

*The* **Millionaire  
Mystery**  
Fergus Hume



Digitized by Google

Original from  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

1st 500

15



Return this book on or before the  
**Latest Date** stamped below.

University of Illinois Library

JUN 15 1954	APR 01 1991
JUN - 5 1957	DEC 29 1990
JUN 12 1957	4/21/2010
APR 30 ENT'D	
NOV 21 1971	
AUG 27 1986	
	L161-1141

4



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Crown 8vo., cloth, 3s. 6d.

## THE LADY FROM NOWHERE

"The Lady from Nowhere" is worthy of its author's reputation. It begins with a mysterious murder, continues with the researches of a clever but oft-baffled detective, and ends with poetic justice to all concerned. The story is well put together.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

'We have the interest well sustained to the very last, and we shall not spoil Mr. Hume's most excellent story by divulging who the murderer was. . . . No one who begins the book will fail to read it through to the very end.'—*Public Opinion*.

'It is seldom that an author who made such a hit as Mr. Fergus Hume did in "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," follows it up with another triumph of a similar character. It is due, however, to the author of that startling piece of work to say that he has hit the bull's-eye again. Everybody who enjoys a few hours' exciting reading should procure "The Lady from Nowhere." In its way, it is a great story.'—*Sporting Life*.

'The story is a good example of its kind, and even the most expert reader of such stories will have considerable difficulty in fixing the responsibility for the murder on the right shoulders until the author chooses to reveal it.'—*Scotsman*.

'Mr. Fergus Hume's name on the back is a guarantee that it will be good in its own particular line.'—*Spectator*.

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, 111 ST. MARTIN'S LANE, W.C.



THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY



THE  
MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

BY  
FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF  
THE MYSTERY OF A HANSON CAR, "THE LADY FROM NOWHERE," ETC.



LONDON  
CHATTO & WINDUS

1901



823  
H88 mi

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE	1
II. THE HUT ON THE HEATH	16
III. AN ELEGANT EPISTLE	33
IV. ANOTHER SURPRISE	47
V. A NINE DAYS' WONDER	62
VI. THE MISSING KEY	77
VII. IN DIXON'S RENTS	92
VIII. AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW	107
IX. INVESTIGATION	122
X. ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE	137
XI. THE STRANGER	152
XII. A STRANGE STORY	168
XIII. A STRANGE STORY— <i>continued</i>	179
XIV. THE ENMITY OF CAPTAIN LESTRANGE	191
XV. TROUBLE	204
XVI. ALAN'S DEFENCE	218
XVII. JOE'S EVIDENCE	231
XVIII. A PORTION OF THE TRUTH	243

NOV 2 - 1953

ALDEN

Q. 10 - Jan. 24 Aug. 53 Forbes.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. A REAPPEARANCE - - -	256
XX. THE AMAZEMENT OF ALAN THOROLD -	269
XXI. THE STORY OF THE PAST - - -	282
XXII. THE BEGINNING OF THE END - - -	295
XXIII. ONE PART OF THE TRUTH - - -	308
XXIV. THE OTHER PART OF THE TRUTH - - -	322



# THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

## CHAPTER I

### A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE

STEERING his course by a tapering spire notched in the eye of the sunset, a tramp slouched along the Heathton Road. From the western sky a flood of crimson light poured over the dusty white highway, which led straightly across the moor. To right and left, acres of sear coarse herbage rolled towards the distant hills, now black against the flaming horizon. In the quivering air gnats danced and flickered; the earth panted with the thirst of a lengthy drought, and the sky arched itself over the heat of a fiery furnace.

For many hours the tramp had held on steadily in the pitiless glare of the mid June

I

## 2 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

sun, and now that he saw ahead of him the spire and house-roofs and encircling trees of the village whither he was bound, a sigh of relief burst from him.

To ease his aching feet he sat down beside a mouldering millstone and wiped his beaded brow with a red bandana. He did not swear, which was singular in a tramp.

Apparently he had but recently joined the cadging profession, for about him there lingered an air of respectability and the marks of a prosperity not wholly decayed. He was stout, rubicund of countenance, and he wheezed like a sick grampus. Watery gray eyes and a strawberry nose revealed the seasoned toper; thick lips and a slack mouth the sensualist. As a begging friar of mediæval times he would have been altogether admirable; as a modern tramp he was out of the picture.

