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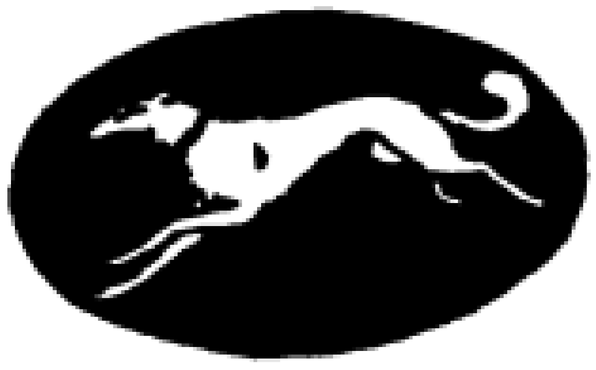

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CHAPTER I

WANTED AT REHEARSAL

Jerramy, thirty years' stage-door keeper at the Theatre Royal, Norcaster, had come to regard each successive Monday morning as a time for the renewal of old acquaintance. For at any rate forty-six weeks of the fifty-two, theatrical companies came and went at Norcaster with unfailing regularity. The company which presented itself for patronage in the first week of April in one year was almost certain to present itself again in the corresponding week of the next year. Sometimes new faces came with it, but as a rule the same old favourites showed themselves for a good many years in succession. And every actor and actress who came to Norcaster knew Jerramy. He was the first official person encountered on entering upon the business of the week. He it was who handed out the little bundles of letters and papers, who exchanged the first greetings, of whom one could make useful inquiries, who always knew exactly what advice to give about lodgings and landladies. From noon onwards of Mondays, when the newcomers began to arrive at the theatre for the customary one o'clock call for rehearsal, Jerramy was invariably employed in hearing that he didn't look a day older, and was as blooming as ever, and sure to last another thirty years, and his reception always culminated in a hearty handshake and genial

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greeting from the great man of the company, who, of course, after the fashion of magnates, always turned up at the end of the irregular procession, and was not seldom late for the fixture which he himself had made.

At a quarter past one of a certain Monday afternoon in the course of a sunny October, Jerramy leaned over the half-door of his sanctum in conversation with an anxious-eyed man who for the past ten minutes had hung about in the restless fashion peculiar to those who are waiting for somebody. He had looked up the street and down the street a dozen times; he had pulled out his watch and compared it with the clock of a neighbouring church almost as often; he had several times gone up the dark passage which led to the dressing-rooms, and had come back again looking more perplexed than ever. The fact was that he was the business manager of the great Mr. Bassett Oliver, who was opening for the week at Norcaster in his latest success, and who, not quite satisfied with the way in which a particular bit of it was being played called a special rehearsal for a quarter to one. Everything and everybody was ready for that rehearsal, but the great man himself had not arrived. Now Mr. Bassett Oliver, as every man well knew who ever had dealings with him, was not one of the irregular and unpunctual order; on the contrary, he was a very martinet as regarded rule, precision and system; moreover, he always did what he expected each member of his company to do.

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Therefore his non-arrival, his half hour of irregularity, seemed all the more extraordinary.

"Never knew him to be late before—never!" exclaimed the business manager, impatiently pulling out his watch for the twentieth time. "Not in all my ten years' experience of him—not once."

"I suppose you've seen him this morning, Mr. Stafford?" inquired Jerramy. "He's in the town, of course?"

"I suppose he's in the town," answered Mr. Stafford. "I suppose he's at his old quarters—the 'Angel.' But I haven't seen him; neither had Rothwell—we've both been too busy to call there. I expect he came on to the 'Angel' from Northborough yesterday."

Jerramy opened the half-door, and going out to the end of the passage, looked up and down the street.

"There's a taxi-cab coming round the corner now," he announced presently. "Coming quick, too—I should think he's in it."

The business manager bustled out to the pavement as the cab came to a halt. But instead of the fine face and distinguished presence of Mr. Bassett Oliver, he found himself confronting a young man who looked like a well-set-up subaltern, or a cricket-and-football loving undergraduate; a somewhat shy, rather nervous young man, scrupulously groomed, and neatly attired in tweeds, who, at sight of the two men on the pavement, immediately produced a card-case.

"Mr. Bassett Oliver?" he said inquiringly. "Is

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he here? I—I've got an appointment with him for one o'clock, and I'm sorry I'm late—my train——"

"Mr. Oliver is not here yet," broke in Stafford. "He's late, too—unaccountably late, for him. An appointment, you say?"

He was looking the stranger over as he spoke, taking him for some stage-struck youth who had probably persuaded the good-natured actor to give him an interview. His expression changed, however; as he glanced at the card which the young man handed over, and he started a little and held out his hand with a smile.

"Oh!—Mr. Copplestone?" he exclaimed. "How do you do? My name's Stafford—I'm Mr. Oliver's business manager. So he made an appointment with you, did he—here, today? Wants to see you about your play, of course."

Again he looked at the newcomer with a smiling interest, thinking secretly that he was a very youthful and ingenuous being to have written a play which Bassett Oliver, a shrewd critic, and by no means easy to please, had been eager to accept, and was about to produce. Mr. Richard Copplestone, seen in the flesh, looked very young indeed, and very unlike anything in the shape of a professional author. In fact he very much reminded Stafford of the fine and healthy young man whom one sees on the playing fields, and certainly does not associate with pen and ink. That he was not much used to the world on whose edge he just then stood Stafford gathered from

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a boyish trick of blushing through the tan of his cheeks.

"I got a wire from Mr. Oliver yesterday—Sunday," replied Mr. Copplestone. "I ought to have had it in the morning, I suppose, but I'd gone out for the day, you know—gone out early. So I didn't find it until I got back to my rooms late at night. I got the next train I could from King's Cross, and it was late getting in here."

"Then you've practically been travelling all night?" remarked Stafford. "Well, Mr. Oliver hasn't turned up—most unusual for him. I don't know where——" Just then another man came hurrying down the passage from the dressing-rooms, calling the business manager by name.

"I say, Stafford!" he exclaimed, as he emerged on the street. "This is a queer thing!—I'm sure there's something wrong. I've just rung up the 'Angel' hotel. Oliver hasn't turned up there! His rooms were all ready for him as usual yesterday, but he never came. They've neither seen nor heard of him. Did you see him yesterday?"

"No!" replied Stafford. "I didn't. Never seen him since last thing Saturday night at Northborough. He ordered this rehearsal for one—no, a quarter to one, here, today. But somebody must have seen him yesterday. Where's his dresser—where's Hackett?"

"Hackett's inside," said the other man. "He hasn't seen him either, since Saturday night. Hackett has friends living in these parts—he went off to see

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them early yesterday morning, from Northborough, and he's only just come. So he hasn't seen Oliver, and doesn't know anything about him; he expected, of course, to find him here."

Stafford turned with a wave of the hand towards Copplestone.

"So did this gentleman," he said. "Mr. Copplestone, this is our stage-manager, Mr. Rothwell. Rothwell, this is Mr. Richard Copplestone, author of the new play that Mr. Oliver's going to produce next month. Mr. Copplestone got a wire from him yesterday, asking him to come here today at one o'clock. He's travelled all night to get here."

"Where was the wire sent from?" asked Rothwell, a sharp-eyed, keen-looking man, who, like Stafford, was obviously interested in the new author's boyish appearance. "And when?"

Copplestone drew some letters and papers from his pocket and selected one. "That's it," he said. "There you are—sent off from Northborough at nine-thirty, yesterday morning—Sunday."

"Well, then he was at Northborough at that time," remarked Rothwell. "Look here, Stafford, we'd better telephone to Northborough, to his hotel. The 'Golden Apple,' wasn't it?"

"No good," replied Stafford, shaking his head. "The 'Golden Apple' isn't on the 'phone—old-fashioned place. We'd better wire."

"Too slow," said Rothwell. "We'll telephone to the theatre there, and ask them to step across and make inquiries. Come on!—let's do it at once."

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He hurried inside again, and Stafford turned to Copplestone.

"Better send your cab away and come inside until we get some news," he said. "Let Jerramy take your things into his sanctum—he'll keep an eye on them till you want them—I suppose you'll stop at the 'Angel' with Oliver. Look here!" he went on, turning to the cab driver, "just you wait a bit—I might want you; wait ten minutes, anyway. Come in, Mr. Copplestone."

Copplestone followed the business manager up the passage to a dressing-room, in which a little elderly man was engaged in unpacking trunks and dress-baskets. He looked up expectantly at the sound of footsteps; then looked down again at the work in hand and went silently on with it.

"This is Hackett, Mr. Oliver's dresser," said Stafford. "Been with him—how long, Hackett?"

"Twenty years next January, Mr. Stafford," answered the dresser quietly.

"Ever known Mr. Oliver late like this?" inquired Stafford.

"Never, sir! There's something wrong," replied Hackett. "I'm sure of it. I feel it! You ought to go and look for him, some of you gentlemen."

"Where?" asked Stafford. "We don't know anything about him. He's not come to the 'Angel,' as he ought to have done, yesterday. I believe you're the last person who saw him, Hackett. Aren't you, now?"

