and fell with his deep breathing. Knightley set down his glass half-full.

"There is something amiss," he said, "since even Captain Scrope retains no memory of his old comrade."

"Captain?" exclaimed Wyley. So Scrope had been more than a lieutenant. Here was an answer to the question which had perplexed him. But it only led to another question: "Had Scrope been degraded, and why?" He did not, however, speculate on the question, for his attention was seized the next moment. Scrope made no sort of answer to Knightley's appeal, but began to drum very softly with his fingers on the table. And the drumming, at first vague and of no significance, gradually took on, of itself as it seemed, a definite rhythm. There was a variation, too, in the strength of the taps—now they fell light, now they struck hard. Scrope was quite unconsciously beating out upon the table a particular tune, although, since there was but the one note sounded, Wyley could get no more than an elusive hint of its character.

Knightley watched Scrope for a little as earnestly

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as the rest. Then—"Harry!" he said, "Harry Scrope!" The name leaped from his lips in a pleading cry; he stretched out his hands towards Scrope, and the chain which bound them reached down to the table and rattled on the wood.

There was a simultaneous movement, almost a simultaneous ejaculation of bewilderment amongst those who stood about Knightley. Where they had expected a deadly anger, they found in its place a beseeching humility. And Scrope ceased from drumming on the table and turned on Knightley.

"Don't shake your chains at me," he burst out harshly. "I am deaf to any reproach that they can make. Are you the only man that has worn chains? I can show as good, and better." He thrust the palm of his left hand under Knightley's nose. "Branded, d'ye see? Branded. There's more besides." He set his foot on the chair and stripped the silk stocking down his leg. Just above the ankle there was a broad indent where a fetter had bitten into the flesh. "I have dragged a chain, you see; not like you among the Moors, but here in Tangier, on that damned Mole, in sight of these my brother officers. By the Lord, Knightley, I tell you you have had the better part of it."

"You!" cried Knightley. "You dragged a chain on Tangier Mole? For what offence?" And he added, with a genuine tenderness, "There was no disgrace in't, I'll warrant."

Major Shackleton half checked an exclamation, and turned it into a cough. Scrope leaned right across the table and stared straight into Knightley's eyes.

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"The offence was a duel," he answered steadily, "fought on the night of January 6th two years ago."

Knightley's face clouded for an instant. "The night when I was captured," he said timidly.

"Yes."

The officers drew closer about the table, and seemed to hold their breath, as the strange catechism proceeded.

"With whom did you fight?" asked Knightley.

"With a very good friend of mine," replied Scrope, in a hard, even voice.

"On what account?"

"A woman."

Knightley laughed with a man's amused leniency for such escapades when he himself is in no way hurt by them.

"I said there would be no disgrace in't, Harry," he said, with a smile of triumph.

The heads of the listeners, which had bunched together, were suddenly drawn back. A dark flush of anger overspread Scrope's face, and the veins ridged up upon his forehead. Some impatient speech was on the tip of his tongue, when the Major interposed.

"What's this talk of penalties? Where's the sense of it? Scrope paid the price of his fault. He was admitted to the ranks afterwards. He won a lieutenancy by sheer bravery in the field. For all we know he may be again a captain to-morrow. Anyhow he wears the King's uniform. It is a badge of service which levels us all from Ensign to Major in an equality of esteem."

Scrope bowed to the Major and drew back from the

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table. The other officers shuffled and moved in a welcome relief from the strain of their expectancy, and Knightley's thoughts were diverted by Shackleton's words to a quite different subject. For he picked with his fingers at the Moorish robe he wore and, "I too wore the King's uniform," he pleaded wistfully.

"And shall do so again, thank God," responded the Major heartily.

Knightley started up from his chair; his face lightened unaccountably.

"You mean that?" he asked eagerly. "Yes, yes, you mean it! Then let it be to-night—now—even before I sup. As long as I wear these chains, as long as I wear this dress, I can feel the driver's whip curl about my shoulders." He parted the robe as he spoke, and showed that underneath he wore only a coarse sack which reached to his knees, with a hole cut in it for his head.

"True, you have worn the chains too long," said the Major. "I should have had them knocked off before, but——" he paused for a second, "but your coming so surprised me that of a truth I forgot," he continued lamely. Then he turned to Tessin. "See to it, Tessin! Ensign Barbour of the Tangier Foot was killed to-day. He was quartered in the Main-Guard. Take Knightley to his quarters and see what you can do. By the way, Knightley, there's a question I should have put to you before. By what road did you come in?"

"Down Teviot Hill past the Henrietta Fort. The Moors brought me down from Mequinez to interpret

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between them and their prisoners. I escaped last night."

"Past the Henrietta Fort?" replied the Major. "Then you can help us, for that way we make our sortie."

"To relieve the Charles Fort?" said Knightley.

"I guessed the Charles Fort was surrounded, for I heard one man on the Tangier wall shouting through a speaking trumpet to the Charles Fort garrison. But it will not be easy to relieve them. The Moors are entrenched between. There are three trenches. I should never have crawled through them, but that I stripped a dead Moor of his robe."

"Three trenches," said Tessin, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes, three. The two nearest to Tangier may be carried. But the third—it is deep, twelve feet at the least, and wide, at the least eight yards. The sides are steep and slippery with the rain."

"A grave, then," said Scrope carelessly; "a grave that will hold many before the evening falls. It is well they made it wide and deep enough."

The sombre words knocked upon every heart like a blow on a door behind which conspirators are plotting. The Major was the first to recover his speech.

"Curse your tongue, Scrope!" he said angrily. "Let who will lie in your grave when the evening falls. Before that time comes, we'll show these Moors so fine a powder-play as shall glut some of them to all eternity. *Bon chat, bon rat;* we are not made of jelly. Tessin, see to Knightley."

The two men withdrew. Major Shackleton scrib-

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bled a note and despatched it to Sir Palmes Fairborne, the Lieutenant-Governor. Scrope took a turn or two across the room while the Major was writing the news which Knightley had brought. Then—"What game is this he's playing?" he said, with a jerk of his head to the door by which Knightley had gone out. "I have no mind to be played with."

"But is he playing a game at all?" asked Wyley.

Scrope faced him quickly, looked him over for a second, and replied: "You are a new-comer to Tangier, or you would not have asked that question."

"I should," rejoined Wyley with complete confidence. "I know quite enough to be sure of one thing. I know there lies some deep matter of dispute between Ensign Knightley and Lieutenant Scrope, and I am sure that there is one other person more in the dark than myself, and that person is Ensign Knightley. For whereas I know there is a dispute, he is unaware of even that."

"Unaware?" cried Scrope. "Why, man, the very good friend I fought with was Ensign Knightley. The woman on whose account we fought was Knightley's wife." He flung the words at the Surgeon with almost a gesture of contempt. "Make the most of that!" And once again he began to pace the room.

"I am not in the least surprised," returned Wyley with an easy smile. "Though I admit that I am interested. A wife is sauce to any story." He looked placidly round the company. He alone held the key to the puzzle, and since he was now become the centre of attraction he was inclined to play with his less acute brethren. With a wave of the hand he stilled

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the requests for an explanation, and turned to Scrope.

"Will you answer me a question?"

"I think it most unlikely."

The curt reply in no way diminished the Surgeon's suavity.

"I chose my words ill. I should have asked, Will you confirm an assertion? The assertion is this: Ensign Knightley had no suspicion before he actually discovered the—well, the lamentable truth."

Scrope stopped his walk and came back to the table.

"Why, that is so," he agreed sullenly. "Knightley had no suspicions. It angered me that he had not."

Wyley leaned back in his chair.

"Really, really," he said, and laughed a little to himself. "On the night of January 6th Ensign Knightley discovers the lamentable truth. At what hour?" he asked suddenly.

Scope looked to the Major. "About midnight," he suggested.

"A little later, I should think," corrected Major Shackleton.

"A little after midnight," repeated Wyley. "Ensign Knightley and Lieutenant Scrope, I understand, immediately fight a duel, which seems to have been interrupted before any hurt was done."

The Major and Scrope agreed with a nod of their heads.

"In the morning," continued Wyley, "Ensign Knightley takes part in a skirmish, and is clubbed on the head so fiercely that Major Shackleton thought his skull must be broken in. At what hour was he struck?" Again he put the question quickly.

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"'Twixt seven and eight of the morning," replied the Major.

"Quite so," said Wyley. "The incidents fit to a nicety. Two years afterwards Ensign Knightley comes home. He knows nothing of the duel, or any cause for a duel. Lieutenant Scrope is still 'Harry' to him, and his best of friends. It is all very clear."

He gazed about him. Perplexity sat on each face except one; that face was Scrope's.

"I spoke to you all some half an hour since concerning the effects of a concussion. I could not have hoped for so complete an example," said Wyley.

Captain Tessin whistled; Major Shackleton bounced on to his feet.

"Then Knightley knows nothing," cried Tessin in a gust of excitement.

"And never will know," cried the Major.

"Except by hearsay," sharply interposed Scrope. "Gentlemen, you go too fast. Except by hearsay. That, Mr. Wyley, was the phrase, I think. By what spells, Major," he asked with irony, "will you bind Tangier to silence when there's scandal to be talked? Let Knightley walk down to the water-gate to-morrow; I'll warrant he'll have heard the story a hundred times with a hundred new embellishments before he gets there."

Major Shackleton resumed his seat moodily.

"And since that's the truth, why, he had best hear the story nakedly from me."

"From you?" exclaimed Tessin. "Another duel, then. Have you counted the cost?"

"Why, yes," replied Scrope quietly.

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"Two years of the bastinado," said the Major. "That was what he said. He comes back to Tangier to find—who knows?—a worse torture here. Knightley, Knightley, a good officer marked for promotion until that infernal night. Scrope, I could turn moralist and curse you!"

Scrope dropped his head as though the words touched him. But it was not long before he raised it again.

"You waste your pity, I think, Major," he said coldly. "I disagree with Mr. Wyley's conclusions. Knightley knows the truth of the matter very well. For observe, he has made no mention of his wife. He has been two years in slavery. He escapes, and he asks for no news of his wife. That is unlike any man, but most of all unlike Knightley. He has his own ends to serve, no doubt, but he knows."

The argument appeared cogent to Major Shackleton.

"To be sure, to be sure," he said. "I had not thought of that."

Tessin looked across to Wyley.

"What do you say?"

"I am not convinced," replied Wyley. "Indeed, I was surprised that Knightley's omission had not been remarked before. When you first showed reserve in welcoming Knightley, I noticed that he became all at once timid, hesitating. He seemed to be afraid."

Major Shackleton admitted the Surgeon's accuracy.

"Well, what then?"

"Well, I go back to what I said before Knightley appeared. A man has lost so many hours. The question, what he did during those hours, is one that

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may well appal any one. Lieutenant Scrope doubted whether that question would trouble a man, and needed an instance. I believe here is the instance. I believe Knightley is afraid to ask any questions, and I believe his reason to be fear of how he lived during those lost hours."

There was a pause. No one was prepared to deny, however much he might doubt, what Wyley said.

Wyley continued:

"At some point of time before this duel Knightley's recollections break off. At what precise point we are not aware, nor is it of any great importance. The sure thing is he does not know of the dispute between Lieutenant Scrope and himself, and it is of more importance for us to consider whether he cannot after all be kept from knowing. Could he not be sent home to England? Mrs. Knightley, I take it, is no longer in Tangier?"

Major Shackleton stood up, took Wyley by the arm and led him out on to the balcony. The town beneath them had gone to sleep; the streets were quiet; the white roofs of the houses in the star-shine descended to the water's edge like flights of marble steps; only here and there did a light burn. To one of the lights close by the city wall the Major directed Wyley's attention. The house in which it burned lay so nearly beneath them that they could command a corner of the square open *patio* in the middle of it; and the light shone in a window set in that corner and giving on to the *patio*.

"You see that house?" said the Major.

"Yes," said Wyley. "It is Scrope's. I have seen him enter and come out."