Clothed in a broadcloth frock-coat considerably the worse for wear, he wore—oddly enough for a tramp—gaiters over his gouty-looking boots. His black gloves were darned at the finger-tips, and his battered silk hat had been ironed and brushed with sedulous care.

This rook-like plumage was now plentifully sprinkled with the white dust of travel. His gait, in spite of his blistered feet, was dignified, and his manners were imposing.

The road was lonely, likewise the heath. There was no one in sight, not even a returning ploughman; but the recumbent wayfarer could hear, mellowed by distance, the bells of homing cows. Beasts as they were, he envied them. They at least had a place to sleep in for the night; he was without a home, without even the necessary money to procure shelter. Luckily it was summer-time, dry and warm. Also the tramp affected the philosopher.

'This,' he remarked, eyeing a sixpence extracted from the knotted corner of his handkerchief, 'is a drink—two drinks if I take beer, which is gouty. But it is not a meal nor a bed. No! one drink, and a morsel of bread-and-cheese. But the bed! Ah!' He stared at the coin with a sigh, as though he hoped it would swell into a shilling. It did not, and he sighed again. 'Shall I have good luck in this place?' cried he. 'Heads I shall, tails I shan't.' The coin spun and fell heads. 'Ha!' said the

#### 4 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

tramp, getting on to his feet, 'this must be seen to. I fly to good fortune on willing feet,' and he resumed his trudging.

A quarter of an hour brought him to the encircling wood. He passed beyond pine and larch and elm into a cosy little village with one street. This was broken in the centre by an expanse of green turf surrounded by red-roofed houses, amongst them—as he saw from the swinging sign—a public-house, called, quaintly enough, the Good Samaritan.

'Scriptural,' said the stranger—'possibly charitable. Let us see.' He strode forward into the taproom.

In the oiliest of tones he inquired for the landlord. But in this case, it appeared, there was no landlord, for a vixenish little woman, lean as a cricket and as shrill, bounced out with the information that she, Mrs. Timber, was the landlady. Her husband, she snapped out, was dead. To the tramp this hostess appeared less promising than the seductive sign, and he quailed somewhat at the sight of her. However, with a brazen assurance born of habit, he put a bold face on it, peremptorily demanding

bread, cheese, and ale. The request for a bed he left in abeyance, for besides the vixenish Mrs. Timber there hovered around a stalwart pot-boy, whose rolled-up sleeves revealed a biceps both admirable and formidable.

'Bread, cheese, and ale,' repeated the landlady, with a sharp glance at her guest's clerical dress, 'for this. And who may you be, sir?' she asked, with a world of sarcasm expended on the "sir."

'My name is Cicero Gramp. I am a professor of elocution and eloquence.'

'Ho! a play-actor?' Mrs. Timber became more disdainful than ever.

'Not at all; I am not on the boards. I recite to the best families. The Bishop of Idlechester has complimented me on my——'

'Here's the bread-and-cheese,' interrupted the landlady, 'likewise the beer. Sixpence!'

Very reluctantly Mr. Gramp produced his last remaining coin. She dropped it into a capacious pocket, and retired without vouchsafing him another word. Cicero, somewhat discouraged by this reception, congratulated himself that the night was fine for out-of-door

## 6 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

slumber. He ensconced himself in a corner with his frugal supper, and listened to the chatter going on around him. It appeared to be concerned with the funeral of a local magnate. Despite the prophecy of the coin, now in Mrs. Timber's pocket, Cicero failed to see how he could extract good fortune out of his present position. However, he listened; some chance word might mean money.

'Ah! 'tis a fine dry airy vault,' said a lean man who proved to be a stonemason. 'Never built a finer, I didn't, nor my mates neither. An' Muster Marlow 'll have it all to 'isself.'

'Such a situation!' croaked another. 'Bang opposite the Lady Chapel! An' the view from that there vault! I don't know as any corp 'ud require a finer.'

'Mr. Marlow 'll be lonely by himself,' sighed a buxom woman; 'there's room for twenty coffins, an' only one in the vault. 'Taint natural-like.'