"I saw him at the 'Golden Apple' at Northborough

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at twelve o'clock Saturday night, sir," answered Hackett. "I took a bag of his to his rooms there. He was all right then. He knew I was going off first thing next morning to see an uncle of mine who's a farmer on the coast between here and Northborough, and he told me he shouldn't want me until one o'clock today. So of course, I came straight here to the theatre—I didn't call in at the 'Angel' at all this morning."

"Did he say anything about his own movements yesterday?" asked Stafford. "Did he tell you that he was going anywhere?"

"Not a word, Mr. Stafford," replied Hackett. "But you know his habits as well as I do."

"Just so," agreed Stafford. "Mr. Oliver," he continued, turning to Copplestone, "is a great lover of outdoor life. On Sundays, when we're travelling from one town to another, he likes to do the journey by motor—alone. In a case like this, where the two towns are not very far apart, it's his practice to find out if there's any particular beauty-spot or place of interest between them, and to spend his Sunday there. I daresay that's what he did yesterday. You see, all last week we were at Northborough. That, like Norcaster, is a coast town—there's fifty miles between them. If he followed out his usual plan he'd probably hire a motor-car and follow the coast-road, and if he came to any place that was of special interest, he'd stop there. But—in the usual way of things—he'd have turned up at his rooms at the 'Angel' hotel here last night. He didn't—and he

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hasn't turned up here, either. So where is he?"

"Have you made inquiries of the company, Mr. Stafford?" asked Hackett. "Most of 'em wander about a bit of a Sunday—they might have seen him."

"Good idea!" agreed Stafford. He beckoned Copplestone to follow him on to the stage, where the members of the company sat or stood about in groups, each conscious that something unusual had occurred. "It's really a queer, and perhaps a serious thing," he whispered as he steered his companion through a maze of scenery. "And if Oliver doesn't turn up, we shall be in a fine mess. Of course, there's an understudy for his part, but—I say!" he went on, as they stepped upon the stage, "Have any of you seen Mr. Oliver, anywhere, since Saturday night? Can anybody tell anything about him—anything at all? Because—it's useless to deny the fact—he's not come here, and he's not come to town at all, so far as we know. So——"

Rothwell came hurrying on to the stage from the opposite wings. He hastened across to Stafford and drew him and Copplestone a little aside.

"I've heard from Northborough," he said. "I 'phoned Waters, the manager there, to run across to the 'Golden Apple' and make inquiries. The 'Golden Apple' people say that Oliver left there at eleven o'clock yesterday morning. He was alone. He simply walked out of the hotel. And they know nothing more."

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CHAPTER II

GREY ROCK AND GREY SEA

The three men stood for a while silently looking at each other. Copplestone, as a stranger, secretly wondered why the two managers seemed so concerned; to him a delay of half an hour in keeping an appointment did not appear to be quite as serious as they evidently considered it. But he had never met Bassett Oliver, and knew nothing of his ways; he only began to comprehend matters when Rothwell turned to Stafford with an air of decision.

"Look here!" he said. "You'd better go and make inquiry at Northborough. See if you can track him. Something must be wrong—perhaps seriously wrong. You don't quite understand, do you, Mr. Copplestone?" he went on, giving the younger man a sharp glance. "You see, we know Mr. Oliver so well—we've both been with him a good many years. He's a model of system, regularity, punctuality, and all the rest of it. In the ordinary course of events, wherever he spent yesterday, he'd have been sure to turn up at his rooms at the 'Angel' hotel last night, and he'd have walked in here this morning at half-past twelve. As he hasn't done either, why, then, something unusual has happened. Stafford, you'd better get a move on."

"Wait a minute," said Stafford. He turned again to the groups behind him, repeating his question.

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"Has anybody anything to tell?" he asked anxiously. "We've just heard that Mr. Oliver left his hotel at Northborough yesterday morning at eleven o'clock, alone, walking. Has anybody any idea of any project, any excursion, that he had in mind?"

An elderly man who had been in conversation with the leading lady stepped forward.

"I was talking to Oliver about the coast scenery between here and Northborough the other day—Friday," he remarked. "He'd never seen it—I told him I used to know it pretty well once. He said he'd try and see something of it on Sunday—yesterday, you know. And, I say—" here he came closer to the two managers and lowered his voice—"that coast is very wild, lonely, and a good bit dangerous—sharp and precipitous cliffs. Eh?"

Rothwell clapped a hand on Stafford's arm.

"You'd really better be off to Northborough," he said with decision. "You're sure to come across traces of him. Go to the 'Golden Apple'—then the station. Wire or telephone me—here. Of course, this rehearsal's off. About this evening—oh, well, a lot may happen before then. But go at once—I believe you can get expresses from here to Northborough pretty often."

"I'll go with you—if I may," said Copplestone suddenly. "I might be of use. There's that cab still at the door, you know—shall we run up to the station?"

"Good!" assented Stafford. "Yes, come by all means." He turned to Rothwell for a moment. "If

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he should turn up here, 'phone to Waters at the Northborough theatre, won't you?" he said. "We'll look in there as soon as we arrive."

He hurried out with Copplestone and together they drove up to the station, where an express was just leaving for the south. Once on their way to Northborough, Stafford turned to his companion with a grave shake of the head.

"I daresay you don't quite see the reason of our anxiety," he observed. "You see, we know Oliver. He's a trick of wandering about by himself on Sundays—when he gets the chance. Of course when there's a long journey between two towns, he doesn't get the chance, and then he's all right. But when, as in this case, the town of one week is fairly close to the town of the next, he invariably spots some place of interest, an old castle, or a ruined abbey, or some famous house, and goes looking round it. And if he's been exploring some spot on this coast yesterday, and it's as that chap Rutherford said, wild and dangerous, why, then——"

"You think he may have had an accident—fallen over the cliffs or something?" suggested Copplestone.

"I don't like to think anything," replied Stafford. "But I shall be a good deal relieved if we can get some definite news about him."

The first half-hour at Northborough yielded nothing definite. A telephone message from Rothwell had just come to the theatre when they drove up to it—nothing had so far been heard of the missing man at Norcaster—either at theatre or hotel. Staf-

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ford and Copplestone hurried across to the "Golden Apple" and interviewed its proprietor; he, keenly interested in the affair, could tell no more than that Mr. Bassett Oliver, having sent his luggage forward to Norcaster, had left the house on foot at eleven o'clock the previous morning, and had been seen to walk across the market-place in the direction of the railway station. But an old head-waiter, who had served the famous actor's breakfast, was able to give some information; Mr. Oliver, he said, had talked a little to him about the coast scenery between Northborough and Norcaster, and had asked him which stretch of it was worth seeing. It was his impression that Mr. Oliver meant to break his journey somewhere along the coast.

"Of course, that's it," said Stafford, as he and Copplestone drove off again. "He's gone to some place between the two towns. But where? Anyhow, nobody's likely to forget Oliver if they've once seen him, and wherever he went, he'd have to take a ticket. Therefore—the booking-office."

Here at last, was light. One of the clerks in the booking-office came forward at once with news. Mr. Bassett Oliver, whom he knew well enough, having seen him on and off the stage regularly for the past five years, had come there the previous morning, and had taken a first-class single ticket for Scarhaven. He would travel to Scarhaven by the 11.35 train, which arrived at Scarhaven at 12.10. Where was Scarhaven? On the coast, twenty miles off, on the way to Norcaster; you changed for it at Tilmouth Junc-

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tion. Was there a train leaving soon for Scarhaven? There was—in five minutes.

Stafford and Copplestone presently found themselves travelling back along the main line. A run of twenty minutes brought them to the junction, where, at an adjacent siding they found a sort of train in miniature which ran over a narrow-gauge railway towards the sea. Its course lay through a romantic valley hidden between high heather-clad moorland; they saw nothing of their destination nor of the coast until, coming to a stop in a little station perched high on the side of a hill they emerged to see shore and sea lying far beneath them. With a mutual consent they passed outside the grey walls of the station-yard to take a comprehensive view of the scene.

"Just the place to attract Oliver!" muttered Stafford, as he gazed around him. "He'd revel in it—fairly revel!"

Copplestone gazed at the scene in silence. That was the first time he had ever seen the Northern coast, and the strange glamour and romance of this stretch of it appealed strongly to his artistic senses. He found himself standing high above the landward extremity of a narrow bay or creek, much resembling a Norwegian fiord in its general outlines; it ran in from the sea between high shelving cliffs, the slopes of which were thickly wooded with the hardier varieties of tree and shrub, through which at intervals great, gaunt masses of grey rock cropped out. On the edge of the water at either side of the bay were lines

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of ancient houses and cottages of grey walls and red roofs, built and grouped with the irregularity of individual liking; on the north side rose the square tower and low nave of a venerable church; amidst a mass of wood on the opposite side stood a great Norman keep, half ruinous, which looked down on a picturesque house at its foot. Quays, primitive and quaint, ran along between the old cottages and the water's edge; in the bay itself or nestling against the worn timbers of the quays, were small craft whose red sails hung idly against their tall masts and spars. And at the end of the quays and the wooded promontories which terminated the land view, lay the North Sea, cold, grey, and mysterious in the waning October light, and out of its bosom rose, close to the shore, great masses of high grey rocks, strong and fantastic of shape, and further away, almost indistinct in the distance, an island, on the highest point of which the ruins of some old religious house were silhouetted against the horizon.