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"No doubt," said the Major; "but it is Knightley's house."

"Knightley's! Then the light burning in the window is——"

The Major nodded. "She is still in Tangier. And never a care for him has troubled her for two years, not so much as would bring a pucker to her pretty forehead—all my arrears of pay to a guinea-piece."

Wyley leaned across the rail of the balcony, watching the light, and as he watched he was aware that his feelings and his thoughts changed. The interest which he had felt in Scrope died clean away, or rather was transferred to Knightley; and with this new interest there sprang up a new sympathy, a new pity. The change was entirely due to that one yellow light burning in the window and the homely suggestions which it provoked. It brought before him very clearly the bitter contrast: so that light had burned any night these last two years, and Scrope had gone in and out at his will, while up in the barbarous inlands of Morocco the husband had had his daily portion of the bastinado and the whip. It was her fault, too, and she made her profit of it. Wyley became sensible of an overwhelming irony in the disposition of the world.

"You spoke a true word to-night, Major," he said bitterly. "That light down there might turn any man to a moralist, and send him preaching in the market-places."

"Well," returned the Major, as though he must make what defence he could for Scrope, "the story is not the politest in the world. But, then, you know Tangier—it is only a tiny outpost on the edges of the

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world where we starve behind broken walls forgotten of our friends. We have the Moors ever swarming at our gates and the wolf ever snarling at our heels, and so the niceties of conduct are lost. We have so little time wherein to live, and that little time is filled with the noise of battle. Passion has its way with us in the end, and honour comes to mean no more than bravery and a gallant death."

He remained a few moments silent, and then disconnectedly he told Wyley the rest of the story.

"It was only three years ago that Knightley came to Tangier. He should never have brought his wife with him. Scrope and Knightley became friends. All Tangier knew the truth pretty soon, and laughed at Knightley's ignorance. . . . I remember the night of January 6th very well. I was Captain of the Guard that night too. A spy brought in news that we might expect a night attack. I sent Knightley with the news to Lord Inchiquin. On the way back he stepped into his own house. It was late at night. Mrs. Knightley was singing some foolish song to Scrope. The two men came down into the street and fought then and there. The quarter was aroused, the combatants arrested and brought to me. . . . There are two faults which our necessities here compel us to punish beyond their proper gravity : duelling, for we cannot afford to lose officers that way ; and brawling in the streets at night, because the Moors lie *perdus* under our walls; ready to take occasion as it comes. Of Scrope's punishment you have heard. Knightley I released for that night. He was on guard—I could not spare him. We were attacked in the morning, and

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repulsed the attack. We followed up our success by a sortie in which Knightley fell."

Wyley began again to wonder at what particular point in this story Knightley's recollection broke off; and, further, what particular fear it was that kept him from all questions even concerning his wife.

Knightley's voice was heard behind them, and they turned back into the room. The Ensign had shaved his matted beard and combed out his hair, which now curled and shone graciously about his head and shoulders; his face, too, for all that it was wasted, had taken almost a boyish zest, and his figure, revealed in the graceful dress of his regiment, showed youth in every movement. He was plainly by some years a younger man than Scrope.

He saluted the Major, and Wyley noticed that with his uniform he seemed to have drawn on something of a soldierly confidence.

"There's your supper, lad," said Shackleton, pointing to a few poor herrings and a crust of bread which an orderly had spread upon the table. "It is scanty."

"I like it the better," said Knightley with a laugh; "for so I am assured I am at home, in Tangier. There is no beef, I suppose?"

"Not so much as a hoof."

"No butter?"

"Not enough to cover a sixpence."

"There is cheese, however." He lifted up a scrap upon a fork.

"There will be none to-morrow."

"And as for pay?" he asked slyly.

"Two years and a half in arrears."

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Knightley laughed again.

"Moreover," added Shackleton, "out of our nothing we may presently have to feed the fleet. It is indeed the pleasantest joke imaginable."

"In a week, no doubt," rejoined Knightley, "I shall be less sensible of its humour. But to-night—well, I am home in Tangier, and that contents me. Nothing has changed." At that he stopped suddenly. "Nothing has changed?" This time the phrase was put as a question, and with the halting timidity which he had shown before. No one answered the question. "No, nothing has changed," he said a third time, and again his eyes began to travel wistfully from face to face.

Tessin abruptly turned his back; Shackleton blinked his eyes at the ceiling with altogether too profound an unconcern; Scrope reached out for the wine, and spilt it as he filled his glass; Wyley busily drew diagrams with a wet finger on the table.

All these details Knightley remarked. He laid down his fork, he rested his elbow on the table, his forehead upon his hand. Then absently he began to hum over to himself a tune. The rhythm of it was somehow familiar to the Surgeon's ears. Where had he heard it before? Then with a start he remembered. It was this very rhythm, that very tune, which Scrope's fingers had beaten out on the table when he first saw Knightley. And as he had absently drummed it then, so Knightley absently hummed it now.

Surely, then, the tune had some part in the relations of the two men—perhaps a part in this story. "A foolish song." The words flashed into Wyley's mind,

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"She was singing a foolish song." What if the tune was the tune of that song? But then—Wyley's argument came to a sudden conclusion. For if the tune *was* the tune of that song, why, then Knightley must know the truth, since he remembered that song. Was Scrope right after all? Was Knightley playing with him? Wyley glanced at Knightley in the keenest excitement. He wanted words fitted to that tune, and in a little the words came—first one or two fitted here and there to a note, and murmured unconsciously, then an entire phrase which filled out a bar, finally this verse in its proper sequence:

"No, no, fair heretick, it needs must be
But an ill love in me,
And worse for thee;
For were it in my power
To love thee now this hour
More than I did the last,
'Twould then so fall
I might not love at all.
Love that can flow . . . ."

And then the song broke off, and silence followed. Wyley looked again at Knightley, but the latter had not changed his position. He still sat with his face shaded by his hand.

The Surgeon was startled by a light touch on the arm. He turned with almost a jump, and he saw Scrope bending across the table towards him, his eyes ablaze with an excitement no less keen than his own.

"He knows, he knows!" whispered Scrope. "It was that song she was singing; at that word 'flow' he pushed open the door of the room."

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Knightley raised his head and drew his hand across his forehead, as though Scrope's whisper had aroused him. Scrope seated himself hurriedly.

"Nothing has changed, eh?" Knightley asked, like a man fresh from his sleep. Then he stood, and quietly, slowly, walked round the table until he stood directly behind Scrope's chair. Scrope's face hardened; he laid the palms of his hands upon the edge of the table ready to spring up; he looked across to Wyley with the expectation of death in his eyes.

One of the officers shuffled his feet. Tessin said "Hush!" Knightley took a step forward and dropped a hand on Scrope's shoulder, very lightly; but none the less Scrope started and turned white as though he had been stabbed.

"Harry," said the Ensign, "my—my wife is still in Tangier?"

Scrope drew in a breath. "Yes."

"Ah, waiting for me! You have shown her what kindness you could during my slavery?"

He spoke in a wavering voice, as if he were not sure of his ground, and as he spoke he felt Scrope shiver beneath his hand, and saw upon the faces of his companions an unmistakable shrinking. He turned away and staggered, rather than walked, to the window, where he stood leaning against the sill.

"The day is breaking," he said quietly. Wyley looked up; outside the window the colour was fading down the sky. It was purple still towards the zenith, but across the Straits its edges rested white upon the hills of Spain.

"Love that can flow . . ." murmured Knightley, and of a sudden he flung back into the room.

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"Let me have the truth of it," he burst out, confronting his brother-officers gathered about the table—"the truth, though it knell out my damnation. If you only knew how up there, at Fez, at Mequinez, I have pictured your welcome when I should get back! I made of my anticipation a very anodyne. The cudgelling, the chains, the hunger, the sun, hot as though a burning glass was held above my head—it would all make a good story for the guard-room when I got back—when I got back. And yet I do get back, and one and all of you draw away from me as though I were one of the Tangier lepers we jostle in the streets. 'Love that can flow . . .'" he broke off. "I ask myself"—he hesitated, and with a great cry, "I ask you, did I play the coward on that night I was captured two years ago?"

"The coward?" exclaimed Shackleton in bewilderment.

Wyley, for all his sympathy, could not refrain from a triumphant glance at Scrope. "Here is the instance you needed," he said.

"Yes, did I play the coward?" Knightley seated himself sideways on the edge of the table, and clasping his hands between his knees, went on in a quick, lowered voice. "'Love that can flow'—those are the last words I remember. You sent me, Major, to the Governor with a message. I delivered it; I started back. On my way back I passed my house. I went in. I stood in the *patio*. My wife was singing that song. The window of the room in which she sang opened on to the *patio*. I stood there listening for a second. Then I went upstairs. I turned the handle

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of the door. I remember quite clearly the light upon the room wall as I opened the door. Those words 'love that can flow' came swelling through the opening; and—and—the next thing I am aware of, I was riding chained upon a camel into slavery."

Tessin and Major Shackleton looked suddenly towards Wyley in recognition of the accuracy of his guess. Scrope simply wiped the perspiration from his forehead and waited.

"But how does that—forgetfulness, shall we say? —persuade you to the fear that you played the coward?" asked Wyley.

"Well," replied Knightley, and his voice sank to a whisper, "I played the coward afterwards at Mequinez. At the first it used to amuse me to wonder what happened after I opened the door and before I was captured outside Tangier; later it only puzzled me, and in the end it began to frighten me. You see, I could not tell; it was all a blank to me, as it is now; and a man overdriven—well, he nurses sickly fancies. No need to say what mine were until the day I played the coward in Mequinez. They set me to build the walls of the Emperor's new Palace. We used the stones of the old Roman town and built them up in Mequinez, and in the walls we were bidden to build Christian slaves alive to the glory of Allah. I refused. They stripped the flesh off my feet with their bastinadoes, starved me of food and drink, and brought me back again to the walls. Again I refused." Knightley looked up at his audience, and whether or no he mistook their breathless silence for disbelief,—"I did," he implored. "Twice I refused, and twice they tor-

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tured me. The third time—I was so broken, the whistle of a cane in the air made me cry out with pain —I was sunk to that pitch of cowardice——" He stopped, unable to complete the sentence. He clasped and unclasped his hands convulsively, he moistened his dry lips with his tongue, and looked about him with a weak, almost despairing laugh. Then he began in another way. "The Christian was a Portuguee from Marmora. He was set in the wall with his arms outstretched on either side—the attitude of a man crucified. I built in his arms—his right arm first—and mortised the stones, then his left arm in the same way. I was careful not to look in his face. No, no! I didn't look in his face." Knightley repeated the words with a horrible leer of cunning, and hugged himself with his arms. To Wyley's thinking he was strung almost to madness. "After his arms I built in his feet, and upwards from his feet I built in his legs and his body until I came to his neck. All this while he had been crying out for pity, babbling prayers, and the rest of it. When I reached his neck he ceased his clamour. I suppose he was dumb with horror. I did not know. All I knew was that now I should have to meet his eyes as I built in his face. I thought for a moment of blinding him. I could have done it quite easily with a stone. I picked up a stone to do it, and then, well—I could not help looking at him. He drew my eyes to his like a steel filing to a magnet. And once I had looked, once I had heard his eyes speaking, I—I tore down the stones. I freed his body, his legs, his feet and one arm. When the guards noticed what I was doing I cannot tell. I

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could not tell you when their sticks began to beat me. But they dragged me away when I had freed only one arm. I remember seeing him tugging at the other. What happened to me,"—he shivered,—" I could not describe to you. But you see I had played the coward finely at Mequinez, and when that question recurred to me as to what had happened after I had opened the door, I began to wonder whether by any chance I had played the coward at Tangier. I dismissed the thought as a sickly fancy, but it came again and again ; and I came back here, and you draw aloof from me with averted faces and forced welcomes on your lips. Did I play the coward on that night I was captured? Tell me! Tell me!" And so the torrent of his speech came to an end.

The Major rose gravely from his seat, walked round the table and held out his hand.