'Well,' chimed in the village schoolmaster, 'twill soon fill. There's Miss Marlow.'

'Dratted nonsense!' cried Mrs. Timber, making a dash into the company with a tankard

of beer in each hand. 'Miss Sophy 'll marry Mr. Thorold, won't she? An' he, as the Squire of Heathton, 'as a family vault, ain't he? She'll sleep beside him as his wife, lawfully begotten.'

'The Thorolds' vault is crowded,' objected the stonemason. 'Why, there's three-hundred-year dead folk there! A very old gentry lot, the Thorolds.'

'Older than your Marlows!' snapped Mrs. Timber. 'Who was he afore he came to take the Moat House five year ago? Came from nowhere—a tree without a root.'

The schoolmaster contradicted.

'Nay, he came from Africa, I know—from Mashonaland, which is said to be the Ophir of King Solomon. And Mr. Marlow was a millionaire!'

'Much good his money 'll do him now,' groaned the buxom woman, who was a Dissenter. 'Ah! Dives in torment.'

'You've no call to say that, Mrs. Berry. Mr. Marlow wasn't a bad man.'

'He was charitable, I don't deny, an' went to church regular,' assented Mrs. Berry; 'but

he died awful sudden. Seems like a judgment for something he'd done.'

'He died quietly,' said the schoolmaster. 'Dr. Warrender told me all about it—a kind of fit at ten o'clock last Thursday, and on Friday night he passed away as a sleeping child. He was not even sufficiently conscious to say good-bye to Miss Sophy.'

'Ah, poor girl! she's gone to the seaside with Miss Parsh to nurse her sorrow.'

'It will soon pass—soon pass,' observed the schoolmaster, waving his pipe. 'The young don't think much of death. Miss Sophy's rich, too—rich as the Queen of Sheba, and she will marry Mr. Thorold in a few months. Funeral knells will give way to wedding-bells, Mrs. Berry.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs. Berry, feeling she was called upon for an appropriate sentiment; 'you may say so, Mr. Stack. Such is life!'

Cicero, munching his bread-and-cheese, felt that his imposing personality was being neglected, and seized upon what he deemed his opportunity.

'If this company will permit,' he said, 'I



propose now to give a recitation apropos of the present melancholy event. Need I say I refer to the lamented death of Mr. Marlow ?

'I'll have no godless mumming here,' said Mrs. Timber firmly. 'Besides, what do you know about Mr. Marlow ?'

Whereupon Cicero lied lustily to impress the bumpkins, basing his fiction upon such facts as his ears had enabled him to come by.

'Marlow!' he wailed, drawing forth his red bandana for effect. 'Did I not know him as I know myself? Were we not boys together till he went to Africa ?'

'Perhaps you can tell us about Mr. Marlow,' said the schoolmaster eagerly. 'None of us knows exactly who he was. He appeared here with his daughter some five years ago, and took the Moat House. He was rich, and people said he had made his riches in South Africa.'

'He did! he did!' said Cicero, deeply affected. 'Millions he was worth—millions! I came hither to see him, and I arrive to find the fond friend of my youth dead. Oh, Jonathan, my brother Jonathan !'

'His name was Richard,' said Mrs. Timber suspiciously.

'I know it, I know it. I use the appellation Jonathan merely in illustration of the close friendship which was between us. I am David.'

'H'm!' snorted Mrs. Timber, eyeing him closely, 'and who was Mr. Marlow?'

This leading question perplexed Mr. Gramp not a little, for he knew nothing about the man.

'What!' he cried, with simulated horror. 'Reveal the secrets of the dead! Never! never!'

'Secrets?' repeated the lean stonemason eagerly. 'Ah! I always thought Mr. Marlow had 'em. He looked over his shoulder too often for my liking. An' there was a look on his face frequent which pointed, I may say, to a violent death.'

'Ah! say not that my friend Dick Marlow came to an untimely end.'

This outcry came from Cicero; it was answered by Mrs. Timber.

'He died of a fit,' she said tartly, 'and that

quietly enough, considerin', as Dr. Warrender can testify. But now we've talked enough, an' I'm going to lock up; so get out, all of you!

In a few minutes the taproom was cleared and the lights out. Cicero, greatly depressed, lingered in the porch, wondering how to circumvent the dragon.