"Just the place!" repeated Stafford. "He'd have cheerfully travelled a thousand miles to see this. And now—we know he came here—what we next want to know is, what he did when he got here?"

Copplestone, who had been taking in every detail of the scene before him, pointed to a house of many gables and queer chimneys which stood a little way beneath them at the point where the waters of a narrow stream ran into the bay.

"That looks like an inn," he said. "I think I can make out a sign on the gable-end. Let's go down

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there and inquire. He would get here just about time for lunch, wouldn't he, and he'd probably turn in there. Also—they may have a telephone there, and you can call up the theatre at Norcaster and find out if anything's been heard yet.''

Stafford smiled approvingly and started out in the direction of the buildings towards which Copplestone had pointed.

''Excellent notion!'' he said. ''You're quite a business man—an unusual thing in authors, isn't it? Come on, then—and that is an inn, too—I can make out the sign now—The 'Admiral's Arms'—Mary Wooler. Let's hope Mary Wooler, who's presumably the landlady, can give us some useful news!''

The ''Admiral's Arms'' proved to be an old-fashioned, capacious hostelry, eminently promising and comfortable in appearance, which stood on the edge of a broad shelf of headland, and commanded a fine view of the little village and the bay. Stafford and Copplestone, turning in at the front door, found themselves in a deep, stone-paved hall, on one side of which, behind a bar window, a pleasant-faced, buxom woman, silk-aproned and smartly-capped, was busily engaged in adding up columns of figures in a big account-book. At sight of strangers she threw open a door and smilingly invited them to walk into a snugly furnished bar-parlour where a bright fire burned in an open hearth. Stafford gave his companion a look—this again was just the sort of old-world place which would appeal to Basset Oliver, supposing he had come across it.

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"I wonder if you can give me some information?" he asked presently, when the good-looking landlady had attended to their requests for refreshment. "I suppose you are the landlady—Mrs. Wooler? Well, now, Mrs. Wooler, did you have a tall, handsome, slightly grey-haired gentleman in here to lunch yesterday—say about one o'clock?"

The landlady turned on her questioner with an intelligent smile.

"You mean Mr. Oliver, the actor?" she said.

"Good!" exclaimed Stafford, with a hearty sigh of relief. "I do! You know him, then?"

"I've often seen him, both at Northborough and at Norcaster," replied Mrs. Wooler. "But I never saw him here before yesterday. Oh, yes! of course I knew him as soon as he walked in, and I had a bit of chat with him before he went out, and he remarked that though he'd been coming into these parts for some years, he'd never been to Scarhaven before—usually, he said, he'd gone inland of a Sunday, amongst the hills. Oh, yes, he was here—he had lunch here."

"We're seeking him," said Stafford, going directly to the question. "He ought to have turned up at the 'Angel Hotel' at Norcaster last night, and at the theatre today at noon—he did neither. I'm his business manager, Mrs. Wooler. Now can you tell us anything—more than you've already told, I mean?"

The landlady, whose face expressed more and more concern as Stafford spoke, shook her head.

"I can't!" she answered. "I don't know any

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more. He was here perhaps an hour or so. Then he went away, saying he was going to have a look round the place. I expected he'd come in again on his way to the station, but he never did. Dear, dear! I hope nothing's happened to him—such a fine, pleasant man. And——"

"And—what?" asked Stafford.

"These cliffs and rocks are so dangerous," murmured Mrs. Wooler. "I often say that no stranger ought to go alone here. They aren't safe, these cliffs."

Stafford set down his glass and rose.

"I think you've got a telephone in your hall," he said. "I'll just call up Norcaster and find out if they've heard anything. If they haven't——"

He shook his head and went out, and Copplestone glanced at the landlady.

"You say the cliffs are dangerous," he said. "Are they particularly so?"

"To people who don't know them, yes," she replied. "They ought to be protected, but then, of course, we don't get many tourists here, and the Scarhaven people know the danger spots well enough. Then again at the end of the south promontory there, beyond the Keep——"

"Is the Keep that high square tower amongst the woods?" asked Copplestone.

"That's it—it's all that's left of the old castle," answered Mrs. Wooler. "Well, off the point beneath that, there's a group of rocks—you'd perhaps noticed them as you came down from the station? They've

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various names—there's the King, the Queen, the Sugar-Loaf, and so on. At low tide you can walk across to them. And of course, some people like to climb them. Now, they're particularly dangerous! On the Queen rock there's a great hole called the Devil's Spout, up which the sea rushes. Everybody wants to look over it, you know, and if a man was there alone, and his foot slipped, and he fell, why——"

Stafford came back, looking more cast down than ever.

"They've heard nothing there," he announced. "Come on—we'll go down and see if we can hear anything from any of the people. We'll call in and see you later, Mrs. Wooler, and if you can make any inquiries in the meantime, do. Look here," he went on, when he and Copplestone had got outside, "you take this south side of the bay, and I'll take the north. Ask anybody you see—any likely person—fishermen and so on. Then come back here. And if we've heard nothing——"

He shook his head significantly, as he turned away, and Copplestone, taking the other direction, felt that the manager's despondency was influencing himself. A sudden disappearance of this sort was surely not to be explained easily—nothing but exceptional happenings could have kept Bassett Oliver from the scene of his week's labours. There must have been an accident—it needed little imagination to conjure up its easy occurrence. A too careless step, a too near approach, a loose stone, a sudden giving way of crum-

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bling soil, the shifting of an already detached rock—any of these things might happen, and then—but the thought of what might follow cast a greyer tint over the already cold and grey sea.

He went on amongst the old cottages and fishing huts which lay at the foot of the wooded heights on the tops of whose pines and firs the gaunt ruins of the old Keep seemed to stand sentinel. He made inquiry at open doors and of little groups of men gathered on the quay and by the drawn-up boats—nobody knew anything. According to what they told him, most of these people had been out and about all the previous afternoon; it had been a particularly fine day, that Sunday, and they had all been out of doors, on the quay and the shore, in the sunshine. But nobody had any recollection of the man described, and Copplestone came to the conclusion that Oliver had not chosen that side of the bay. There was, however, one objection to that theory—so far as he could judge, that side was certainly the more attractive. And he himself went on to the end of it—on until he had left quay and village far behind, and had come to a spit of sand which ran out into the sea exactly opposite the group of rocks of which Mrs. Wooler had spoken. There they lay, rising out of the surf like great monsters, a half-mile from where he stood. The tide was out at that time, and between him and them stretched a shining expanse of glittering wet sand. And, coming straight towards him across it, Copplestone saw the slim and graceful figure of a girl.

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CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO KNEW SOMETHING

It was not from any idle curiosity that Copplestone made up his mind to await the girl's nearer approach. There was no other human being in view, and he was anxious to get some information about the rocks whose grim outlines were rapidly becoming faint and indistinct in the gathering darkness. And so as the girl came towards him, picking her way across the pools which lay amidst the brown ribs of sand, he went forward, throwing away all formality and reserve in his eagerness.

"Forgive me for speaking so unceremoniously," he said as they met. "I'm looking for a friend who has disappeared—mysteriously. Can you tell me if, any time yesterday, afternoon or evening, you saw anywhere about here a tall, distinguished-looking man—the actor type. In fact, he is an actor—perhaps you've heard of him? Mr. Bassett Oliver."

He was looking narrowly at the girl as he spoke, and she, too, looked narrowly at him out of a pair of grey eyes of more than ordinary intelligence and perception. And at the famous actor's name she started a little and a faint colour stole over her cheeks.

"Mr. Bassett Oliver!" she exclaimed in a clear, cultured voice. "My mother and I saw Mr. Oliver

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at the Northborough Theatre on Friday evening. Do you mean that he——"

"I mean—to put it bluntly—that Bassett Oliver is lost," answered Copplestone. "He came to this place yesterday, Sunday, morning, to look round; he lunched at the 'Admiral's Arms,' he went out, after a chat with the landlady, and he's never been seen since. He should have turned up at the 'Angel' at Norcaster last night, and at a rehearsal at the Theatre Royal there today at noon—but he didn't. His manager and I have tracked him here—and so far I can't hear of him. I've asked people all through the village—this side, anyway—nobody knows anything."

He and the girl still looked attentively at each other; Copplestone, indeed, was quietly inspecting her while he talked. He judged her to be twenty-one or two; she was a little above medium height, slim, graceful, pretty, and he was quick to notice that her entire air and appearance suggested their present surroundings. Her fair hair escaped from a knitted cap such as fisher-folk wear; her slender figure was shown to advantage by a rough blue jersey; her skirt of blue serge was short and practical; she was shod in brogues which showed more acquaintance with sand and salt water than with polish. And her face was tanned with the strong northern winds, and the ungloved hands, small and shapely as they were, were brown as the beach across which she had come.

"I have not seen—nor heard—of Mr. Bassett Oliver—here," she answered. "I was out and about all yesterday afternoon and evening, too—not on

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this side of the bay, though. Have you been to the police-station?"

"The manager may have been there," replied Copplestone. "He's gone along the other shore. But—I don't think he'll get any help there. I'm afraid Mr. Oliver must have met with an accident. I wanted to ask you a question—I saw you coming from the direction of those rocks just now. Could he have got out there across those sands, yesterday afternoon?"