" Put your hand there, lad," he said gravely.

Knightley looked at the outstretched hand, then at the Major's face. He took the hand diffidently, and the Major's grasp was of the heartiest.

" Neither at Mequinez nor at Tangier did you play the coward," said the Major. " You fell by my side in the van of the attack."

And then Knightley began to cry. He blubbered like a child, and with his blubbering he mixed apologies. He was weak, he was tired, his relief was too great ; he was thoroughly ashamed.

" You see," he said, " there was need that I should know. My wife is waiting for me. I could not go back to her bearing that stigma. Indeed, I hardly dared ask news of her. Now I can go back ; and, gentlemen, I wish you good-night."

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He stood up, made his bow, wiped his eyes, and began to walk to the door. Scrope rose instantly.

"Sit down, Lieutenant," said the Major sharply, and Scrope obeyed with reluctance.

The Major watched Knightley cross the room. Should he let the Ensign go? Should he keep him? He could not decide. That Knightley would seek his wife at once might of course have been foreseen; and yet it had not been foreseen either by the Major or the others. The present facts, as they had succeeded one after another had engrossed their minds.

Knightley's hand was on the door, and the Major had not decided. He pushed the door open, he set a foot in the passage, and then the roar of a gun shook the room.

"Ah!" remarked Wyley, "the signal for your sortie."

Knightley stopped and listened. Major Shackleton stood in a fixed attitude with his eyes upon the floor. He had hit upon an issue, it seemed to him by inspiration. The noise of the gun was followed by ten clear strokes of a bell.

"That's for the King's Battalion," said Knightley with a smile.

"Yes," said Tessin, and picking up his sword from a corner he slung the bandolier across his shoulder.

The bell rang out again; this time the number of the strokes was twenty.

"That's for my Lord Dunbarton's Regiment," said Knightley.

"Yes," said two of the remaining officers. They

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took their hats and followed Captain Tessin down the stairs.

A third time the bell spoke, and the strokes were thirty.

"Ah!" said Knightley, "that's for the Tangier Foot. Well, good luck to you, Major!" and he passed through the door.

"A moment, Knightley. The regiment first. You wear Ensign Barbour's uniform. You must do more than wear his uniform. The regiment first."

Major Shackleton spoke in a husky voice and kept his eyes on the floor. Scrope looked at him keenly from the table. Knightley hardly looked at him at all. He stepped back into the room.

"With all my heart, Major: the regiment first."

"Your station is at Peterborough Tower. You will go there—at once."

"At once," replied Knightley cheerfully. "So she would wish," and he went down the stairs into the street. Major Shackleton picked up his hat.

"I command this sortie," he said to Wyley; but as he turned he found himself confronted by Scrope.

"What do you intend?" asked Scrope.

Major Shackleton looked towards Wyley. Wyley understood the look and also what Shackleton intended. He went from the room and left the two men together.

The grey light poured through the window; the candles still burnt yellow on the table.

"What do you intend?"

The Major looked Scrope straight in the face.

"I have heard a man speak to-night in a man's

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voice. I mean to do that man the best service that I can. These two years at Mequinez cannot mate with these two years at Tangier. Knightley knows nothing now; he never shall know. He believes his wife a second Penelope; he shall keep that belief. There is a trench—you called it very properly a grave. In that trench Knightley will not hear though all Tangier scream its gossip in his ears. I mean to give him his chance of death."

"No, Major," cried Scrope. "Or listen! Give me an equal chance."

"Trelawney's Regiment is not called out. Again, Lieutenant, I fear me you will have the harder part of it."

Shackleton repeated Scrope's own words in all sincerity, and hurried off to his post.

Scrope was left alone in the guard-room. A vision of the trench, twelve feet deep, eight yards wide, yawned before his eyes. He closed them, but that made no difference; he still saw the trench. In imagination he began to measure its width and depth. Then he shook his head to rid himself of the picture, and went out on to the balcony. His eyes turned instinctively to a house by the city wall, to a corner of the *patio* of the house and the latticed shutter of a window just seen from the balcony.

He stepped back into the room with a feeling of nausea, and blowing out the candles sat down alone, in the twilight, amongst the empty chairs. There were dark corners in the room; the broadening light searched into them, and suddenly the air was tinged with warm gold. Somewhere the sun had risen. In a

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little, Scrope heard a dropping sound of firing, and a few moments afterwards the rattle of a volley. The battle was joined. Scrope saw the trench again yawn up before his eyes. The Major was right. This morning, again, Lieutenant Scrope had the harder part of it.

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THE MAN OF WHEELS.

WHEN Sir Charles Fosbrook was told by Mr. Pepys that Tangier had been surrendered to the Moors, he asked at once after the fate of his gigantic mole; and when he was informed that his mole had been, before the evacuation, so utterly blown to pieces that its scattered blocks made the harbour impossible for anchorage, he forbade so much as the mention in his presence of the name of Africa. But if he had done with Tangier, Tangier had not done with him, and five years afterwards he became concerned in the most unexpected way with certain tragic consequences of that desperate siege.

He received a letter from an acquaintance of whom he had long lost sight, a Mr. Mardale of the Quarry House near Leamington, imploring him to give his opinion upon some new inventions. The value of the inventions could be easily gauged; Mr. Mardale claimed to have invented a wheel of perpetual rotation. Sir Charles, however, had his impulses of kindness. He knew Mr. Mardale to be an old and gentle person, a little touched in the head perhaps, who with money enough to surfeit every instinct of pleasure, had preferred to live a shy secluded life, busily engaged either in the collection of curiosities or the invention of toy-like futile machines. There was a girl too whom Sir Charles remembered, a weird elfin creature

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with extraordinary black eyes and hair and a clear white face. Her one regret in those days had been that she was not born a horse, and she had lived in the stables, in as horse like a fashion as was possible. Her ankle indeed still must bear an unnecessary scar through the application of a fierce horse-liniment to a sprain. No doubt, however, she had long since changed her ambitions. Sir Charles calculated her age. Resilda Mardale must be twenty-five years old and a deuced fine woman into the bargain. Sir Charles took a glance at his figure in his cheval-glass. He had reached middle-age to be sure, but he had a leg that many a spindle-shanked youngster might envy, nor was there any unbecoming protuberance at his waist. He wrote a letter accepting the invitation and a week later in the dusk of a June evening, drove up the long avenue of trees to the terrace of the Quarry House.

The house was a solid square mansion built upon the side of a hill, and the ground in front of it fell away very quickly from the terrace to what Sir Charles imagined must be a pond, for a light mist hung at the bottom. On the other side of the pond the ground rose again in a steep hill. But Sir Charles had no opportunity at this moment to get any accurate knowledge of the house and its surroundings. For apart from the darkness, it was close upon supper-time and Miss Resilda Mardale must assuredly not be kept waiting. His valet subsequently declared that Sir Charles had seldom been so particular in the choice of his coat and small-clothes; and the supper-bell certainly rang out before he was satisfied with the set of his cravat.

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He could not, however, consider his pains wasted when once he was set down opposite to Resilda. She was taller than he had expected her to be, but he did not count height a fault so long as there was grace to carry it off, and grace she had in plenty. Her face had gained in delicacy and lost nothing of its brilliancy, or of its remarkable clearness of complexion. Her hair too if it was less rebellious, and more neatly coiled, had retained its glory of profusion, and her big black eyes, though to be sure they were grown a trifle sedate, no doubt could sparkle as of old. Sir Charles set himself to make them sparkle. Old Mr. Mardale prattled of his inventions to his heart's delight—he described the wheel, and also a flying machine and besides the flying machine, an engine by which steam might be used to raise water to great altitudes. Sir Charles was ready from time to time with a polite, if not always an appropriate comment, and for the rest he paid compliments to Resilda. Still the eyes did not sparkle, indeed a pucker appeared and deepened on her forehead. Sir Charles accordingly redoubled his gallantries, he was slyly humorous about the horse-liniment, and thereupon came the remark which so surprised him and was the beginning of his strange discoveries. For Resilda suddenly leaned towards him and said frankly:

"I would much rather, Sir Charles, you told me something of your great mole at Tangier."

Sir Charles had reason for surprise. The world had long since forgotten his mole, if ever it had been concerned in it. Yet here was a girl whose thoughts might be expected to run on youths and ribands talk-

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ing of it in a little village four miles from Leamington as though there were no topic more universal. Sir Charles Fosbrook answered her gravely.

"I thought never to speak of Tangier and the mole again. I spent many years upon the devising and construction of that great breakwater. It could have sheltered every ship of his Majesty's navy. It was wife and children to me. My heart lay very close to it. I fancied indeed my heart was disrupted with the disruption of the mole, and it has at all events, lain ever since as heavy as King Charles' Chest."

"Yes, I can understand that," said Resilda.

Sir Charles had vowed never to speak of the matter again. But he had kept his vow for five long years, and besides here was a girl of a remarkable beauty expressing sympathy and asking for information. Sir Charles broke his vow and talked, and the girl helped him. A suspicion that she might have primed herself with knowledge in view of his coming, vanished before the flame of her enthusiasm. She knew the history of its building almost as well as he did himself, and could even set him right in his dates. It was she who knew the exact day on which King Charles' Chest, that great block of mortised stones, which formed as it were the keystone of the breakwater, had been lowered into its place. Sir Charles abandoned all reserve, and talked freely of his hopes and fears as the pier ran farther out and out into the currents of the Straits, of his bitter disappointment when his labours were destroyed. He forgot his gallantries, he showed himself the man he was. Neither he nor Resilda noticed a low rumble of thunder or the beating of sudden rain

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upon the windows, so occupied were they with the theme of their talk; and at last Sir Charles, leaning back in his chair, cried out with astonishment and delight.

"But how is it that my mole is so familiar a thing to you? Explain it if you please! Never have I spent so agreeable an evening."

A momentary embarrassment seemed to follow upon his words. Resilda looked at her father who chuckled and explained.

"Sir, an old soldier years ago came over the hill in front of the house and begged for alms. He found my daughter on the terrace in a lucky moment for himself. He had all sorts of wonderful stories of Tangier and the great mole which was then a building. Resilda was set on fire that day, and though the King and the Parliament might shut their eyes to the sore straits of that town and the gallantry of its defenders, no one was allowed to forget them in the Quarry House. To tell the truth I sometimes envied the obliviousness of Parliament," and he laughed gently. "So from the first my daughter was primed with the history of that siege, and lately we have had further means of knowledge—" He began to speak warily and with embarrassment— "For two years ago Resilda married an officer of The King's Battalion, Major Lashley."

"Here are two surprises," cried Sir Charles. "For in the first place, Madam, I had no thought you were wed. Blame a bachelor's stupidity!" and he glanced at her left hand which lay upon the table-cloth with the band of gold gleaming upon a finger. "In the

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second place I knew Major Lashley very well, though it is news to me that he ever troubled his head with my mole. A very gallant officer, who defended Charles Fort through many nights of great suspense, and cleft his way back to Tangier when his ammunition was expended. I shall be very glad to shake the Major once more by the hand."

At once Sir Charles was aware that he had uttered the most awkward and unsuitable remark. Resilda Lashley, as he must now term her, actually flinched away from him and then sat with a vague staring look of pain as though she had been shocked clean out of her wits. She recovered herself in a moment, but she did not speak, neither had Sir Charles any words. He looked at her dress which was white and had not so much as a black riband dangling anywhere about it.

But there were other events than death which could make the utterance of his wish a *gaucherie*. Sir Charles prided himself upon his tact, particularly with a good-looking woman, and he was therefore much abashed and confused. The only one who remained undisturbed was Mr. Mardale. His mind was never for very long off his wheels, or his works of art. It was the turn of his pictures now. He had picked up a genuine Rubens in Ghent, he declared. It was standing somewhere in the great drawing-room on the carpet against the back of a chair, and Sir Charles must look at it in the morning, if only it could be found. He had clean forgotten all about his daughter it appeared. She, however, had a mind to clear the mystery up, and interrupting her father.