'Well,' snapped that amiable beast, 'what are you waitin' for?'

'You couldn't give me a bed for the night?'

'Course I could, for a shillin'.'

'I haven't a shilling, I regret to say.'

'Then you'd best get one, or go without your bed,' replied the lady, and banged the door in his face.

Under this last indignity even Cicero's philosophy gave way, and he launched an ecclesiastic curse at the inhospitable inn.

Fortunately the weather was warm and tranquil. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees. The darkling earth was silent—silent as the watching stars. Even the sordid soul of the vagabond was stirred by the solemn majesty of the sky. He removed his battered hat and looked up.

'The heavens are telling the glory of God,' he said; but, not recollecting the rest of the text, he resumed his search for a resting-place.

It was now only between nine and ten o'clock, yet, as he wandered down the silent street, he could see no glimmer of a light in any window. His feet took him, half unconsciously as it were, by the path leading towards the tapering spire. He went on through a belt of pines which surrounded the church, and came suddenly upon the graveyard, populous with the forgotten dead—at least, he judged they were forgotten by the state of the tombstones.

On the hither side he came upon a circular chapel, with lance-shaped windows and marvellous decoration wrought in gray-stone on the outer walls. Some distance off rose a low wall, encircling the graveyard, and beyond the belt of pines through which he had just passed stretched the league-long herbage of the moor. He guessed this must be the Lady Chapel.

Between the building and the low wall he noticed a large tomb of white marble, surmounted by a winged angel with a trumpet.

'Dick Marlow's tomb,' he surmised. Then he proceeded to walk round it as that of his own familiar friend, for he had already half persuaded himself into some such belief.

But he realized very soon that he had not come hither for sight-seeing, for his limbs ached, and his feet burned, and his eyes were heavy with sleep. He rolled along towards a secluded corner, where the round of the Lady Chapel curved into the main wall of the church. There he found a grassy nook, warm and dry. He removed his gloves with great care, placed them in his silk hat, and then took off his boots and loosened his clothes. Finally he settled himself down amid the grass, put a hand up either coat-sleeve for warmth, and was soon wrapped in a sound slumber.

He slept on undisturbed until one o'clock, when—as say out-of-door observers—the earth turns in her slumber. This vagrant, feeling as it were the stir of Nature, turned too. A lowing of cows came from the moor beyond the pines. A breath of cool air swept through the branches, and the sombre boughs swayed like the plumes of a hearse. Across the face of the sky ran a

## 14 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

shiver. He heard distinctly what he had not noticed before, the gush of running water. He roused himself and sat up alert, and strained his hearing. What was it he heard now? He listened and strained again. Voices surely! Men's voices!

There could be no mistake. Voices he heard, though he could not catch the words they said. A tremor shook his whole body. Then, curiosity getting the better of his fear, he wriggled forward flat on his stomach until he was in such a position that he could peer round the corner of the Lady Chapel. Here he saw a sight which scared him.

Against the white wall of the mausoleum bulked two figures, one tall, the other short. The shorter carried a lantern. They stood on the threshold of the iron door, and the tall man was listening. They were nearer now, so that he could hear their talk very plainly.

'All is quiet,' said the taller man. 'No one will suspect. We'll get him away easily.'

Then Cicero heard the key grate in the lock, saw the door open and the men disappear into the tomb. He was sick with terror, and

was minded to make a clean bolt of it ; but with the greatest effort he controlled his fears and remained. There might be money in this adventure.

In ten minutes the men came out carrying a dark form between them, as Cicero guessed, the dead body of Richard Marlow. They set down their burden, made fast the door, and took up again the sinister load. He saw them carry it towards the low stone wall. Over this they lifted it, climbed over themselves, and disappeared into the pine-woods.

Cicero waited until he could no longer hear the rustle of their progress ; then he crept cautiously forward and tried the door of the tomb. It was fast locked.

' Resurrection - men ! body - snatchers ! ' he moaned.

He felt shaken to his very soul by the ghastliness of the whole proceeding. Then suddenly the awkwardness of his own position, if by chance anyone should find him there, rushed in upon his mind, and, without so much as another glance, he made off as quickly as he could in the opposite direction.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HUT ON THE HEATH

'WELL, I'm glad it's all over,' said the footman, waving a cigar stolen from the box of his master. 'Funerals don't suit me.'