"Between three o'clock and evening—yes," said the girl.

"And—is it dangerous out there?"

"Very dangerous indeed—to any one who doesn't know them."

"There's something there called the Devil's Spout?"

"Yes—a deep fissure up which the sea boils. Oh! it seems dreadful to think of—I hope he didn't fall in there. If he did——"

"Well?" asked Copplestone bluntly, "what if he did?"

"Nothing ever came out that once went in," she answered. "It's a sort of whirlpool that's sucked right away into the sea. The people hereabouts say it's bottomless."

Copplestone turned his face towards the village.

"Oh, well," he said, with an accent of hopelessness. "I can't do any more down here, it's growing dusk. I must go back and meet the manager."

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The girl walked along at his side as he turned towards the village.

"I suppose you are one of Mr. Oliver's company?" she observed presently. "You must all be much concerned."

"They're all greatly concerned," answered Copplestone. "But I don't belong to the company. No—I came to Norcaster this morning to meet Mr. Oliver—he's going—I hope I oughtn't to say was going!—to produce a play of mine next month, and he wanted to talk about the rehearsals. Everything, of course, was at a standstill when I reached Norcaster at one o'clock, so I came with Stafford, the business manager, to see what we could do about tracking Mr. Oliver. And I'm afraid, I'm very much afraid——"

He paused, as a gate, set in the thick hedge of a garden at this point of the village, suddenly opened to let out a man, who at sight of the girl stopped, hesitated, and then waited for her approach. He was a tall, well-built man of apparently thirty years, dressed in a rough tweed knickerbocker suit, but the dusk had now so much increased that Copplestone could only gather an impression of ordinary good-lookingness from the face that was turned inquiringly on his companion. The girl turned to him and spoke hurriedly.

"This is my cousin, Mr. Greyle, of Scarhaven Keep," she murmured. "He may be able to help. Marston!" she went on, raising her voice, "can you give any help here? This gentleman——" she paused, looking at Copplestone.

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"My name is Richard Copplestone," he said.

"Mr. Copplestone is looking for Mr. Bassett Oliver, the famous actor," she continued, as the three met. "Mr. Oliver has mysteriously disappeared. Mr. Copplestone has traced him here, to Scarhaven—he was here yesterday, lunching at the inn—but he can't get any further news. Did you see anything, or hear anything of him?"

Marston Greyle, who had been inspecting the stranger narrowly in the fading light, shook his head.

"Bassett Oliver, the actor," he said. "Oh, yes, I saw his name on the bills in Norcaster the other day. Came here, and has disappeared, you say? Under what circumstances?"

Copplestone had listened carefully to the newcomer's voice; more particularly to his accent. He had already gathered sufficient knowledge of Scarhaven to know that this man was the Squire, the master of the old house and grey ruin in the wood above the cliff; he also happened to know, being something of an archaeologist and well acquainted with family histories, that there had been Greyles of Scarhaven for many hundred years. And he wondered how it was that though this Greyle's voice was pleasant and cultured enough, its accent was decidedly American.

"Perhaps I'd better explain," said Copplestone. "I've already told most of it to this lady, but you will both understand more fully if I tell you more. It's this way——" and he went on to tell everything that had happened and come to light since one

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o'clock that day. "So you see, it's here," he concluded; "we're absolutely certain that Oliver went out of the 'Admiral's Arms' up there about half-past two yesterday, but—where? From that moment, no one seems to have seen him. Yet how he could come along this village street, this quay, without being seen——"

"He need not have come along the quayside," interrupted the girl. "There is a cliff path just below the inn which leads up to the Keep."

"Also, he mayn't have taken this side of the bay, either." remarked Greyle. "He may have chosen the other. You didn't see or hear of him on your side, Audrey?"

"Nothing!" replied the girl. "Nothing!"

Marston Greyle had fallen into line with the other two, and they were now walking along the quay in the direction of the "Admiral's Arms." And presently Stafford, accompanied by a policeman, came hurriedly round a corner and quickened his steps at sight of Copplestone. The policeman, evidently much puzzled and interested, saluted the Squire obsequiously as the two groups met.

"No news at all!" exclaimed Stafford, glancing at Copplestone's companions. "You got any?"

"None," replied Copplestone. "Not a word. This is Mr. Greyle, of the Keep—he has heard nothing. This lady—Miss Greyle?—was out a good deal yesterday afternoon; she knows Oliver quite well by sight, but she did not see him. So if you've no news——"

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Marston Greyle interrupted, turning to the policeman.

"What ought to be done, Haskett?" he asked. "You've had cases of disappearance to deal with before, eh?"

"Can't say as I have, sir, in my time," answered the policeman. "Leastways, not of this sort. Of course, we can get search parties together, and one of 'em can go along the coast north'ards, and the other can go south'ards, and we might have a look round the rocks out yonder, tomorrow, as soon as it's light. But if the gentleman went out there, and had the bad luck to fall into that Devil's Spout, why, then, sir, I'm afraid all the searching in the world'll do no good. And the queer thing is, gentlemen, if I may express an opinion, that nobody ever saw the gentleman after he had left Mrs. Wooler's! That seems——"

A fisherman came lounging across the quay from the shadow of one of the neighbouring cottages. He touched his cap to Marston Greyle, and looked inquiringly at the two strangers.

"Are you the gentlemen as is asking after another gentleman?" he said. "'Cause if so, I make no doubt as how I had a word or two with him yesterday afternoon."

Stafford and Copplestone turned sharply on the newcomer—an elderly man of plain and homely aspect who responded frankly to their questioning glances. He went on at once, before they could put their questions into words.

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"It 'ud be about half-past two, or maybe a bit nearer three o'clock," he said. "Up yonder it was, about a hundred yards this side of the 'Admiral's Arms.' I was sitting on a baulk o' timber there, doing nothing, when he comes along—a tall, fine-looking man. He gives me a pleasant sort o' nod, and said it was a grand day, and we got talking a bit, about the scenery and such-like, and he said he'd never been here before. Then he pointed up to the big house and the old Keep yonder, and asked whose place that might be, and I said that was the Squire's. 'And who may the Squire be?' says he. 'Mr. Marston Greyle,' says I. 'Recent come into the property.' 'Marston Greyle!' he says, sharp-like. 'Why, I used to know a young man of that very name in America!' he says. 'Very like,' says I, 'I have heard as how the Squire had been in them parts before he came here.' 'Bless me!' he says, 'I've a good mind to call on him. How do you get up there?' he says. So I showed him that side path that runs up through the plantation to near the top, and I told him that if he followed that till he came to the Keep, he'd find another path there as would take him to the door of the house. And he gave me a shilling to drink his health, and off he went, the way as I'd pointed out. D'ye think that'll be the same gentleman, now?"

Nobody answered this question. Everybody there was looking at Marston Greyle. The little group had drawn near to the light of one of the three gas-lamps which feebly illuminated the quay; it seemed

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to Copplestone that the Squire's face had paled when the fisherman arrived at the middle of his story. But it flushed as his companion turned to him, and he laughed, a little uneasily.

"Said he knew me—in America?" he exclaimed. "I don't remember meeting Mr. Bassett Oliver out there. But then I met so many Englishmen in one place or another that I may have been introduced to him somewhere, at some time, and—forgotten all about it."

Stafford spoke—with unnecessary abruptness, in Copplestone's opinion.

"I don't think it very likely that any one would forget Bassett Oliver," he said. "He isn't—or wasn't—the sort of man anybody could forget, once they'd met him. Anyhow—did he come to your house yesterday afternoon as this man suggests?"

Marston Greyle drew himself up. He looked Stafford up and down. Then he made a slight gesture to the girl, whose face had already assumed a troubled expression.

"If I had seen Mr. Bassett Oliver yesterday, sir, we should not be discussing his possible whereabouts now," said Greyle, icily. "Are you coming, Audrey?"

The girl hesitated, glanced at Copplestone, and then walked away with her cousin. Stafford sniffed contemptuously.

"Ass!" he muttered. "Couldn't he see that what I meant was that Oliver must either have been mistaken, or have referred to some other Greyle whom

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he met? Hang his pride! Well, now," he went on, turning to the fisherman, "you're dead certain about what you've told us?"

"As certain as mortal man can be of aught there is!" answered the informant. "Sure certain, mister."

"Make a note of it, constable," said Stafford. "Mr. Oliver was last seen going up the path to the Keep, having said he meant to call on Mr. Marston Greyle. I'll call on you again tomorrow morning. Copplestone!" he went on, drawing his companion away, "I'm off to Norcaster—I shall see the police there and get detectives. There's something seriously wrong here—and by heaven, we've got to get to the bottom of it! Now, look here—will you stay here for the night, so as to be on the spot? I'll come back first thing in the morning and bring your luggage—I can't come sooner, for there are heaps of business matters to deal with. You will—good! Now I can just catch a train. Copplestone!—keep your eyes and ears open. It's my firm belief—I don't know why—that there's been foul play. Foul play!"

Stafford hurried away up hill to the station, and Copplestone, after waiting a minute or two, turned along the quay on the north of the bay—following Audrey Greyle, who was in front, alone.