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"It is right that you should know," she said simply, "Major Lashley disappeared six months ago."

"Disappeared!" exclaimed Sir Charles in spite of himself, and the astonishment in his voice woke the old gentleman from his prattle.

"To be sure," said he apologetically, "I should have told you before of the sad business. Yes, Sir, Major Lashley disappeared, utterly from this very house on the eleventh night of last December, and though the country-side was scoured and every ragamuffin for miles round brought to question, no trace of him has anywhere been discovered from that day to this."

An intuition slipped into Sir Charles Fosbrook's mind, and though he would have dismissed it as entirely unwarrantable, persisted there. The thought of the steep slope of ground before the house and the mist in the hollow between the two hills. The mist was undoubtedly the exhalation from a pond. The pond might have reeds which might catch and gather a body. But the pond would have been dragged. Still the thought of the pond remained while he expressed a vague hope that the Major might by God's will yet be restored to them.

He had barely ended before a louder gust of rain than ordinary smote upon the windows and immediately there followed a knocking upon the hall-door. The sound was violent, and it came with so opposite a rapidity upon the heels of Fosbrook's words that it thrilled and startled him. There was something very timely in the circumstances of night and storm and that premonitory clapping at the door. Sir Charles

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looked towards the door in a glow of anticipation. He had time to notice, however, how deeply Resilda herself was stirred; her left hand which had lain loose upon the table-cloth was now tightly clenched, and she had a difficulty in breathing. The one strange point in her conduct was that although she looked towards the door like Sir Charles Fosbrook, there was more of suspense in the look than of the eagerness of welcome. The butler, however, had no news of Major Lashley to announce. He merely presented the compliments of Mr. Gibson Jerkley who had been caught in the storm near the Quarry House and ten miles from his home. Mr. Jerkley prayed for supper and a dry suit of clothes.

"And a bed too," said Resilda, with a flush of colour in her cheeks, and begging Sir Charles' permission she rose from the table. Sir Charles was disappointed by the mention of a strange name. Mr. Mardale, however, to whom that loud knocking upon the door had been void of suggestion, now became alert. He looked with a strange anxiety after his daughter, an anxiety which surprised Fosbrook, to whom this man of wheels and little toys had seemed lacking in the natural affections.

"And a bed too," repeated Mr. Mardale doubtfully, "to be sure! To be sure!" And though he went into the hall to welcome his visitor, it was not altogether without reluctance.

Mr. Gibson Jerkley was a man of about thirty years. He had a brown open personable countenance, a pair of frank blue eyes, and the steady restful air of a man who has made his account with himself, and who

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neither speaks to win praise nor is at pains to escape dislike. Sir Charles Fosbrook was from the first taken with the man, though he spoke little with him for the moment. For being tired with his long journey from London, he retired shortly to his room.

But however tired he was, Sir Charles found that it was quite impossible for him to sleep. The cracking of the rain upon his windows, the groaning trees in the park, and the wail of the wind among the chimneys and about the corners of the house were no doubt for something in a Londoner's sleeplessness. But the mysterious disappearance of Major Lashley was at the bottom of it. He thought again of the pond. He imagined a violent kidnapping and his fancies went to work at devising motives. Some quarrel long ago in the crowded city of Tangier and now brought to a tragical finish amongst the oaks and fields of England. Perhaps a Moor had travelled over seas for his vengeance and found his way from village to village like that Baracen lady of old times. And when he had come to this point of his reflections, he heard a light rapping upon his door. He got out of bed and opened it. He saw Mr. Gibson Jerkley standing on the threshold with a candle in one hand and a finger of the other at his lip.

"I saw a light beneath your door," said Jerkley, and Sir Charles made room for him to enter. He closed the door cautiously, and setting his candle down upon a chest of drawers, said without any hesitation:

"I have come, Sir, to ask for your advice. I do not wonder at your surprise, it is indeed a strange sort

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of intrusion for a man to make upon whom you have never clapped your eyes before this evening. But for one thing I fancy Mrs. Lashley wishes me to ask you for the favour. She has said nothing definitely, in faith she could not as you will understand when you have heard the story. But that I come with her approval I am very sure. For another, had she disapproved, I should none the less have come of my own accord. Sir, though I know you very well by reputation, I have had the honour of few words with you, but my life has taught me to trust boldly where my eyes bid me trust. And the whole affair is so strange that one more strange act like this intrusion of mine is quite of apiece. I ask you therefore to listen to me. The listening pledges you to nothing, and at the worst, I can promise you, my story will while away a sleepless hour. If when you have heard, you can give us your advice, I shall be very glad. For we are sunk in such a quandary that a new point of view cannot but help us."

Sir Charles pointed to a chair and politely turned away to hide a yawn. For the young man's lengthy exordium had made him very drowsy. He could very comfortably had fallen asleep at this moment. But Gibson Jerkley began to speak, and in a short space of time Sir Charles was as wide-awake as any housebreaker.

"Eight years ago," said he, "I came very often to the Quarry House, but I always rode homewards discontented in the evening. Resilda at that time had a great ambition to be a boy. The sight of any brown bare-legged lad gipsying down the hill with a song

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upon his lips, would set her viciously kicking the toes of her satin slippers against the parapet of the terrace, and clamouring at her sex. Now I was not of the same mind with Resilda."

"That I can well understand," said Sir Charles drily. "But, my young friend, I can remember a time when Resilda desired of all things to be a horse. There was something hopeful because more human in her wish to be a boy, had you only known."

Mr. Jerkley nodded gravely and continued:

"I was young enough to argue the point with her, which did me no good, and then to make matters worse, the soldier from Tangier came over the hill, with his stories of Major Lashley—Captain he was then."

"Major Lashley," exclaimed Sir Charles. "I did not hear the soldier was one of Major Lashley's men!"

"But he was and thenceforward the world went very ill with me. Reports of battles, and sorties came home at rare intervals. She was the first to read of them. Major Lashley's name was more than once mentioned. We country gentlemen who stayed at home and looked after our farms and our tenants, having no experience of war, suffered greatly in the comparison. So at the last I ordered my affairs for a long voyage, and without taking leave of any but my nearest neighbours and friends, I slipped off one evening to the wars."

"You did not wish your friends at the Quarry House good-bye?" said Fosbrook.

"No. It might have seemed that I was making claims, and, after all, one has one's pride. I would

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never, I think, ask a woman to wait for me. But she heard of course after I had gone and—I am speaking frankly—I believe the news woke the woman in her. At all events there was little talk after of Tangier at the Quarry House."

Mr. Jerkley related his subsequent history. He had sailed at his own charges to Africa; he had enlisted as a gentleman volunteer in The King's Battalion; he had served under Major Lashley in the Charles Fort where he was in charge of the great speaking-trumpet by which the force received its orders from the Lieutenant-Governor in Tangier Castle; he took part in the desperate attempt to cut a way back through the Moorish army into the town. In that fight he was wounded and left behind for dead.

"A year later peace was made. Tangier was evacuated, Major Lashley returned to England. Now the Major and I despite the difference in rank had been friends. I had spoken to him of Miss Mardale's admiration, and as chance would have it, he came to Leamington to take the waters."

"Chance?" said Sir Charles drily.

"Well it may have been intention," said Jerkley. "There was no reason in the world why he should not seek her out. She was not promised to me, and very likely I had spoken of her with enthusiasm. For a long time she would not consent to listen to him. He was, however, no less persistent—he pleaded his suit for three years. I was dead you understand, and what man worth a pinch of salt would wish a woman to waste her gift of life in so sterile a fidelity. . . . You follow me? At the end of three years Resilda

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yielded to his pleadings, and the persuasions of her friends. For Major Lashley quickly made himself a position in the country. They were married, Major Lashley was not a rich man, it was decided that they should both live at the Quarry House."

"And what had Mr. Mardale to say to it?" asked Fosbrook.

"Oh, Sir," said Gibson Jerkley with a laugh. "Mr. Mardale is a man of wheels, and little steel springs. Let him sit at his work-table in that crowded drawing-room on the first floor, without interruption, and he will be very well content, I can assure you. . . . Hush!" and he suddenly raised his hand. In the silence which followed, they both distinctly heard the sound of some one stirring in the house. Mr. Jerkley went to the door and opened it. The door gave on to the passage which was shut off at its far end by another door from the square tulip-wood landing, at the head of the stairs. He came back into the bedroom.

"There is a light on the other side of the passage-door," said he. "But I have no doubt it is Mr. Mardale going to his bed. He sits late at his work-table."

Sir Charles brought him back to his story.

"Meanwhile you were counted for dead, but actually you were taken prisoner. There is one thing which I do not understand. When peace was concluded the prisoners were freed and an officer was sent up into Morocco to secure their release."

"There were many oversights like mine, I have no doubt. The Moors were reluctant enough to produce their captives. We who were supposed to be dead

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were not particularly looked for. I have no doubt there is many a poor English soldier sweating out his soul in the uplands of that country to this day. I escaped two years ago, just about the time, in fact, when Miss Resilda Mardale became Mrs. Lashley. I crept down over the hillside behind Tangier one dark evening, and lay all night beneath a bush of tamarisks dreaming the Moors were still about me. But an inexplicable silence reigned and nowhere was the darkness spotted by the flame of any camp-fire. In the morning I looked down to Tangier. The first thing which I noticed was your broken stump of mole, the second that nowhere upon the ring of broken wall could be seen the flash of a red coat or the glitter of a musket-barrel. I came down into Tangier, I had no money and no friends. I got away in a felucca to Spain. From Spain I worked my passage to England. I came home nine months ago. And here is the trouble. Three months after I returned Major Lashley disappeared. You understand?"

"Oh," cried Sir Charles, and he jumped in his chair. "I understand indeed. Suspicion settled upon you," and as it ever will upon the least provocation suspicion passed for a moment into Fosbrook's brain. He was heartily ashamed of it when he looked into Jerkley's face. It would need, assuredly, a criminal of an uncommon astuteness to come at this hour with this story. Mr. Jerkley was not that criminal.

"Yes," he answered simply, "I am looked at askance, devil a doubt of it. I would not care a snap of the fingers were I alone in the matter; but there is

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Mrs. Lashley . . . she is neither wife nor widow . . . and," he took a step across the room and said quicky—"and were she known for a widow, there is still the suspicion upon me like a great iron door between us."

"Can you help us, Sir Charles! Can you see light?"

"You must tell me the details of the Major's disappearance," said Sir Charles, and the following details were given.

On the eleventh of December and at ten o'clock of the evening Major Lashley left the house to visit the stables which were situated in the Park and at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the house. A favourite mare, which he had hunted the day before, had gone lame, and all day Major Lashley had shown some anxiety; so that there was a natural reason why he should have gone out at the last moment before retiring to bed. Mrs. Lashley went up to her room at the same time, indeed with so exact a correspondence of movement that as she reached the polished tulip-wood landing at the top of the stairs, she heard the front door latch as her husband drew it to behind him. That was the last she heard of him.

"She woke up suddenly," said Jerkley, "in the middle of the night, and found that her husband was not at her side. She waited for a little and then rose from her bed. She drew the window-curtains aside and by the glimmering light which came into the room, was able to read the dial of her watch. It was seven minutes past three of the morning. She immediately lighted her candle and went to rouse her father. Her door opened upon the landing, it is the first door

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upon the left hand side as you mount the stairs; the big drawing-room opens on to the landing too, but faces the stairs. Mrs. Lashley at once went to that room, knowing how late Mr. Mardale is used to sit over his inventions, and as she expected, found him there. A search was at once arranged; every servant in the house was at once impressed, and in the morning every servant on the estate. Major Lashley had left the stable at a quarter past ten. He has been seen by no one since."

Sir Charles reflected upon this story.

"There is a pond in front of the house," said he.

"It was dragged in the morning," replied Jerkley.

Sir Charles made various inquiries and received the most unsatisfactory answers for his purpose. Major Lashley had been a favourite alike at Tangier, and in the country. He had a winning trick of a smile, which made friends for him even among his country's enemies. Mr. Jerkley could not think of a man who had wished him ill.