'Yet we must all 'ave one of our own some day,' said the cook, who was plainly under the influence of gin; 'an' that pore Miss Sophy—me 'art bleeds for 'er!'

'An' she with 'er millions,' growled a red-faced coachman. 'Wot rot!'

'Come now, John, you know Miss Sophy was fond of her father'—this from a sprightly housemaid, who was trimming a hat.

'I dunno why,' said John. 'Master was as cold as ice, an' as silent as 'arf a dozen graves.'

The scullery-maid shuddered, and spread out her grimy hands.



## THE HUT ON THE HEATH 17

'Oh, Mr. John, don't talk of graves, please! I've 'ad the nightmare over 'em.'

'Don't put on airs an' make out as 'ow you've got nerves, Cammelliar,' put in the cook tearfully. 'It's me as 'as 'em—I've a bundle of 'em—real shivers. Ah, well! we're cut down like green bay-trees, to be sure. Pass that bottle, Mr. Thomas.'

This discussion took place in the kitchen of the Moat House. The heiress and Miss Parsh, the housekeeper, had departed for the seaside immediately after the funeral, and in the absence of control, the domestics were making merry. To be sure, Mr. Marlow's old and trusted servant, Joe Brill, had been told off to keep them in order, but just at present his grief was greater than his sense of duty. He was busy now sorting papers in the library—hence the domestic chaos.

It was, in truth, a cheerful kitchen, more especially at the present moment, with the noonday sun streaming in through the open casements. A vast apartment with a vast fireplace of the baronial hall kind: brown oaken walls and raftered roof; snow-white dresser

and huge deal table, and a floor of shining white tiles.

There was a moment's silence after the last unanswerable observation of the cook. It was broken by a voice at the open door—a voice which boomed like the drone of a bumble-bee.

'Peace be unto this house,' said the voice richly, 'and plenty be its portion.'

The women screeched, the men swore—since the funeral their nerves had not been quite in order—and all eyes turned towards the door. There, in the hot sunshine, stood an enormously fat old man, clothed in black, and perspiring profusely. It was, in fact, none other than Cicero Gramp, come in the guise of Autolycus to pick up news and unconsidered trifles. He smiled benignly, and raised his fat hand.

'Peace, maidservants and menservants,' said he, after the manner of Chadband. 'There is no need for alarm. I am a stranger, and you must take me in.'

'Who the devil are you?' queried the coachman.

'We want no tramps here,' growled the footman.

'I am no tramp,' said Cicero mildly, stepping into the kitchen. 'I am a professor of elocution and eloquence, and a friend of your late master's. He went up in the world, I dropped down. Now I come to him for assistance, and I find him occupying the narrow house; yes, my friends, Dick Marlow is as low as the worms whose prey he soon will be. Pax vobiscum!'

'Calls master "Dick,"' said the footman.

'Sez 'e's an old friend,' murmured the cook.

They looked at each other, and the thought in every mind was the same. The servants were one and all anxious to hear the genesis of their late master, who had dropped into the Moat House, as from the skies, some five years before. Mrs. Crammer, the cook, rose to the occasion with a curtsy.

'I'm sure, sir, I'm sorry the master ain't here to see you,' she said, polishing a chair with her apron. 'But as you says—or as I take it you means—'e's gone where we must all go. Take a seat, sir, and I'll tell Joe, who's in the library.'

'Joe—my old friend Joe!' said Cicero, sitting down like a mountain. 'Ah! the faithful fellow!'

This random remark brought forth information, which was Cicero's intention in making it.

'Faithful!' growled the coachman, 'an' why not? Joe Brill was paid higher nor any of us, he was; just as of living all his life with an iceberg deserved it!'

'Poor Dick *was* an iceberg!' sighed Cicero pensively. 'A cold, secretive man.'

'Ah!' said Mrs. Crammer, wiping her eye, 'you may well say that. He 'ad secrets, I'm sure, and guilty ones, too!'

'We all have our skeletons, ma'am. But would you mind giving me something to eat and to drink? for I have walked a long way. I am too poor,' said Cicero, with a sweet smile, 'to ride, as in the days of my infancy, but *spero meliora*.'