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CHAPTER IV

THE ESTATE AGENT

Copplestone had kept a sharp watch on Marston Greyle and his cousin when they walked off, and he had seen that they had parted at a point a little farther along the shore road—the man turning up into the wood, the girl going forward along the quay which led to the other half of the village. He quickened his pace and followed her, catching her up as she came to a path which led towards the old church. At the sound of his hurrying steps she turned and faced him, and he saw in the light of a cottage lamp that she still looked troubled and perplexed.

"Forgive me for running after you," said Copplestone as he went up to her. "I just wanted to say that I'm sorry about—about that little scene down there, you know. Your cousin misunderstood Mr. Stafford—what Stafford meant was that——"

"I saw what Mr. Stafford meant," she broke in quickly. "I'm sorry my cousin didn't see it. It was —obvious."

"All the same, Stafford put it rather—shall we say, brusquely," remarked Copplestone. "Of course, he's terribly upset about Oliver's disappearance, and he didn't consider the effect of his words. And it was rather a surprise to hear that Oliver had known some

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man of your cousin's name over there in America, wasn't it?"

"And that Mr. Oliver should mysteriously disappear just after making such an announcement," said Audrey. "That certainly seems very surprising."

The two looked at each other, a question in the eyes of each, and Copplestone knew that the trouble in the girl's eyes arose from inability to understand what was already a suspicious circumstance.

"But after all, that may have been a mere coincidence," he hastened to say. "Let's hope things may be cleared. I only hope that Oliver hasn't met with an accident and is lying somewhere without help. I'm going to remain here for the night, however, and Stafford will come back early in the morning and go more thoroughly into things—I suppose there'll have to be a search of the neighbourhood."

They had walked slowly up a path on the side of the cliff as they talked, and now the girl stopped before a small cottage which stood at the end of the churchyard, set in a tree-shaded garden, and looking out on the bay. She laid her hand on the gate, glancing at Copplestone, and suddenly she spoke, a little impulsively.

"Will you come in and speak to my mother?" she said. "She was a great admirer of Mr. Oliver's acting—and she knew him at one time. She will be interested—and grieved."

Copplestone followed her up the garden and into the house, where she led the way into a small old-fashioned parlour in which a grey-haired woman,

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who had once been strikingly handsome, and whose face seemed to the visitor to bear traces of great trouble, sat writing at a bureau. She turned in surprise as her daughter led Copplestone in, but her manner became remarkably calm and collected as Audrey explained who he was and why he was there. And Copplestone, watching her narrowly, fancied that he saw interest flash into her eyes when she heard of Bassett Oliver's remark to the fisherman. But she made no comment, and when Audrey had finished the story, she turned to Copplestone as if she had already summed up the situation.

"We know this place so well—having lived here so long, you know," she said, "that we can make a fairly accurate guess at what Mr. Oliver might do. There seems no doubt that he went up the path to the Keep. According to Mr. Marston Greyle's statement, he certainly did not go to the house. Well, he might have done one of two other things. There is a path which leads from the Keep down to the beach, immediately opposite the big rocks which you have no doubt seen. There is another path which turns out of the woods and follows the cliffs towards Lenwick, a village along the coast, a mile away. But —at that time, on a Sunday afternoon, both paths would be frequented. Speaking from knowledge, I should say that Mr. Oliver cannot have left the woods —he must have been seen had he done so. It's impossible that he could have gone down to the shore or along the cliffs without being seen, too—impossible!"

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There was a certain amount of insistence in the last few words which puzzled Copplestone—also they conveyed to him a queer suggestion which repulsed him; it was almost as if the speaker was appealing to him to use his own common-sense about a difficult question. And before he could make any reply Mrs. Greyle put a direct inquiry to him.

"What is going to be done?"

"I don't know, exactly," answered Copplestone. "I'm going to stay here for the night, anyway, on the chance of hearing something. Stafford is coming back in the morning—he spoke of detectives."

He looked a little doubtfully at his questioner as he uttered the last word, and again he saw the sudden strange flash of unusual interest in her eyes, and she nodded her head emphatically.

"Precisely!—the proper thing to do," she said. "There must have been foul play—must!"

"Mother!" exclaimed Audrey, half doubtfully. "Do you really think—that?"

"I don't think anything else," replied Mrs. Greyle. "I certainly don't believe that Bassett Oliver would put himself into any position of danger which would result in his breaking his neck. Bassett Oliver never left Scarhaven Wood!"

Copplestone made no comment on this direct assertion.

Instead, after a brief silence, he asked Mrs. Greyle a question.

"You knew Mr. Oliver—personally?"

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"Five and twenty years ago—yes," she answered. "I was on the stage myself before my marriage. But I have never met him since then. I have seen him, of course, at the local theatres."

"He—you won't mind my asking?" said Copplestone, diffidently, "he didn't know that you lived here?"

Mrs. Greyle smiled, somewhat mysteriously.

"Not at all—my name wouldn't have conveyed anything to him," she answered. "He never knew whom I married. Otherwise, if he met some one named Marston Greyle in America he would have connected him with me, and have made inquiry about me, and had he known I lived here, he would have called. It is odd, Audrey, that if your cousin met Mr. Oliver over there he should have forgotten him. For one doesn't easily forget a man of reputation—and Mr. Oliver was that of course!—and on the other hand, Marston Greyle is not a common name. Did you ever hear the name before, Mr. Copplestone?"

"Only in connection with your own family—I have read of the Greyles of Scarhaven," replied Copplestone. "But, after all, I suppose it is not confined to your family. There may be Greyles in America. Well—it's all very queer," he went on, as he rose to leave. "May I come in tomorrow and tell you what's being done?—I'm sure Stafford means to leave no stone unturned—he's tremendously keen about it."

"Do!" said Mrs. Greyle, heartily. "But the prob-

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ability is that you'll see us out and about in the morning—we spend most of our time out of doors, having little else to do."

Copplestone went away feeling more puzzled than ever.

Now that he was alone, for the first time since meeting Audrey Greyle on the beach, he was able to reflect on certain events of the afternoon in uninterrupted fashion. He thought over them as he walked back towards the "Admiral's Arms." It was certainly a strange thing that Bassett Oliver, after remarking to the fisherman that he had known a Mr. Marston Greyle in America, and hearing that the Squire of Scarhaven had been in that country, should have gone up to the house saying that he would call on the Squire and should never have been seen again. It was certainly strange that if this Marston Greyle, of Scarhaven, had met Bassett Oliver in America he should have completely forgotten the fact. Bassett Oliver had a considerable reputation in the United States—he was, in fact, more popular in that country than in his own, and he had toured in the principal towns and cities across there regularly for several years. To meet him there was to meet a most popular celebrity—could any man forget it? Therefore, were there two men of the name of Marston Greyle?

That was one problem—closely affecting Oliver's disappearance. The other had nothing to do with Oliver's disappearance—nevertheless, it interested Richard Copplestone. He was a young man of quick perception and accurate observation, and his alert

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eyes had seen that the Squire of Scarhaven occupied a position suggestive of power and wealth. The house which stood beneath the old Keep was one of size and importance, the sort of place which could only be kept up by a rich man—Copplestone's glances at its grounds, its gardens, its entrance lodge, its entire surroundings had shown him that only a well-to-do man could live there. How came it, then, that the Squire's relations—his cousin and her mother—lived in a small and unpretentious cottage, and were obviously not well off as regards material goods? Copplestone had the faculty of seeing things at a glance, and refined and cultivated as the atmosphere of Mrs. Greyle's parlour was, it had taken no more than a glance from his perceptive eyes to see that he was there confronted with what folk call genteel poverty. Mrs. Greyle's almost nun-like attire of black had done duty for a long time; the carpet was threadbare; there was an absence of those little touches of comfort with which refined women of even modest means love to surround themselves; a sure instinct told him that here were two women who had to carefully count their pence, and lay out their shillings with caution. Genteel, quiet poverty, without doubt—and yet, on the other side of the little bay, a near kinsman whose rent-roll must run to a few thousands a year!

And yet one more curious occasion of perplexity—to add to the other two. Copplestone had felt instinctively attracted to Audrey Greyle when he met her on the sands, and the attraction increased as he

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walked at her side towards the village. In his quiet unobtrusive fashion he had watched her closely when they encountered the man whom she introduced as her cousin; and he had fancied that her manner underwent a curious change when Marston Greyle came on the scene—she had seemed to become constrained, chilled, distant, aloof—not with the stranger, himself, but with her kinsman. This fancy had become assurance during the conversation which had abruptly ended when Greyle took offence at Stafford's brusque remark. Copplestone had seen a sudden look in the girl's eyes when the fisherman repeated what Oliver had said about meeting a Mr. Marston Greyle in America; it was a look of sharply awakened—what? Suspicion? apprehension?—he could not decide. But it was the same look which had come into her mother's eyes later on. Moreover, when the Squire turned huffily away, taking his cousin with him, Copplestone had noticed that there was evidently a smart passage of words between them after leaving the little group on the quay, and they had parted unceremoniously, the man turning on his heel up a side path into his own grounds and the girl going forward with a sudden acceleration of pace. All this made Copplestone draw a conclusion.