"Well, I will think the matter over," said Sir Charles, who had not an idea in his head, and he held the door open for Mr. Jerkley. Both men stood upon the threshold, looked down the passage and then looked at one another.

"It is strange," said Jerkley.

"The light has been a long while burning on the landing," said Sir Charles. They walked on tip-toe down the passage to the door beneath which one bright bar of light stretched across the floor. Jerkley opened the door and looked through; Sir Charles who was the taller man looked over Jerkley's head

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and never were two men more surprised. In the embrasure of that door to the left of the stair-case, the door behind which Resilda Lashley slept, old Mr. Mardale reclined, with his back propped against the door-post. He had fallen asleep at his post, and a lighted candle half-burnt flamed at his side. The reason of his presence then was clear to them both.

"A morbid fancy!" he said in a whisper, but with a considerable anger in his voice. "Such a fancy as comes only to a man who has lost his judgment through much loneliness. See, he sits like any negro outside an Eastern harem! Sir, I am shamed by him."

"You have reason I take the liberty to say," said Sir Charles absently, and he went back to his room puzzling over what he had seen, and over what he could neither see nor understand. The desire for sleep was altogether gone from him. He opened his window and leaned out. The rain had ceased, but the branches still dripped and the air was of an incomparable sweetness. Blackbirds and thrushes on the lawns, and in the thicket-depths were singing as though their lives hung upon the full fresh utterance of each note. A clear pure light was diffused across the world. Fosbrook went back to his old idea of some vengeful pursuit sprung from a wrong done long ago in Tangier. The picture of Major Lashley struck with terror as he got news of his pursuers, and slinking off into the darkness. Even now, somewhere or another, on the uplands or the plains of England, he might be rising from beneath a hedge to shake the rain from his besmeared clothes, and start off

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afresh on another day's aimless flight. The notion caught his imagination and comforted him to sleep. But in the morning he woke to recognise its unreality. The unreality became yet more vivid to him at the breakfast-table, when he sat with two pairs of young eyes turning again and again trustfully towards him. The very reliance which the man and woman so clearly placed in him spurred him. Since they looked to him to clear up the mystery, why he must do it, and there was an end of the matter.

He was none the less glad, however, when Mr. Jerkley announced his intention of returning home. There would at all events be one pair of eyes the less. He strolled with Mr. Jerkley on the terrace after breakfast with a deep air of cogitation, the better to avoid questions. Gibson Jerkley, however, was himself in a ruminative mood. He stopped, and gazing across the valley to the riband of road descending the hill:

"Down that road the soldier came," said he, "whose stories brought about all this misfortune."

"And very likely down that road will come the bearer of news to make an end of it," rejoined Fosbrook sententiously. Mr. Jerkley looked at him with a sudden upspringing of hope, and Sir Charles nodded with ineffable mystery, never guessing how these lightly spoken words were to return to his mind with the strength of a fulfilled prophecy.

As he nodded, however, he turned about towards the house, and a certain disfigurement struck upon his eyes. Two windows on the first floor were entirely bricked up, and as the house was square with level

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tiers of windows, they gave to it an unsightly look. Sir Charles inquired of his companion if he could account for them.

"To be sure," said Jerkley, with the inattention of a man diverted from serious thought to an unimportant topic. "They are the windows of the room in which Mrs. Mardale died a quarter of a century ago. Mr. Mardale locked the door as soon as his wife was taken from it to the church, and the next day he had the windows blocked. No one but he has entered the room during all these years, the key has never left his person. It must be the ruin of a room by now. You can imagine it, the dust gathering, the curtains rotting, in the darkness and at times the old man sitting there with his head running on days long since dead. But you know Mr. Mardale, he is not as other men."

Sir Charles swung round alertly to his companion. To him at all events the topic was not an indifferent one.

"Yet you say, you believe that he is void of the natural affections. Last night we saw a proof, a crazy proof if you will, but none the less a proof of his devotion to his daughter. To-day you give me as sure a one of his devotion to his dead wife," and almost before he had finished, Mr. Mardale was calling to him from the steps of the house.

He spent all that morning in the great drawing-room on the first floor. It was a room of rich furniture, grown dingy with dust and inattention, and crowded from end to end with tables and chairs and sofas, on which were heaped in a confused medley, pictures, statues of marble, fans and buckles from

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Spain, queer barbaric ornaments, ivory carvings from the Chinese. Sir Charles could hardly make his way to the little cleared space by the window, where Mr. Mardale worked, without brushing some irreplaceable treasure to the floor. Once there he was fettered for the morning. Mr. Mardale with all the undisciplined enthusiasm of an amateur, jumping from this invention to that, beaming over his spectacles. Sir Charles listened with here and there a word of advice, or of sympathy with the labour of creation. But his thoughts were busy elsewhere, he was pondering over his discovery of the morning, over the sight which he and Jerkley had seen last night, he was accustoming himself to regard the old man in a strange new light, as an over-careful father and a sorely-stricken husband. Meanwhile he sat over against the window which was in the side of the house, and since the house was built upon a slope of hill, although the window was on the first floor, a broad terrace of grass stretched away from it to a circle of gravel ornamented with statues. On this terrace he saw Mrs. Lashley, and reflected uncomfortably that he must meet her at dinner and again sustain the inquiry of her eyes.

He avoided actual questions, however, and as soon as dinner was over, with a meaning look at the girl to assure her that he was busy with her business, he retired to the library. Then he sat himself down to think the matter over restfully. But the room, walled with books upon its three sides, fronted the Southwest on its fourth, and as the afternoon advanced, the hot June sun streamed farther and farther into the room. Sir Charles moved his chair back, and again back, and

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again, until at last it was pushed into the one cool dark corner of the room. Then Sir Charles closed his wearied eyes the better to think. But he had slept little during the last night, and when he opened them again, it was with a guilty start. He rubbed his eyes, then he reached a hand down quickly at his side, and lifted a book out of the lowest shelf in the corner. The book was a volume of sermons. Sir Charles replaced it, and again dipped his hand into the lucky-bag. He drew out a tome of Mr. Hobbes' philosophy; Sir Charles was not in the mood for Hobbes; he tried again. On this third occasion he found something very much more to his taste, namely the second Volume of Anthony Hamilton's Memoirs of Count Grammont. This he laid upon his knee, and began glancing through the pages while he speculated upon the mystery of the Major's disappearance. His thoughts, however, lagged in a now well-worn circle, they begot nothing new in the way of a suggestion. On the other hand the book was quite new to him. He became less and less interested in his thoughts, more and more absorbed in the Memoirs. There were passages marked with a pencil-line in the margin, and marked, thought Sir Charles, by a discriminating judge. He began to look only for the marked passages, being sure that thus he would most easily come upon the raciest anecdotes. He read the story of the Count's pursuit by the brother of the lady he was affianced to. The brother caught up the Count when he was nearing Dover to return to France. "You have forgotten something," said the brother. "So I have," replied Grammont. "I have forgotten to marry your

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sister." Sir Charles chuckled and turned over the pages. There was an account of how the reprobate hero rode seventy miles into the country to keep a tryst with an *inamorata* and waited all night for no purpose in pouring rain by the Park gate. Sir Charles laughed aloud. He turned over more pages, and to his surprise came across, amongst the marked passages, a quite unentertaining anecdote of how Grammont lost a fine new suit of clothes, ordered for a masquerade at White Hall. Sir Charles read the story again, wondering why on earth this passage had been marked; and suddenly he was standing by the window, holding the book to the light in a quiver of excitement. Underneath certain letters in the words of this marked passage he had noticed dents in the paper, as though by the pressure of a pencil point. Now that he stood by the light, he made sure of the dents, and he saw also by the roughness of the paper about them, that the pencil-marks had been carefully erased. He read these underlined letters together—they made a word, two words—a sentence, and the sentence was an assignation.

Sir Charles could not remember that the critical moment in any of his great engineering undertakings, had ever caused him such a flutter of excitement, such a pulsing in his temples, such a catching of his breath —no, not even the lowering of Charles' Chest into the Waters of Tangier harbour. Everything at once became exaggerated out of its proportions, the silence of the house seemed potential and expectant, the shadows in the room now that the sun was low had their message, he felt a queer chill run down his spine

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like ice, he shivered. Then he hurried to the door, locked it and sat down to a more careful study. And as he read, there came out before his eyes a story—a story told as it were in telegrams, a story of passion, of secret meetings, of gratitude for favours.

Who was the discriminating judge who had marked these passages and underlined these letters? The book was newly published, it was in the Quarry House, and there were three occupants of the Quarry House. Was it Mr. Mardale? The mere question raised a laugh. Resilda? Never. Major Lashley then? If not Major Lashley, who else?

It flashed into his mind that here in this book he might hold the history of the Major's long courtship of Resilda. But he dismissed the notion contemptuously. Gibson Jerkley had told him of that courtship, and of the girl's reluctance to respond to it. Besides Resilda was never the woman in this story. Perhaps the first volume might augment it and give the clue to the woman's identity. Sir Charles hunted desperately through the shelves. Nowhere was the first volume to be found. He wasted half-an-hour before he understood why. Of course the other volume would be in the woman's keeping, and how in the world to discover her?

Things moved very quickly with Sir Charles that afternoon. He had shut up the volume and laid it on the table, the while he climbed up and down the library steps. From the top of the steps he glanced about the room in a despairing way, and his eyes lit upon the table. For the first time he remarked the binding which was of a brown leather. But all the

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books on the shelves were bound uniformly in marble boards with a red backing. He sprang down from the steps with the vigour of a boy, and seizing the book looked in the fly leaf for a name. There was a name, the name of a bookseller in Leamington, and as he closed the book again, some one rapped upon the door. Sir Charles opened it and saw Mr. Mardale. He gave the old gentleman no time to speak.

"Mr. Mardale," said he, "I am a man of plethoric habits, and must needs take exercise. Can you lend me a horse?"

Mr. Mardale was disappointed as his manner showed. He had perhaps at that very moment hit upon a new and most revolutionary invention. But his manners hindered him from showing more than a trace of the disappointment, and Sir Charles rode out to the bookseller at Leamington, with the volume beneath his coat.

"Can you show me the companion to this?" said he, dumping it down upon the counter. The bookseller seized upon the volume and fondled it.

"It is not fair," he cried. "In any other affair but books, it would be called at once sheer dishonesty. Here have been my subscribers clamouring for the Memoirs for six months and more."

"You hire out your books!" cried Sir Charles.

"Give would be the properer word," grumbled the man.

Sir Charles humbly apologised.

"It was the purest oversight," said he, "and I will gladly pay double. But I need the first volume."

"The first volume, Sir," replied the bookseller in a

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mollified voice, "is in the like case with the second. There has been an oversight."

"But who has it?"

The bookseller was with difficulty persuaded to search his list. He kept his papers in the greatest disorder, so that it was no wonder people kept his volumes until they forgot them. But in the end he found his list.

"Mrs. Ripley," he read out, "Mrs. Ripley of Burley Wood."

"And where is Burley Wood?" asked Sir Charles.

"It is a village, Sir, six miles from Leamington," replied the bookseller, and he gave some rough directions as to the road.

Sir Charles mounted his horse and cantered down the Parade. The sun was setting; he would for a something miss his supper; but he meant to see Burley Wood that day, and he would have just daylight enough for his purpose. As he entered the village, he caught up a labourer returning from the fields. Sir Charles drew rein beside him.

"Will you tell me, if you please, where Mrs. Ripley lives?"

The man looked up and grinned.

"In the churchyard," said he.

"Do you mean she is dead?"

"No less."

"When did she die?"

"Well, it may have been a month or two ago, or it may have been more."

"Show me her grave and there's a silver shilling in your pocket."

The labourer led Fosbrook to a corner of the

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churchyard. Then upon a head-stone he read that Mary Ripley aged twenty-nine had died on December 7th. December the 7th thought Sir Charles, five days before Major Lashley died. Then he turned quickly to the labourer.