'Talking about skeletons, sir,' said the footman when Mr. Gramp's jaws were fully occupied, 'what about the master's?'

'Ah!' said Gramp profoundly. 'What indeed!'

'But whatever it is, it has to do with the West Indies,' said the man.

'Lor!' exclaimed the housemaid, 'and how do you know that, Mr. Thomas?'

'From observation, Jane, my dear,' Thomas smiled loftily. 'A week or two afore master had the fit as took him, I brought in a letter with the West Indy stamp. He turned white as chalk when he saw it, and tore it open afore I could get out of the room. I 'ad to fetch a glass of whisky. He was struck all of a 'eap—gaspin', faintin', and cussin' orful.'

'Did he show it to Miss Sophy?' asked Mrs. Crammer.

'Not as I knows of. He kept his business to hissself,' replied Thomas.

Gramp was taking in all this with greedy ears.

'Ha!' he said, 'when you took in the letter, might you have looked at the postmark, my friend?'

With an access of colour, the footman admitted that he had been curious enough to do so.

'And the postmark was Kingston, Jamaica,' said he.

'It recalls my youth,' said Cicero. 'Ah! they were happy, happy days!'

'What was Mr. Marlow, sir?'

'A planter of—of—rice,' hazarded Gramp. He knew that there were planters in the West Indies, but he was not quite sure what it was they planted. 'Rice—acres of it!'

'Well, he didn't make his money out of that, sir,' growled the coachman.

'No, he did not,' admitted the professor of elocution. 'He acquired his millions in Mashonaland—the Ophir of the Jews.'

This last piece of knowledge had been acquired from Slack, the schoolmaster.

'He was precious careful not to part with none of it,' said the footman.

'Except to Dr. Warrender,' said the cook. 'The doctor was always screwing money out of him. Not that it was so much 'im as 'is wife. I can't abear that doctor's wife—a stuck-up peacock, I call her. She fairly ruined her husband in clothes. Miss Sophy didn't like her, neither.'

'Dick's child!' cried Gramp, who had by this time procured a cigar from the footman. 'Ah! is little Sophy still alive?'

He lighted the cigar and puffed luxuriously.

'Still alive!' echoed Mrs. Crammer, 'and as pretty as a picture. Dark air, dark eyes—not a bit like 'er father.'

'No,' said Cicero, grasping the idea. 'Dick was fair when we were boys. I heard rumours that little Sophy was engaged—let me see—to a Mr. Thorold.'

'Alan Thorold, Esquire,' corrected the coachman gruffly, 'one of the oldest families hereabouts, as lives at the Abbey Farm. He's gone with her to the seaside.'

'To the seaside? Not to Brighton?'

'Nothin' of the sort—to Bournemouth, if you know where that is.'

'I know some things, my friend,' said Cicero mildly. 'It was Bournemouth I meant—not unlike Brighton, I think, since both names begin with a B. I know that Miss Marlow—dear little Sophy!—is staying at the Imperial Hotel, Bournemouth.'

'You're just wrong!' cried Thomas, falling

into the trap; 'she is at the Soudan Hotel. I've got the address to send on letters.'

'Can I take them?' asked Gramp, rising. 'I am going to Bournemouth to see little Sophy and Mr. Thorold. I shall tell them of your hospitality.'

Before the footman could reply to this generous offer, the page-boy of the establishment darted in, much excited.

'Oh, here's a go!' he exclaimed. 'Dr. Warrender's run away, an' the Quiet Gentleman's followed!'

'Wot d'ye mean, Billy?'

'Wot I say. The doctor ain't bin 'ome all night, nor all mornin', an' Mrs. Warrender's in hysterics over him. Their 'ousemaid I met shoppin' tole me.'

The servants looked at one another. Here was more trouble, more excitement.

'And the Quiet Gentleman?' asked the cook with ghoulisn interest.

'He's gone, too. Went out larst night, an' never come back. Mrs. Marry thinks he's bin murdered.'

There was a babel of voices and cries, but



after a moment quiet was restored. Then Cicero placed his hand on the boy's head.

'My boy,' he said pompously, 'who is the Quiet Gentleman? Let us be clear upon the point of the Quiet Gentleman.'