"There's no great love lost between the gentleman at the big house and his lady relatives in the little cottage," he mused. "Also, around the gentleman there appears to be some cloud of mystery. What?—and has it anything to do with the Oliver mystery?"

He went back to the inn and made his arrange-

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ments with its landlady, who by that time was full to overflowing with interest and amazement at the strange affair which had brought her this guest. But Mrs. Wooler had eyes as well as ears, and noticing that Copplestone was already looking weary and harassed, she hastened to provide a hot dinner for him, and to recommend a certain claret which in her opinion possessed remarkable revivifying qualities. Copplestone, who had eaten nothing for several hours, accepted her hospitable attentions with gratitude, and he was enjoying himself greatly in a quaint old-world parlour, in close proximity to a bright fire, when Mrs. Wooler entered with a countenance which betokened mystery in every feature.

"There's the estate agent, Mr. Chatfield, outside, very anxious to have a word with you about this affair," she said. "Would you be for having him in? He's the sort of man," she went on, sinking her tones to a whisper, "who must know everything that's going on, and, of course, having the position he has, he might be useful. Mr. Peter Chatfield, Mr. Greyle's agent, and his uncle's before him—that's who he is—Peeping Peter, they call him hereabouts, because he's fond of knowing everybody's business."

"Bring him in," said Copplestone. He was by no means averse to having a companion, and Mrs. Wooler's graphic characterization had awakened his curiosity. "Tell him I shall be glad to see him."

Mrs. Wooler presently ushered in a figure which Copplestone's dramatic sense immediately seized on. He saw before him a tall, heavily-built man, with a

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large, solemn, deeply-lined face, out of which looked a pair of the smallest and slyest eyes ever seen in a human being—queer, almost hidden eyes, set beneath thick bushy eyebrows above which rose the dome of an unusually high forehead and a bald head. As for the rest of him, Mr. Peter Chatfield had a snub nose, a wide slit of a mouth, and a flabby hand; his garments were of a Quaker kind in cut and hue; he wore old-fashioned stand-up collars and a voluminous black stock; in one hand he carried a stout oaken staff, in the other a square-crowned beaver hat; altogether, his mere outward appearance would have gained notice for him anywhere, and Copplestone rejoiced in him as a character. He rose, greeted his visitor cordially, and invited him to a seat by the fire. The estate agent settled his heavy figure comfortably, and made a careful inspection of the young stranger before he spoke. At last he leaned forward.

"Sir!" he whispered in a confidential tone. "Do you consider this here a matter of murder?"

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CHAPTER V

THE GREYLE HISTORY

If Copplestone had followed his first natural impulse, he would have laughed aloud at this solemnly propounded question: as it was, he found it difficult to content himself with a smile.

"Isn't it a little early to arrive at any conclusion, of any sort, Mr. Chatfield?" he asked. "You haven't made up your own mind, surely?" Chatfield pursed up his long thin lips and shook his head, continuing to stare fixedly at Copplestone.

"Now I may have, and I may not have, mister," he said at last, suddenly relaxing. "What I was asking of was—what might you consider?"

"I don't consider at all—yet," answered Copplestone. "It's too soon. Let me offer you a glass of claret."

"Many thanks to you, sir, but it's too cold for my stomach," responded the visitor. "A drop of gin, now, is more in my line, since you're so kind. Ah, well, in any case, sir, this here is a very unfortunate affair. I'm a deal upset by it—I am indeed!"

Copplestone rang the bell, gave orders for Mr. Chatfield's suitable entertainment with gin and cigars, and making an end of his dinner, drew up a chair to the fire opposite his visitor.

"You are upset, Mr. Chatfield?" he remarked. "Now, why?"

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Chatfield sipped his gin and water, and flourished a cigar with a comprehensive wave of his big fat hand.

"Oh, in general, sir!" he said. "Things like this here are not pleasant to have in a quiet, respectable community like ours. There's very wicked people in this world, mister, and they will not control what's termed the unruly member. They will talk. You'll excuse me, but I doubt not that I'm a good deal more than twice your age, and I've learnt experience. My experience, sir, is that a wise man holds his tongue until he's called upon to use it. Now, in my opinion, it was a very unwise thing of yon there sea-going man, Ewbank, to say that this unfortunate play-actor told him that he'd met our Squire in America—very unfortunate!"

Copplestone pricked his ears. Had the estate agent come there to tell him that? And if so, why?

"Oh!" he said. "You've heard that, have you? Now who told you that, Mr. Chatfield? For I don't think that's generally known."

"If you knew this here village, mister, as well as what I do," replied Chatfield coolly, "you'd know that there is known all over the place by this time. The constable told me, and of course yon there man, Ewbank, he'll have told it all round since he had that bit of talk with you and your friend. He'll have been in to every public there is in Scarhaven, repeating of it. And a very, very serious complexion, of course, could be put on them words, sir."

"How?" asked Copplestone.

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"Put it to yourself, sir," replied Chatfield. "The unfortunate man comes here, tells Ewbank he knew Mr. Greyle in that far-away land, says he'll call on him, is seen going towards the big house—and is never seen no more! Why, sir, what does human nature—which is wicked—say?"

"What does your human nature—which I'm sure is not wicked, say?" suggested Copplestone. "Come, now!"

"What I say, sir, is neither here nor there," answered the agent. "It's what evil-disposed tongues says."

"But they haven't said anything yet," said Copplestone.

"I should say they've said a deal, sir," responded Chatfield, lugubriously. "I know Scarhaven tongues. They'll have thrown out a deal of suspicious talk about the Squire."

"Have you seen Mr. Greyle?" asked Copplestone. He was already sure that the agent was there with a purpose, and he wanted to know its precise nature. "Is he concerned about this?"

"I have seen Mr. Greyle, mister, and he is concerned about what yon man, Ewbank, related," replied Chatfield. "Mr. Greyle, sir, came straight to me—I reside in a residence within the park. Mr. Greyle, mister, says that he has no recollection whatever of meeting this play-actor person in America—he may have done and he mayn't. But he doesn't remember him, and it isn't likely he should—him, an English landlord and a gentleman wouldn't be very

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like to remember a play-actor person that's here to-day and gone tomorrow! I hope I give no offence, sir—maybe you're a play-actor yourself."

"I am not," answered Copplestone. He sat staring at his visitor for awhile, and when he spoke again his voice had lost its cordial tone. "Well," he said, "and what have you called on me about?"

Chatfield looked up sharply, noticing the altered tone.

"To tell you—and them as you no doubt represent—that Mr. Greyle will be glad to help in any possible way towards finding out something in this here affair," he answered. "He'll welcome any inquiry that's opened."

"Oh!" said Copplestone. "I see! But you're making a mistake, Mr. Chatfield. I don't represent anybody. I'm not even a relation of Mr. Bassett Oliver. In fact, I never met Mr. Oliver in my life: never spoke to him. So—I'm not here in any representative or official sense."

Chatfield's small eyes grew smaller with suspicious curiosity.

"Oh?" he said questioningly. "Then—what might you be here for, mister?"

Copplestone stood up and rang the bell.

"That's my business," he answered. "Sorry I can't give you any more time," he went on as Mrs. Wooler opened the door. "I'm engaged now. If you or Mr. Greyle want to see Mr. Oliver's friends I believe his brother, Sir Cresswell Oliver, will be here tomorrow—he's been wired for anyhow."

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Chatfield's mouth opened as he picked up his hat. He stared at this self-assured young man as if he were something quite new to him.

"Sir Cresswell Oliver!" he exclaimed. "Did you say, sir?"

"I said Sir Cresswell Oliver—quite plainly," answered Copplestone.

Chatfield's mouth grew wider.

"You don't mean to tell me that a play-actor's own brother to a titled gentleman!" he said.

"Good-night!" replied Copplestone, motioning his visitor towards the door. "I can't give you any more time, really. However, as you seem anxious, Mr. Bassett Oliver is the younger brother of Rear-Admiral Sir Cresswell Oliver, Baronet, and I should imagine that Sir Cresswell will want to know a lot about what's become of him. So you'd better—or Mr. Greyle had better—speak to him. Now once more—good-night."

When Chatfield had gone, Copplestone laughed and flung himself into an easy chair before the fire. Of course, the stupid, ignorant, self-sufficient old fool had come fishing for news—he and his master wanted to know what was going to be done in the way of making inquiry. But why?—why so much anxiety if they knew nothing whatever about Bassett Oliver's strange disappearance? Why this profession of eager willingness to welcome any inquiry that might be made? Nobody had accused Marston Greyle of having anything to do with Bassett Oliver's strange exit—if it was an exit—why, then——

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"But it's useless speculating," he mused. "I can't do anything—and here I am, with nothing to do!"

He had pleaded an engagement, but he had none, of course. There was a shelf of old books in the room, but he did not care to read. And presently, hands in pockets, he lounged out into the hall and saw Mrs. Wooler standing at the door of the little parlour into which she had shown him and Stafford earlier in the day.

"There's nobody in here, sir," she said, invitingly; "if you'd like to smoke your pipe here——"

"Thank you—I will," answered Copplestone. "I got rid of that old fellow," he observed confidentially when he had followed the landlady within, and had dropped into a chair near her own. "I think he had come—fishing."