"Can you tell me when Mrs. Ripley was buried?"

"I can find out for another shilling."

"You shall have it, man."

The labourer hurried off, discovered the sexton, and came back. But instead of the civil gentleman he had left, he found now a man with a face of horror, and eyes that had seen appalling things. Sir Charles had remained in the churchyard by the grave, he had looked about him from one to the other of the mounds of turf, his imagination already stimulated had been quickened by what he had seen; he stood with the face of a Medusa.

"She was buried when?" he asked.

"On December the 11th," replied the labourer.

Sir Charles showed no surprise. He stood very still for a moment, then he gave the man his two shillings, and walked to the gate where his horse was tied. Then he inquired the nearest way to the Quarry House, and he was pointed out a bridle-path running across fields to a hill. As he mounted he asked another question.

"Mr. Ripley is alive?"

"Yes."

"It must be Mr. Ripley," Sir Charles assured himself, as he rode through the dusk of the evening. "It must be . . . It must be . . . until the words in his mind became a meaningless echo of his horse's hoofs. He rode up the hill, left the bridle-path for

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the road, and suddenly, and long before he had expected, he saw beneath him the red square of the Quarry House and the smoke from its chimneys. He was on that very road up which he and Gibson Jerkley had looked that morning. Down that road, he had said, would come the man who knew how Major Lashley had disappeared, and within twelve hours down that road the man was coming. "But it must be Mr. Ripley," he said to himself.

None the less he took occasion at supper to speak of his ride.

"I rode by Leamington to Burley Wood. I went into the churchyard." Then he stopped, but as though the truth was meant to come to light, Resilda helped him out.

"I had a dear friend buried there not so long ago," she said. "Father, you remember Mrs. Ripley."

"I saw her grave this afternoon," said Fosbrook, with his eyes upon Mr. Mardale. It might have been a mere accident, it was in any case a trifling thing, the mere shaking of a hand, the spilling of a spoonful of salt upon the table, but trifling things have their suggestions. He remembered that Resilda, when she had waked up on the night of December the 11th to find herself alone, had sought out her father, who was still up, and at work in the big drawing-room. He remembered too that the window of that room gave on to a terrace of grass. A man might go out by that window —aye and return without a soul but himself being the wiser.

Of course it was all guess work and inference, and besides, it must be Mr. Ripley. Mr. Ripley might as

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easily have discovered the secret of the Memoirs as himself—or anyone else. Mr. Ripley would have justification for anger and indeed for more—yes for what men who are not affected are used to call a crime .... Sir Charles abruptly stopped his reasoning, seeing that it was prompted by a defence of Mr. Mardale.

He made his escape from his hosts as soon as he decently could and retired to his room. He sat down in his room and thought, and he thought to some purpose. He blew out his candle, and stole down the stairs into the hall. He had met no one. From the hall he went to the library-door and opened it—ever so gently. The room was quite dark. Sir Charles felt his way across it to his chair in the corner. He sat down in the darkness and waited. After a time inconceivably long, after every board in the house had cracked a million times, he heard distinctly a light shuffling step in the passage, and after that the latch of the door release itself from the socket. He heard nothing more, for a little, he could only guess that the door was being silently opened by some one who carried no candle. Then the shuffling footsteps began to move gently across the room, towards him, towards the corner where he was sitting. Sir Charles had had no doubt but that they would, not a single doubt, but none the less as he sat there in the dark, he felt the hair rising on his scalp, and all his body thrill. Then a hand groped and touched him. A cry rang out, but it was Sir Charles who uttered it. A voice answered quietly:

"You had fallen asleep. I regret to have waked you."

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"I was not asleep, Mr. Mardale."

There was a pause and Mr. Mardale continued.

"I cannot sleep to-night, I came for a book."

"I know. For the book I took back to Leamington to-day, before I went to visit Mrs. Ripley's grave."

There was a yet longer pause before Mr. Mardale spoke again.

"Stay then!" he said in the same gentle voice. "I will fetch a light." He shuffled out of the room, and to Sir Charles it seemed again an inconceivably long time before he returned. He came back with a single candle, which he placed upon the table, a little star of light, showing the faces of the two men shadowy and dim. He closed the door carefully, and coming back, said simply:

"You know."

"Yes."

"How did you find out?"

"I saw the grave. I noticed the remarkable height of the mound. I guessed."

"Yes," said Mr. Mardale, and in a low voice he explained. "I found the book here one day, that he left by accident. On December 11th Mrs. Ripley was buried, and that night he left the house—for the stables, yes, but he did not return from the stables. It seemed quite clear to me where he would be that night. People hereabouts take me for a man crazed and daft, I know that very well, but I know something of passion, Sir Charles. I have had my griefs to bear. Oh, I knew where he would be. I followed over the hill down to the churchyard of Burley Wood. I had no thought of what I should do. I carried a

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stick in my hand, I had no thought of using it. But I found him lying full-length upon the grave with his lips pressed to the earth of it, whispering to her who lay beneath him. . . . I called to him to stand up and he did. I bade him, if he dared, repeat the words he had used to my face, to me, the father of the girl he had married, and he did—triumphantly, recklessly. I struck at him with the knob of my stick, the knob was heavy, I struck with all my might, the blow fell upon his forehead. The spade was lying on the ground beside the grave. I buried him with her. Now what will you do?"

"Nothing," said Sir Charles.

"But Mr. Jerkley asked you to help him."

"I shall tell a lie."

"My friend, there is no need," said the old man with his gentle smile. "When I went out for this candle I . . . " Sir Charles broke in upon him in a whirl of horror.

"No. Don't say it! You did not!"

"I did," replied Mr. Mardale. "The poison is a kindly one. I shall be dead before morning. I shall sleep my way to death. I do not mind, for I fear that, after all, my inventions are of little worth. I have left a confession on my writing-desk. There is no reason—is there?—why he and she should be kept apart?"

It was not a question which Sir Charles could discuss. He said nothing, and was again left alone in the darkness, listening to the shuffling footsteps of Mr. Mardale as, for the last time, he mounted the stairs.

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MR. MITCHELBOURNE'S LAST ESCAPADE.

It was in the kitchen of the inn at Framlingham that Mr. Mitchelbourne came across the man who was afraid, and during the Christmas week of the year 1681. Lewis Mitchelbourne was young in those days, and esteemed as a gentleman of refinement and sensibility, with a queer taste for escapades, pardonable by reason of his youth. It was his pride to bear his part in the graceful tactics of a minuet, while a saddled horse waited for him at the door. He delighted to vanish of a sudden from the lighted circle of his friends into the byways where none knew him, or held him of account, not that it was all vanity with Mitchelbourne though no doubt the knowledge that his associates in London Town were speculating upon his whereabouts tickled him pleasurably through many a solitary day. But he was possessed both of courage and resource, qualities for which he found too infrequent an exercise in his ordinary life; and so he felt it good to be free for awhile, not from the restraints but from the safeguards, with which his social circumstances surrounded him. He had his spice of philosophy too, and discovered that these sharp contrasts,—luxury and hardship, treading hard upon each

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other and the new strange people with whom he fell in, kept fresh his zest of life.

Thus it happened that at a time when families were gathering cheerily each about a single fireside, Mr. Mitchelbourne was riding alone through the muddy and desolate lanes of Suffolk. The winter was not seasonable; men were not tempted out of doors. There was neither briskness nor sunlight in the air, and there was no snow upon the ground. It was a December of dripping branches, and mists and steady pouring rains, with a raw sluggish cold, which crept into one's marrow.

The man who was afraid, a large, corpulent man, of a loose and heavy build, with a flaccid face and bright little inexpressive eyes like a bird's, sat on a bench within the glow of the fire.

"You travel far to-night?" he asked nervously, shuffling his feet.

"To-night!" exclaimed Mitchelbourne as he stood with his legs apart taking the comfortable warmth into his bones. "No further than from this fire to my bed," and he listened with enjoyment to the rain which cracked upon the window like a shower of gravel flung by some mischievous urchin. He was not suffered to listen long, for the corpulent man began again.

"I am an observer, sir. I pride myself upon it, but I have so much humility as to wish to put my observations to the test of fact. Now, from your carriage, I should judge you to serve His Majesty."

"A civilian may be straight. There is no law against it," returned Mitchelbourne, and he perceived

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that the ambiguity of his reply threw his questioner into a great alarm. He was at once interested. Here, it seemed, was one of those encounters which were the spice of his journeyings.

"You will pardon me," continued the stranger with a great assumption of heartiness, "but I am curious, sir, curious as Socrates, though I thank God I am no heathen. Here is Christmas, when a sensible gentleman, as upon my word I take you to be, sits to his table and drinks more than is good for him in honour of the season. Yet here are you upon the roads to Suffolk which have nothing to recommend them. I wonder at it, sir."

"You may do that," replied Mitchelbourne, "though to be sure, there are two of us in the like case."

"Oh, as for me," said his companion shrugging his shoulders, "I am on my way to be married. My name is Lance," and he blurted it out with a suddenness as though to catch Mitchelbourne off his guard. Mitchelbourne bowed politely.

"And my name is Mitchelbourne, and I travel for my pleasure, though my pleasure is mere gipsying, and has nothing to do with marriage. I take comfort from thinking that I have no friend from one rim of this country to the other, and that my closest intimates have not an inkling of my whereabouts."

Mr. Lance received the explanation with undisguised suspicion, and at supper, which the two men took together, he would be forever laying traps. Now he slipped some outlandish name or oath unexpectedly into his talk, and watched with a forward

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bend of his body to mark whether the word struck home; or again he mentioned some person with whom Mitchelbourne was quite unfamiliar. At length, however, he seemed satisfied, and drawing up his chair to the fire, he showed himself at once in his true character, a loud and gusty boaster.

"An exchange of sentiments, Mr. Mitchelbourne, with a chance acquaintance over a pipe and a glass—upon my word I think you are in the right of it, and there's no pleasanter way of passing an evening. I could tell you stories, sir; I served the King in his wars, but I scorn a braggart, and all these glories are over. I am now a man of peace, and, as I told you, on my way to be married. Am I wise? I do not know, but I sometimes think it preposterous that a man who has been here and there about the world, and could, if he were so meanly-minded, tell a tale or so of success in gallantry, should hamper himself with connubial fetters. But a man must settle, to be sure, and since the lady is young, and not wanting in looks or breeding or station, as I am told—"

"As you are told?" interrupted Mitchelbourne.

"Yes, for I have never seen her. No, not so much as her miniature. Nor have I seen her mother either, or any of the family, except the father, from whom I carry letters to introduce me. She lives in a house called 'The Porch' some miles from here. There is another house hard by to it, I understand, which has long stood empty and I have a mind to buy it. I bring a fortune, the lady a standing in the county."

"And what has the lady to say to it?" asked Mitchelbourne.

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"The lady!" replied Lance with a stare. "Nothing but what is dutiful, I'll be bound. The father is under obligations to me." He stopped suddenly, and Mitchelbourne, looking up, saw that his mouth had fallen. He sat with his eyes starting from his head and a face grey as lead, an image of panic pitiful to behold. Mitchelbourne spoke but got no answer. It seemed Lance could not answer—he was so arrested by a paralysis of terror. He sat staring straight in front of him, and it seemed at the mantelpiece which was just on a level with his eyes. The mantelpiece, however, had nothing to distinguish it from a score of others. Its counterpart might be found to this day in the parlour of any inn. A couple of china figures disfigured it, to be sure, but Mitchelbourne could not bring himself to believe that even their barbaric crudity had power to produce so visible a discomposure. He inclined to the notion that his companion was struck by a physical disease, perhaps some recrudescence of a malady contracted in those foreign lands of which he vaguely spoke.

"Sir, you are ill," said Mitchelbourne. "I will have a doctor, if there is one hereabouts to be found, brought to your relief." He sprang up as he spoke, and that action of his roused Lance out of his paralysis. "Have a care," he cried almost in a shriek, "Do not move! For pity, sir, do not move," and he in his turn rose from his chair. He rose trembling, and swept the dust off a corner of the mantelpiece into the palm of his hand. Then he held his palm to the lamp.