'Don't you know, sir?' put in the eager cook. 'He's a mystery, 'aving bin staying at Mrs. Marry's cottage, she a lone widder taking in boarders.'

'I'll give a week's notice!' sobbed the scullery-maid. 'These crimes is too much for me.'

'I didn't say the Quiet Gentleman 'ad been murdered,' said Billy, the page; 'but Mrs. Marry only thinks so, cos 'e ain't come 'ome.'

'As like as not he's cold and stiff in some lonely grave!' groaned Mrs. Crammer hopefully.

'The Quiet Gentleman,' said Cicero, bent upon acquiring further information — 'tall, yellow-bearded, with a high forehead and a bald head?'

'Well, I never, sir!' cried Jane, the housemaid. 'If you ain't describing Dr. Warrender! Did you know him, sir?'

Cicero was quite equal to the occasion.

'I knew him professionally. He attended me for a relaxed throat. I was *vox et praterea nihil* until he cured me. But what was this mysterious gentleman like? Short, eh?'

'No; tall and thin, with a stoop. Long white hair, longer beard and black eyes like gimblets,' gabbled the cook. 'I met 'im arter dark one evenin', and I declare as 'is eyes were glow-worms. Ugh! They looked me through and through. I've never bin the same woman since.'

At this moment a raucous voice came from the inner doorway.

'What the devil's all this?' was the polite question.

Cicero turned, and saw a heavily-built man surveying the company in general, and himself in particular, anything but favourably. His face was a mahogany hue, and he had a veritable tangle of whiskers and hair. The whole cut of the man was distinctly nautical, his trousers being of the dungaree, and his pea-jacket plentifully sprinkled with brass buttons. In his ears he wore rings of gold, and his

clenched fists hung by his side as though eager for any emergency, and 'the sooner the better.' That was how he impressed Cicero, who, in no wise fancying the expression on his face, edged towards the door.

'Oh, Joe!' shrieked the cook, 'wot a turn you give me! an' sich news as we've 'ad!'

'News!' said Joe uneasily, his eyes still on Cicero.

'Mrs. Warrender's lost her husband, and the Quiet Gentleman's disappeared mysterious!'

'Rubbish! Get to your work, all of you!'

So saying, Joe drove the frightened crowd hither and thither to their respective duties, and Cicero, somewhat to his dismay, found himself alone with the buccaneer, as he had inwardly dubbed the new-comer.

'Who the devil are you?' asked Joe, advancing.

'Fellow,' replied Cicero, getting into the doorway, 'I am a friend of your late master. Cicero Gramp is my name. I came here to see Dick Marlow, but I find he's gone aloft.'

Joe turned pale, even through his tan.

'A friend of Mr. Marlow,' he repeated

hoarsely. 'That's a lie! I've been with him these thirty years, and I never saw you!'

'Not in Jamaica?' inquired Cicero sweetly.

'Jamaica! What do you mean?'

'What I wrote in that letter your master received before he died.'

'Oh, you liar! I know the man who wrote it.' Joe clenched his fists more tightly and swung forward. 'You're a rank impostor, and I'll hand you over to the police, lest I smash you completely!'

Cicero saw he had made a mistake, but he did not flinch. Hardihood alone could carry him through now.

'Do,' he said. 'I'm particularly anxious to see the police, Mr. Joe Brill.'

'Who are you, in Heaven's name?' shouted Joe, much agitated. 'Do you come from him?'

'Perhaps I do,' answered Cicero, wondering to whom the 'him' might now refer.

'Then go back and tell him he's too late—too late, curse him! and you too, you lubber!'

'Very good.' Cicero stepped out into the hot sunshine. 'I'll deliver your message—for a sovereign.'

Joe Brill tugged at his whiskers, and cast an uneasy glance around. Evidently, he was by no means astute, and the present situation was rather too much for him. His sole idea, for some reason best known to himself, was to get rid of Cicero. With a groan, he plunged his huge fist into his pocket and pulled out a gold coin.

'Here, take it, and go to hell!' he said, throwing it to Cicero.

'Mariner, *fata obstant*,' rolled Gramp in his deep voice.