"That's his usual occupation," said Mrs. Wooler, with a meaning smile. "I told you he was called Peeping Peter. He's the sort of man who will have his nose in everybody's affairs. But," she added, with a shake of the head which seemed to mean a good deal more than the smile, "he doesn't often come here. This is almost the only house in Scarhaven that doesn't belong to the Greyle estate. This house, and the land round it, have belonged to the Wooler family as long as the rest of the place has belonged to the Greyles. And many a Greyle has wanted to buy it, and every Wooler has refused to sell it—and always will!"

"That's very interesting," said Copplestone. "Does the present Greyle want to buy?"

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The landlady picked up a piece of sewing and sat down in a chair which seemed to be purposely placed so that she could keep an eye on the adjacent bar-parlour on one side and the hall on the other.

"I don't know much about what the present Squire would like," she said. "Nobody does. He's a new-comer, and nobody knows anything about him. You saw him this afternoon?"

"I met a young lady on the sands who turned out to be his cousin, and he came up while I was talking to her," replied Copplestone. "Yes, I saw him. I'm afraid Mr. Stafford, who came in here with me, you know, offended him," he continued, and gave Mrs. Wooler an account of what had happened. "Is he rather—touchy?" he concluded.

"I don't know that he is," she said. "No one sees much of him. You see he's a stranger: although he's a Greyle, he's not a Scarhaven man. Of course, I know all his family history—I'm Scarhaven born and bred. In my time there have been three generations of Greyles. The first one I knew was this Squire's grandfather, old Mr. Stephen Greyle: he died when I was a girl in my 'teens. He had three sons and no daughters. The three sons were all different in their tastes and ideas; the eldest, Stephen John, who came into the estates on his father's death, was a real home bird—he never left Scarhaven for more than a day or two at a time all his life. And he never married—he was a real old bachelor, almost a woman-hater. The next one, Marcus, went out to America and settled there—he was the father of this

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present Squire, Mr. Marston Greyle. Then there was the third son, Valentine—he went to live in London. And years after he came back here, very poor, and settled down in a little house near Scarhaven Church with his wife and daughter—that was the daughter you met this afternoon, Miss Audrey. I don't know why, and nobody else knows, either, but the last Squire, Stephen John, never had anything to do with Valentine and his family; what's more, when Valentine died and left the widow and daughter very poorly off, Stephen John did nothing for them. But he himself died very soon after Valentine, and then of course, as Marcus had already died in America, everything came to this Mr. Marston. And, as I said, he's a stranger to Scarhaven folk and Scarhaven ways. Indeed, you might say to England and English ways, for I understand he'd never been in England until he came to take up the family property."

"Is he more friendly with the mother and daughter than the last Squire was?" asked Copplestone, who had been much interested in this chapter of family history.

Mrs. Wooler made several stitches in her sewing before she answered this direct question, and when she spoke it was in lower tones and with a glance of caution.

"He would be, if he could!" she said. "There are those in the village who say that he wants to marry his cousin. But the truth is—so far as one can see or learn it—that for some reason or other,

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neither Mrs. Valentine Greyle nor Miss Audrey can bear him! They took some queer dislike to the young man when he first came, and they've kept it up. Of course, they're outwardly friendly, and he occasionally, I believe, goes to the cottage, but they rarely go to the big house, and it's very seldom they're ever seen together. I have heard—one does hear things in villages—that he'd be very glad to do something handsome for them, but they're both as proud as they're poor, and not the sort to accept aught from anybody. I believe they've just enough to live on, but it can't be a great deal, for everybody knows that Valentine Greyle made ducks and drakes of his fortune long before he came back to Scarhaven, and old Stephen John only left them a few hundreds of pounds. However—there it is. However much the new Squire wants to marry his cousin, it's very flat she'll not have anything to say to him. I've once or twice had an opportunity of seeing those two together, and it's my private opinion that Miss Audrey dislikes that young man just about as heartily as she possibly could!"

"What does Mr. Marston Greyle find to do with himself in this place?" asked Copplestone, turning the conversation. "Can't be very lively for him if he's a man of any activity."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Mrs. Wooler. "I think he's a good deal like his uncle, the last squire—he certainly never goes anywhere, except out to sea in his yacht. He shoots a bit, and fishes a bit, and so on, and spends a lot of time with Peeping Peter—

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he's a widower, is Chatfield, and lives alone, except when his daughter runs down to see him. And that daughter, bye-the-bye, Mr. Copplestone, is on the stage."

"Dear me!" said Copplestone. "That is surprising! Her father made several contemptuous references to play-actors when he was talking to me."

"Oh, he hates them, and all connected with them!" replied Mrs. Wooler, laughing. "All the same, his own daughter has been on the stage for a good five years, and I fancy she's doing well. A fine, handsome girl she is, too—she's been down here a good deal lately, and——'

The landlady suddenly paused, hearing a light step in the hall. She glanced through the window and then turned to Copplestone with an arch smile.

"Talk of the—you know," she exclaimed. "Here's Addie Chatfield herself!"

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CHAPTER VI

THE LEADING LADY

Copplestone looked up with interest as the door of the private parlour was thrown open, and a tall, handsome young woman burst in with a briskness of movement which betokened unusual energy and vivacity. He got an impression of the old estate agent's daughter in one glance, and wondered how Chatfield came to have such a good-looking girl as his progeny. The impression was of dark, sparkling eyes, a mass of darker, highly-burnished hair, bright colour, a flashing vivacious smile, a fine figure, a general air of sprightliness and glowing health—this was certainly the sort of personality that would recommend itself to a considerable mass of theatre-goers, and Copplestone, as a budding dramatist, immediately began to cast Addie Chatfield for an appropriate part.

The newcomer stopped short on the threshold as she caught sight of a stranger, and she glanced with sharp inquisitiveness at Copplestone as he rose from his chair.

"Oh!—I supposed you were alone, Mrs. Wooler," she exclaimed. "You usually are, you know, so I came in anyhow—sorry!"

"Come in," said the landlady. "Don't go, Mr. Copplestone. This is Miss Adela Chatfield. Your

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father has just been to see this gentleman, Addie—perhaps he told you?"

Addie Chatfield dropped into a chair at Mrs. Wooler's side, and looked the stranger over slowly and carefully."

"No," she answered. "My father didn't tell me —he doesn't tell me anything about his own affairs. All his talk is about mine—the iniquity of them, and so on."

She showed a fine set of even white teeth as she made this remark, and her eyes sought Copplestone's again with a direct challenge. Copplestone looked calmly at her, half-smiling; he was beginning, in his youthful innocence, to think that he already understood this type of young woman. And seeing him smile, Addie also smiled.

"Now I wonder whatever my father wanted to see you about?" she said, with a strong accent on the personal pronoun. "For you don't look his sort, and he certainly isn't yours—unless you're deceptive."

"Perhaps I am," responded Copplestone, still keeping his eyes on her. "Your father wanted to see me about the strange disappearance of Mr. Bassett Oliver. That was all."

The girl's glance, bold and challenging, suddenly shifted before Copplestone's steady look. She half turned to Mrs. Wooler, and her colour rose a little.

"I've heard of that," she said, with an affectation of indifference. "And as I happen to know a bit of Bassett Oliver, I don't see what all this fuss is about. I should say Bassett Oliver took it into his

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head to go off somewhere yesterday on a little game of his own, and that he's turned up at Norcaster by this time, and is safe in his dressing-room, or on the stage. That's my notion."

"I wish I could think it the correct one," replied Copplestone. "But we can soon find out if it is—there's a telephone in the hall. Yet—I'm so sure that you're wrong, that I'm not even going to ring Norcaster up. Mr. Bassett Oliver has—disappeared here!"

"Are you a member of his company?" asked Addie, again looking Copplestone over with speculative glances.

"Not at all! I'm a humble person whose play Mr. Oliver was about to produce next month, in consequence of which I came down to see him, and to find this state of affairs. And—having nothing else to do—I'm now here to help to find him—alive or dead."

"Oh!" said Addie. "So—you're a writer?"

"I understand that you are an actress?" responded Copplestone. "I wonder if I've ever seen you anywhere?"

Addie bowed her head and gave him a sharp glance.

"Evidently not!" she retorted. "Or you wouldn't wonder! As if anybody could forget me, once they'd seen me! I believe you're pulling my leg, though. Do you live in town?"

"I live," replied Copplestone slowly and with affected solemnity, "in chambers in Jermyn Street."

"And do you mean to tell me that you didn't see

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me last year in *The Clever Lady Hartletop?*" she exclaimed.

Copplestone put the tips of his fingers together and his head on one side and regarded her critically.

"What part did you play?" he asked innocently.

"Part? Why, *the* part, of course!" she retorted. "Goodness! Why, I created it! And played it to crowded houses for nearly two hundred nights, too!"

"Ah!" said Copplestone. "But I'll make a confession to you. I rarely visit the theatre. I never saw *Lady Hartletop*. I haven't been in a theatre of any sort for two years. So you must forgive me. I congratulate you on your success."

Addie received this tribute with a mollified smile, which changed to a glance of surprised curiosity.