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"Have you seen the like of this before?" he asked in a low shaking voice.

Mitchelbourne looked over Lance's shoulder. The dust was in reality a very fine grain of a greenish tinge.

"Never!" said Mitchelbourne.

"No, nor I," said Lance, with a sudden cunning look at his companion, and opening his fingers, as he let the grain run between them. But he could not remove as easily from Mitchelbourne's memories that picture he had shown him of a shaking and a shaken man. Mitchelbourne went to bed divided in his feelings between pity for the lady Lance was to marry, and curiosity as to Lance's apprehensions. He lay awake for a long time speculating upon that mysterious green seed which could produce so extraordinary a panic, and in the morning his curiosity predominated. Since, therefore, he had no particular destination he was easily persuaded to ride to Saxmundham with Mr. Lance, who, for his part, was most earnest for a companion. On the journey Lance gave further evidence of his fears. He had a trick of looking backwards whenever they came to a corner of the road—an habitual trick, it seemed, acquired by a continued condition of fear. When they stopped at midday to eat at an ordinary, he inspected the guests through the chink at the hinges of the door before he would enter the room; and this, too, he did as though it had long been natural to him. He kept a bridle in his mouth, however; that little pile of grain upon the mantelshelf had somehow warned him into reticence, so that Mitchelbourne, had he not been addicted to his tobacco, would have learnt

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no more of the business and would have escaped the extraordinary peril which he was subsequently called upon to face.

But he *was* addicted to his tobacco, and no sooner had he finished his supper that night at Saxmundham than he called for a pipe. The maidservant fetched a handful from a cupboard and spread them upon the table, and amongst them was one plainly of Barbary manufacture. It had a straight wooden stem painted with hieroglyphics in red and green and a small reddish bowl of baked earth. Nine men out of ten would no doubt have overlooked it, but Mitchelbourne was the tenth man. His fancies were quick to kindle, and taking up the pipe he said in a musing voice:

"Now, how in the world comes a Barbary pipe to travel so far over seas and herd in the end with common clays in a little Suffolk village?"

He heard behind him the grating of a chair violently pushed back. The pipe seemingly made its appeal to Mr. Lance also.

"Has it been smoked?" he asked in a grave low voice.

"The inside of the bowl is stained," said Mitchelbourne.

Mitchelbourne had been inclined to believe that he had seen last evening the extremity of fear expressed in a man's face: he had now to admit that he had been wrong. Mr. Lance's terror was a Circe to him and sunk him into something grotesque and inhuman; he ran once or twice in a little tripping, silly run backwards and forwards like an animal trapped and out of its wits; and his face had the look of a man suffering

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from a nausea; so that Mitchelbourne, seeing him, was ashamed and hurt for their common nature.

"I must go," said Lance babbling his words. "I cannot stay. I must go."

"To-night?" exclaimed Mitchelbourne. "Six yards from the door you will be soaked!"

"Then there will be the fewer men abroad. I cannot sleep here! No, though it rained pistols and bullets I must go." He went into the passage, and calling his host secretly asked for his score. Mitchelbourne made a further effort to detain him.

"Make an inquiry of the landlord first. It may be a mere shadow that frightens you."

"Not a word, not a question," Lance implored. The mere suggestion increased a panic which seemed incapable of increase. "And for the shadow, why, that's true. The pipe's the shadow, and the shadow frightens me. A shadow! Yes! A shadow is a horrible, threatning thing! Show me a shadow cast by nothing and I am with you. But you might as easily hold that this Barbary pipe floated hither across the seas of its own will. No! 'Ware shadows, I say." And so he continued harping on the word, till the landlord fetched in the bill.

The landlord had his dissuasions too, but they availed not a jot more than Mr. Mitchelbourne's.

"The road is as black as a pauper's coffin," said he, "and damnable with ruts."

"So much the better," said Lance.

"There is no house where you can sleep nearer than Glemham, and no man would sleep there could he kennel elsewhere."

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"So much the better," said Lance. "Besides, I am expected to-morrow evening at 'The Porch' and Glemham is on the way." He paid his bill, slipped over to the stables and lent a hand to the saddling of his horse. Mitchelbourne, though for once in his life he regretted the precipitancy with which he welcomed strangers, was still sufficiently provoked to see the business to its end. His imagination was seized by the thought of this fat and vulgar person fleeing in terror through English lanes from a Barbary Moor. He had now a conjecture in his mind as to the nature of that greenish seed. He accordingly rode out with Lance toward Glemham.

It was a night of extraordinary blackness; you could not distinguish a hedge until the twigs stung across your face; the road was narrow, great tree-trunks with bulging roots lined it, at times it was very steep—and, besides and beyond every other discomfort, there was the rain. It fell pitilessly straight over the face of the country with a continuous roar as though the earth was a hollow drum. Both travellers were drenched to the skin before they were free of Saxmundham, and one of them, when after midnight they stumbled into the poor tumble-down parody of a tavern at Glemham, was in an extrême exhaustion. It was no more than an ague, said Lance, from which he periodically suffered, but the two men slept in the same bare room, and towards morning Mitchelbourne was awakened from a deep slumber by an unfamiliar voice talking at an incredible speed through the darkness in an uncouth tongue. He started up upon his elbow; the voice came from Lance's bed. He struck

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a light. Lance was in a high fever, which increased as the morning grew.

Now, whether he had the sickness latent within him when he came from Barbary, or whether his anxieties and corpulent habit made him an easy victim to disease, neither the doctor nor any one else could determine. But at twelve o'clock that day Lance was seized with an attack of cholera and by three in the afternoon he was dead. The suddenness of the catastrophe shocked Mr. Mitchelbourne inexpressibly. He stood gazing at the still features of the man whom fear had, during these last days, so grievously tormented, and was solemnly aware of the vanity of those fears. He could not pretend to any great esteem for his companion, but he made many suitable reflections upon the shears of the Fates and the tenacity of life, in which melancholy occupation he was interrupted by the doctor, who pointed out the necessity of immediate burial. Seven o'clock the next morning was the hour agreed upon, and Mitchelbourne at once searched in Lance's coat pockets for the letters which he carried. There were only two, superscribed respectively to Mrs. Ufford at "The Porch" near Glemham, and to her daughter Drusilla. At "The Porch" Mitchelbourne remembered Lance was expected this very evening, and he thought it right at once to ride thither with his gloomy news.

Having, therefore, sprinkled the letters plentifully with vinegar and taken such rough precautions as were possible to remove the taint of infection from the letters, he started about four o'clock. The evening was most melancholy. For, though no rain any

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longer fell, there was a continual pattering of drops from the trees and a ghostly creaking of branches in a light and almost imperceptible wind. The day, too, was falling, the grey overhang of cloud was changing to black, except for one wide space in the west, where a pale spectral light shone without radiance; and the last of that was fading when he pulled up at a parting of the roads and inquired of a man who chanced to be standing there his way to "The Porch." He was directed to ride down the road upon his left hand until he came to the second house, which he could not mistake, for there was a dyke or moat about the garden wall. He passed the first house a mile further on, and perhaps half a mile beyond that he came to the dyke and the high garden wall, and saw the gables of the second house loom up behind it black against the sky. A wooden bridge spanned the dyke and led to a wide gate. Mitchelbourne stopped his horse at the bridge. The gate stood open and he looked down an avenue of trees into a square of which three sides were made by the high garden wall, and the fourth and innermost by the house. Thus the whole length of the house fronted him, and it struck him as very singular that neither in the lower nor the upper windows was there anywhere a spark of light, nor was there any sound but the tossing of the branches and the wail of the wind among the chimneys. Not even a dog barked or rattled a chain, and from no chimney breathed a wisp of smoke. The house in the gloom of that melancholy evening had a singular eerie and tenantless look; and oppressive silence reigned there; and Mitchelbourne was unaccountably conscious of a

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growing aversion to it, as to something inimical and sinister.

He had crossed the mouth of a lane, he remembered, just at the first corner of the wall. The lane ran backwards from the road, parallel with the side wall of the garden. Mitchelbourne had a strong desire to ride down that lane and inspect the back of the house before he crossed the bridge into the garden. He was restrained for a moment by the thought that such a proceeding must savour of cowardice. But only for a moment. There had been no doubting the genuine nature of Lance's fears and those fears were very close to Mr. Mitchelbourne now. They were feeling like cold fingers about his heart. He was almost in the icy grip of them.

He turned and rode down the lane until he came to the end of the wall. A meadow stretched behind the house. Mitchelbourne unfastened the catch of a gate with his riding whip and entered it. He found himself upon the edge of a pool, which on the opposite side wetted the house wall. About the pool some elder trees and elms grew and overhung, and their boughs tapped like fingers upon the window-panes. Mitchelbourne was assured that the house was inhabited, since from one of the windows a strong yellow light blazed, and whenever a sharper gust blew the branches aside, swept across the face of the pool like a flaw of wind.

The lighted window was in the lowest storey, and Mitchelbourne, from the back of his horse, could see into the room. He was mystified beyond expression by what he saw. A deal table, three wooden chairs,

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some ragged curtains drawn back from the window, and a single lamp made up the furniture. The boards of the floor were bare and unswept; the paint peeled in strips from the panels of the walls; the discoloured ceiling was hung with cobwebs; the room in a word matched the outward aspect of the house in its look of long disuse. Yet it had occupants. Three men were seated at the table in the scarlet coats and boots of the King's officers. Their faces, though it was winter-time, were brown with the sun, and thin and drawn as with long privation and anxiety. They had little to say to one another, it seemed. Each man sat stiffly in a sort of suspense and expectation, with now and then a restless movement or a curt word as curtly answered.

Mitchelbourne rode back again, crossed the bridge, fastened his horse to a tree in the garden, and walked down the avenue to the door. As he mounted the steps, he perceived with something of a shock, that the door was wide open and that the void of the hall yawned black before him. It was a fresh surprise, but in this night of surprises, one more or less, he assured himself, was of little account. He stepped into the hall and walked forwards feeling with his hands in front of him. As he advanced, he saw a thin line of yellow upon the floor ahead of him. The line of yellow was a line of light, and it came, no doubt, from underneath a door, and the door, no doubt, was that behind which the three men waited. Mitchelbourne stopped. After all, he reflected, the three men were English officers wearing His Majesty's uniform, and, moreover, wearing it stained with their

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country's service. He walked forward and tapped upon the door. At once the light within the room was extinguished.

It needed just that swift and silent obliteration of the slip of light upon the floor to make Mitchelbourne afraid. He had been upon the brink of fear ever since he had seen that lonely and disquieting house; he was now caught in the full stream. He turned back. Through the open doorway, he saw the avenue of leafless trees tossing against a leaden sky. He took a step or two and then came suddenly to a halt. For all around him in the darkness he seemed to hear voices breathing and soft footsteps. He realised that his fear had overstepped his reason; he forced himself to remember the contempt he had felt for Lance's manifestations of terror; and swinging round again he flung open the door and entered the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he airily, and he got no answer whatsoever. In front of him was the grey panel of dim twilight where the window stood. The rest was black night and an absolute silence. A map of the room was quite clear in his recollections. The three men were seated he knew at the table on his right hand. The faint light from the window did not reach them, and they made no noise. Yet they were there. Why had they not answered him, he asked himself. He could not even hear them breathing, though he strained his ears. He could only hear his heart drumming at his breast, the blood pulsing in his temples. Why did they hold their breath? He crossed the room, not knowing what he

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did, bereft of his wits. He had a confused, ridiculous picture of himself wearing the flaccid, panic stricken face of Mr. Lance, like an ass' head, not holding the wand of Titania. He reached the window and stood in its embrasure, and there one definite, practical thought crept into his mind. He was visible to these men who were invisible to him. The thought suggested a precaution, and with the trembling haste of a man afraid, he tore at the curtains and dragged them till they met across the window so that even the faint grey glimmer of the night no longer had entrance. The next moment he heard the door behind him latch and a key turn in the lock. He crouched beneath the window and did not stand up again until a light was struck, and the lamp relit.

The lighting of the lamp restored Mr. Mitchelbourne, if not to the full measure of his confidence, at all events to an appreciation that the chief warrant for his trepidation was removed. What he had with some appearance of reason feared was a sudden attack in the dark. With the lamp lit, he could surely stand in no danger of any violence at the hands of three King's officers whom he had never come across in all his life. He took, therefore, an easy look at them. One, the youngest, now leaned against the door, a youth of a frank, honest face, unremarkable but for a firm set of the jaws. A youth of no great intellect, thought Mitchelbourne, but tenacious, a youth marked out for a subordinate command, and never likely for all his sterling qualities to kindle a woman to a world-forgetting passion, or to tread with her the fiery heights where life throbs at its fullest.

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Mr. Mitchelbourne began to feel quite sorry for this young officer of the limited capacities, and he was still in the sympathetic mood when one of the two men at the table spoke to him. Mitchelbourne turned at once. The officers were sitting with a certain air of the theatre in their attitudes, one a little dark man and the other a stiff, light complexioned fellow with a bony, barren face, unmistakably a stupid man and the oldest of the three. It was he who was speaking, and he spoke with a sort of aggravated courtesy like a man of no breeding counterfeiting a gentleman upon the stage.

"You will pardon us for receiving you with so little ceremony. But while we expected you, you on the other hand were not expecting us, and we feared that you might hesitate to come in if the lamp was burning when you opened the door."

Mitchelbourne was now entirely at his ease. He perceived that there was some mistake and made haste to put it right.

"On the contrary," said he, "for I knew very well you were here. Indeed, I knocked at the door to make a necessary inquiry. You did not extinguish the lamp so quickly but that I saw the light beneath the door, and besides I watched you some five minutes through the window from the opposite bank of the pool at the back of the house."

The officers were plainly disconcerted by the affability of Mr. Mitchelbourne's reply. They had evidently expected to carry off a triumph, not to be taken up in an argument. They had planned a stroke of the theatre,

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final and convincing, and behold the dialogue went on! There was a riposte to their thrust.

The spokesman made some gruff noises in his throat. Then his face cleared.

"These are dialectics," he said superbly with a wave of the hand.

"Good," said the little dark fellow at his elbow, "very good!"

The youth at the door nodded superciliously towards Mitchelbourne.

"True, these are dialectics," said he with a smack of the lips upon the word. It was a good cunning scholarly word, and the man who could produce it so aptly worthy of admiration.

"You make a further error, gentlemen," continued Mitchelbourne, "you no doubt are expecting some one, but you were most certainly not expecting me. For I am here by the purest mistake, having been misdirected on the way." Here the three men smiled to each other, and their spokesman retorted with a chuckle.

"Misdirected, indeed you were. We took precautions that you should be. A servant of mine stationed at the parting of the roads. But we are forgetting our manners," he added rising from his chair. "You should know our names. The gentleman at the door is Cornet Lashley, this is Captain Bassett and I am Major Chantrell. We are all three of Trevelyan's regiment."

"And my name," said Mitchelbourne, not to be outdone in politeness, "is Lewis Mitchelbourne, a gentleman of the County of Middlesex."

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At this each of the officers was seized with a fit of laughter; but before Mitchelbourne had time to resent their behavior, Major Chantrell said indulgently:

"Well, well, we shall not quarrel about names. At all events we all four are lately come from Tangier."

"Oh, from Tangier," cried Mitchelbourne. The riddle was becoming clear. That extraordinary siege when a handful of English red-coats unpaid and illfed fought a breached and broken town against countless hordes for the honour of their King during twenty years, had not yet become the property of the historian. It was still an actual war in 1681. Mitchelbourne understood whence came the sunburn on his antagonists' faces, whence the stains and the worn seams of their clothes. He advanced to the table and spoke with a greater respect than he had used.

"Did one of you," he asked, "leave a Moorish pipe behind you at an inn of Saxmundham?"

"Ah," said the Major with a reproachful glance at Captain Bassett. The Captain answered with some discomfort:

"Yes. I made that mistake. But what does it matter? You are here none the less."

"You have with you some of the Moorish tobacco?" continued Mitchelbourne.

Captain Bassett fetched out of his pocket a little canvas bag, and handed it to Mitchelbourne, who untied the string about the neck, and poured some of the contents into the palm of his hand. The tobacco was a fine, greenish seed.

"I thought as much," said Mitchelbourne, "you expected Mr. Lance to-night. It is Mr. Lance whom

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you thought to misdirect to this solitary house. Indeed Mr. Lance spoke of such a place in this neighbourhood, and had a mind to buy it."

Captain Bassett suddenly raised his hand to his mouth, not so quickly, however, but Mitchelbourne saw the grim, amused smile upon his lips. "It is Mr. Lance for whom you now mistake me," he said abruptly.

The young man at the door uttered a short, contemptuous laugh, Major Chantrell only smiled.

"I am aware," said he, "that we meet for the first time to-night, but you presume upon that fact too far. What have you to say to this?" And dragging a big and battered pistol from his pocket, he tossed it upon the table, and folded his arms in the best transpontine manner.

"And to this?" said Captain Bassett. He laid a worn leather powder flask beside the pistol, and tapped upon the table triumphantly.

Mr. Mitchelbourne recognised clearly that villainy was somehow checkmated by these proceedings and virtue restored, but how he could not for the life of him determine. He took up the pistol.

"It appears to have seen some honourable service," said he. This casual remark had a most startling effect upon his auditors. It was the spark to the gun-powder of their passions. Their affectations vanished in a trice.

"Service, yes, but honourable! Use that lie again, Mr. Lance, and I will ram the butt of it down your throat!" cried Major Chantrell. He leaned forward over the table in a blaze of fury. Yet his face did no more than match the faces of his comrades.

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Mitchelbourne began to understand. These simple soldier-men had endeavoured to conduct their proceedings with great dignity and a judicial calmness; they had mapped out for themselves certain parts which they were to play as upon a stage; they were to be three stern imposing figures of justice; and so they had become simply absurd and ridiculous. Now, however, that passion had the upper hand of them, Mitchelbourne saw at once that he stood in deadly peril. These were men.

"Understand me, Mr. Lance," and the Major's voice rang out firm, the voice of a man accustomed to obedience. "Three years ago I was in command of Devil's Drop, a little makeshift fort upon the sands outside Tangier. In front the Moors lay about us in a semicircle. Sir, the diameter was the line of the sea at our backs. We could not retire six yards without wetting our feet, not twenty without drowning. One night the Moors pushed their trenches up to our palisades; in the dusk of the morning I ordered a sortie. Nine officers went out with me and three came back, we three. Of the six we left behind, five fell, by my orders, to be sure, for I led them out; but, by the living God, you killed them. There's the pistol that shot my best friend down, an English pistol. There's the powder flask which charged the pistol, an English flask filled with English powder. And who sold the pistol and the powder to the Moors, England's enemies? You, an Englishman. But you have come to the end of your lane to-night. Turn and turn as you will you have come to the end of it."

The truth was out now, and Mitchelbourne was

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chilled with apprehension. Here were three men very desperately set upon what they considered a mere act of justice. How was he to dissuade them? By argument? They would not listen to it. By proofs? He had none to offer them. By excuses? Of all unsupported excuses which can match for futility the excuse of mistaken identity? It springs immediate to the criminal's lips. Its mere utterance is almost a conviction.

"You persist in error, Major Chantrell," he nevertheless began.

"Show him the proof, Bassett," Chantrell interrupted with a shrug of the shoulders, and Captain Bassett drew from his pocket a folded sheet of paper.

"Nine officers went out," continued Chantrell, "five were killed, three are here. The ninth was taken a prisoner into Barbary. The Moors brought him down to their port of Marmora to interpret. At Marmora your ship unloaded its stores of powder and guns. God knows how often it had unloaded the like cargo during these twenty years—often enough it seems, to give you a fancy for figuring as a gentleman in the county. But the one occasion of its unloading is enough. Our brother officer was your interpreter with the Moors, Mr. Lance. You may very likely know that, but this you do not know, Mr. Lance. He escaped, he crept into Tangier with this, your bill of lading in his hand," and Bassett tossed the sheet of paper towards Mitchelbourne. It fell upon the floor before him but he did not trouble to pick it up.

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"Is it Lance's death that you require?" he asked.

"Yes! yes! yes!" came from each mouth.

"Then already you have your wish. I do not question one word of your charges against Lance. I have reason to believe them true. But I am not Lance. Lance lies at this moment dead at Great Glemham. He died this afternoon of cholera. Here are his letters," and he laid the letters on the table. "I rode in with them at once. You do not believe me, but you can put my words to the test. Let one of you ride to Great Glemham and satisfy himself. He will be back before morning."

The three officers listened so far with impassive faces, or barely listened, for they were as indifferent to the words as to the passion with which they were spoken.

"We have had enough of the gentleman's ingenuities, I think," said Chantrell, and he made a movement towards his companions.

"One moment," exclaimed Mitchelbourne. "Answer me a question! These letters are to the address of Mrs. Ufford at a house called 'The Porch.' It is near to here?"

"It is the first house you passed," answered the Major and, as he noticed a momentary satisfaction flicker upon his victim's face, he added, "But you will not do well to expect help from 'The Porch'—at all events in time to be of much service to you. You hardly appreciate that we have been at some pains to come up with you. We are not likely again to find so many circumstances agreeing to favour us, a dismantled house, yourself travelling alone and off

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your guard in a country with which you are unfamiliar and where none know you, and just outside the window a convenient pool. Besides—besides," he broke out passionately, "There are the little mounds about Tangier, under which my friends lie," and he covered his face with his hands. "My friends," he cried in a hoarse and broken voice, "my soldiermen! Come, let's make an end. Bassett, the rope is in the corner. There's a noose to it. The beam across the window will serve;" and Bassett rose to obey.

But Mitchelbourne gave them no time. His fears had altogether vanished before his indignation at the stupidity of these officers. He was boiling with anger at the thought that he must lose his life in this futile ignominious way for the crime of another man, who was not even his friend, and who besides was already dead. There was just one chance to escape, it seemed to him. And even as Bassett stooped to lift the coil of rope in the corner he took it.

"So that's the way of it," he cried stepping forward. "I am to be hung up to a beam till I kick to death, am I? I am to be buried decently in that stagnant pool, am I? And you are to be miles away before sunrise, and no one the wiser! No, Major Chantrell, I am not come to the end of my lane," and before either of the three could guess what he was at, he had snatched up the pistol from the table and dashed the lamp into a thousand fragments.

The flame shot up blue and high, and then came darkness.

Mitchelbourne jumped lightly back from his position

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to the centre of the room. The men he had to deal with were men who would follow their instincts. They would feel along the walls; of so much he could be certain. He heard the coil of rope drop down in a corner to his left; so that he knew where Captain Bassett was. He heard a chair upset in front of him, and a man staggered against his chest. Mitchelbourne had the pistol still in his hand and struck hard, and the man dropped with a crash. The fall followed so closely upon the upsetting of the chair that it seemed part of the same movement and accident. It seemed so clearly part, that a voice spoke on Mitchelbourne's left, just where the empty hearth would be.

"Get up! Be quick!"

The voice was Major Chantrell's and Mitchelbourne had a throb of hope. For since it was not the Major who had fallen nor Captain Bassett, it must be Lashley. And Lashley had been guarding the door, of which the key still remained in the lock. If only he could reach the door and turn the key! He heard Chantrell moving stealthily along the wall upon his left hand and he suffered a moment's agony; for in the darkness he could not surely tell which way the Major moved. For if he moved to the window, if he had the sense to move to the window and tear aside those drawn curtains, the grey twilight would show the shadowy moving figures. Mitchelbourne's chance would be gone. And then something totally unexpected and unhoped for occurred. The god of the machine was in a freakish mood that evening. He had a mind for pranks and absurdities. Mitchel-

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