"You never go to the theatre?—and yet you write plays!" she exclaimed. "That's queer, isn't it? But I believe writing people are queer—they look it, anyhow. All the same, you don't look like a writer—what does he look like, Mrs. Wooler? Oh, I know—a sort of nice little officer boy, just washed and tidied up!"

The landlady, who had evidently enjoyed this passage at arms, laughed as she gave Copplestone a significant glance.

"And when did you come down home, Addie?" she asked quietly. "I didn't know you were here again."

"Came down Saturday night," said Addie. "I'm on my way to Edinburgh—business there on Wednes-

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day. So I broke the journey here—just to pay my respects to my worshipful parent."

"I think I heard you say that you knew Mr. Bassett Oliver?" asked Copplestone. "You've met him?"

"Met him in this country and in America," replied Addie, calmly. "He was on tour over there when I was—three years ago. We were in two or three towns together at the same time—different houses, of course. I never saw much of him in London, though."

"You didn't see anything of him yesterday, here?" suggested Copplestone.

Addie stared and glanced at the landlady.

"Here?" she exclaimed. "Goodness, no! When I'm here of a Sunday, I lie in bed all day, or most of it. Otherwise, I'd have to walk with my parent to the family pew. No—my Sundays are days of rest! You really think this disappearance is serious?"

"Oliver's managers—who know him best, of course—think it most serious," replied Copplestone. "They say that nothing but an accident of a really serious nature would have kept him from his engagements."

"Then that settles it!" said Addie. "He's fallen down the Devil's Spout. Plain as plain can be, that! He's made his way there, been a bit too daring, and slipped over the edge. And whoever falls in there never comes out again!—isn't that it, Mrs. Wooler?"

"That's what they say," answered the landlady.

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"But I don't remember any accident at the Devil's Spout in my time."

"Well, there's been one now, anyway—that's flat," remarked Addie. "Poor old Bassett—I'm sorry for him! Well, I'm off. Good-night, Mr. Copplestone—and perhaps you'll so far overcome your repugnance to the theatre as to come and see me in one some day!"

"Supposing I escort you homeward instead—now?" suggested Copplestone. "That will at least show that I am ready to become your devoted——"

"Admirer, I suppose," said Addie. "I'm afraid he's not quite as innocent as he looks, Mrs. Wooler. Well—you can escort me as far as the gates of the park, then—I daren't take you further, because it's so dark in there that you'd surely lose your way, and then there'd be a second disappearance and all sorts of complications."

She went out of the inn, laughing and chattering, but once outside she suddenly became serious, and she involuntarily laid her hand on Copplestone's arm as they turned down the hillside towards the quay.

"I say!" she said in a low voice. "I wasn't going to ask questions in there, but—what's going to be done about this Oliver affair? Of course you're stopping here to do something. What?"

Copplestone hesitated before answering this direct question. He had not seen anything which would lead him to suppose that Miss Adela Chatfield was a disingenuous and designing young woman, but she was certainly Peeping Peter's daughter, and the old

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man, having failed to get anything out of Copplestone himself, might possibly have sent her to see what she could accomplish. He replied noncommittally.

"I'm not in a position to do anything," he said. "I'm not a relative—not even a personal friend. I daresay you know that Bassett Oliver was—one's already talking of him in the past tense!—the brother of Rear-Admiral Sir Cresswell Oliver, the famous seaman?"

"I knew he was a man of what they call family, but I didn't know that," she answered. "What of it?"

"Stafford's wired to Sir Cresswell," replied Copplestone. "He'll be down here some time tomorrow, no doubt. And of course he'll take everything into his own hands."

"And he'll do—what?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Copplestone. "Set the police to work, I should think. They'll want to find out where Bassett Oliver went, where he got to, when he turned up to the Keep, saying he'd go and call on the Squire, as he'd met some man of that name in America. By-the-bye, you said you'd been in America. Did you meet anybody of the Squire's name there?"

They were passing along the quay by that time, and in the light of one of its feeble gas-lamps he turned and looked narrowly at his companion. He fancied that he saw her face change in expression at his question; if there was any change, however, it

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was so quick that it was gone in a second. She shook her head with emphatic decision.

"I?" she exclaimed. "Never! It's a most uncommon name, that. I never heard of anybody called Greyle except at Scarhaven."

"The present Mr. Greyle came from America," said Copplestone.

"I know, of course," she answered. "But I never met any Greyles out there. Bassett Oliver may have done, though. I know he toured in a lot of American towns—I only went to three—New York, Chicago, St. Louis. I suppose," she continued, turning to Copplestone with a suggestion of confidence in her manner, "I suppose you consider it a very damning thing that Bassett Oliver should disappear, after saying what he did to Ewbank."

It was very evident to Copplestone that whether Miss Chatfield had spoken the truth or not when she said that her father had not told her of his visit to the "Admiral's Arms," she was thoroughly conversant with all the facts relating to the Oliver mystery, and he was still doubtful as to whether she was not seeking information.

"Does it matter at all what I think," he answered evasively. "I've no part in this affair—I'm a mere spectator. I don't know how what you refer to might be considered by people who are accustomed to size things up. They might say all that was a mere coincidence."

"But what do you think?" she said with feminine persistence. "Come, now, between ourselves?"

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Copplestone laughed. They had come to the edge of the wooded park in which the estate agent's house stood, and at a gate which led into it, he paused.

"Between ourselves, then, I don't think at all—yet," he answered. "I haven't sized anything up. All I should say at present is that if—or as, for I'm sure the fisherman repeated accurately what he heard—as Oliver said he met somebody called Marston Greyle in America, why—I conclude he did. That's all. Now, won't you please let me see you through these dark woods?"

But Addie said her farewell, and left him somewhat abruptly, and he watched her until she had passed out of the circle of light from the lamp which swung over the gate. She passed on into the shadows—and Copplestone, who had already memorized the chief geographical points of his new surroundings, noticed what she probably thought no stranger would notice—that instead of going towards her father's house, she turned up the drive to the Squire's.

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CHAPTER VII

LEFT ON GUARD

Stafford was back at Scarhaven before breakfast time next morning, bringing with him a roll of copies of the *Norcaster Daily Chronicle*, one of which he immediately displayed to Copplestone and Mrs. Wooler, who met him at the inn door. He pointed with great pride to certain staring headlines.

"I engineered that!" he exclaimed. "Went round to the newspaper office last night and put them up to everything. Nothing like publicity in these cases. There you are!

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF FAMOUS ACTOR! BASSETT OLIVER MISSING! INTERVIEW WITH MAN WHO SAW HIM LAST!

That's the style, Copplestone!—every human being along this coast'll be reading that by now!"

"So there was no news of him last night?" asked Copplestone.

"Neither last night nor this morning, my boy," replied Stafford. "Of course not! No—he never left here, not he! Now then, let Mrs. Wooler serve us that nice breakfast which I'm sure she has in readiness, and then we're going to plunge into busi-

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ness, hot and strong. There's a couple of detectives coming on by the nine o'clock train, and we're going to do the whole thing thoroughly."

"What about his brother?" inquired Copplestone.

"I wired him last night to his London address, and got a reply first thing this morning," said Stafford. "He's coming along by the 5:15 A. M. from King's Cross—he'll be here before noon. I want to get things to work before he arrives, though. And the first thing to do, of course, is to make sympathetic inquiry, and to search the shore, and the cliffs, and these woods—and that Keep. All that we'll attend to at once."

But on going round to the village police-station they found that Stafford's ideas had already been largely anticipated. The news of the strange gentleman's mysterious disappearance had spread like wild-fire through Scarhaven and the immediate district during the previous evening, and at daybreak parties of fisher-folk had begun a systematic search. These parties kept coming in to report progress all the morning: by noon they had all returned. They had searched the famous rocks, the woods, the park, the Keep, and its adjacent ruins, and the cliffs and shore for some considerable distance north and south of the bay, and there was no result. Not a trace, not a sign of the missing man was to be found anywhere. And when, at one o'clock, Stafford and Copplestone walked up to the little station to meet Sir Cresswell Oliver, it was with the disappointing consciousness that they had no news to give him.

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Copplestone, who nourished a natural taste for celebrities of any sort, born of his artistic leanings and tendencies, had looked forward with interest to meeting Sir Cresswell Oliver, who, only a few months previously, had made himself famous by a remarkable feat of seamanship in which great personal bravery and courage had been displayed. He had a vague expectation of seeing a bluff, stalwart, sea-dog type of man; instead, he presently found himself shaking hands with a very quiet-looking, elderly gentleman, who might have been a barrister or a doctor, of pleasant and kindly manners. With him was another gentleman of a similar type, and of about the same age, whom he introduced as the family solicitor, Mr. Petherton. And to these two, in a private sitting-room at the "Admiral's Arms," Stafford, as Bassett Oliver's business representative, and Copplestone, as having remained on the spot since the day before, told all and every detail of what had transpired since it was definitely established that the famous actor was missing. Both listened in silence and with deep attention; when all the facts had been put before them, they went aside and talked together; then they returned and Sir Cresswell besought Stafford and Copplestone's attention.

"I want to tell you young gentlemen precisely what Mr. Petherton and I think it best to do," he said in the mild and bland accents which had so much astonished Copplestone. "We have listened, as you will admit, with our best attention. Mr. Petherton, as you know, is a man of law; I myself,

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