Then he strode haughtily away. He looked round as he turned the corner of the house, and saw Joe clutching his iron-gray locks, still at the kitchen door.

So with a guinea in his pocket and a certain amount of knowledge which he hoped would bring him many more, Cicero departed, considerably uplifted. At the village grocery he bought bread, meat, and a bottle of whisky, then he proceeded to shake the dust of Heath-ton off his feet. As he stepped out on to the moor he recalled the Latin words he had used, and he shuddered.

'Why did I say that?' he murmured. 'The

words came into my head somehow. Just when Joe was talking of my employer, too! Who is my employer? What has he to do with all this? I'm all in the dark! So Dr. Warrender's gone, and the Quiet Gentleman too. It must have been Dr. Warrender who helped to steal Marlow's body. The description tallies exactly—tall, fair beard and bald. I wonder if t'other chap was the Quiet Gentleman? And what on earth could they want with the body? Any way, the body's gone, and, as it's a millionaire corpse, I'll have some of its money or I'm a Dutchman!

He stopped and placed his hand to his head.

'Bournemouth, Bournemouth!' he muttered. 'Ah, that's it—the Soudan Hotel, Bournemouth!'

It was now the middle of the afternoon, and, as he plodded on, the moor glowed like a furnace. No vestige of shade was there beneath which to rest, not even a tree or a bush. Then, a short distance up the road, he espied a hut. It seemed to be in ruins. It was a shepherd's hut, no doubt. The grass roof was torn, the door was broken, though

closed, and the mud walls were crumbling. Impatient of any obstacle, he shoved his back against it and burst it open. It had been fastened with a piece of rope. He fell in, headlong almost. But the gloom was grateful to him, though for the moment he could see but little.

When his eyes had become more accustomed to the half-light, the first object upon which they fell was a stiff human form stretched on the mud floor—a body with a handkerchief over the face. Yelling with terror, Cicero hurled himself out again.

‘Marlow’s body!’ he gasped. ‘They’ve put it here!’

With feverish haste he produced a corkscrew knife, and opened his whisky bottle. A fiery draught gave him courage. He ventured back into the hut and knelt down beside the body. Over the heart gaped an ugly wound, and the clothes were caked with blood. He gasped again.

‘No fit this, but murder! Stabbed to the heart! And Joe—what does Joe know about this—and my employer? Lord!’

32 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

He snatched the handkerchief from the face, and fell back on his knees with another cry, this time of wonderment rather than of terror. He beheld the dead man's fair beard and bald head.

'Dr. Warrender! And he was alive last night! This is murder indeed!'

Then his nerves gave way utterly, and he began to cry like a frightened child.

'Murder! Wilful and horrible murder!' wept the professor of elocution and eloquence.



## CHAPTER III

### AN ELEGANT EPISTLE

ON Bournemouth cliffs, where pine-trees cluster to the edge, sat an elderly spinster, knitting a homely stocking. She wore, in spite of the heat, a handsome cashmere shawl, pinned across her spare shoulders with a portrait brooch, and that hideous variety of Early Victorian head-gear known as the mushroom hat. From under this streamed a frizzy crop of gray curls, which framed a rosy, wrinkled face, brightened by twinkling eyes. These, sparkling as those of sweet seventeen, proved that their owner was still young in heart. This quaint survival of the last century knitted as assiduously as was possible under the circumstances, for at a discreet distance were two young people, towards whom she acted the part of chaperon. Doubtless such an office is somewhat out-of-

date nowadays ; but Miss Victoria Parsh would rather have died than have left a young girl alone in the company of a young man.

Yet she knew well enough that this young man was altogether above reproach, and, moreover, engaged by parental consent to the pretty girl to whom he was talking so earnestly. And no one could deny that Sophy Marlow was indeed charming. There was somewhat of the Andalusian about her. Not very tall, shaped delicately as a nymph, she well deserved Alan Thorold's name. He called her the 'Midnight Fairy,' and, indeed, she looked like a brunette Titania. Her complexion was dark, and faintly flushed with red ; her mouth and nose were exquisitely shaped, while her eyes were wells of liquid light—glorious Spanish orbs. About her, too, was that peculiar charm of personality which defies description.

Alan, her lover, was not tall, but uncommonly well-built and muscular, as fair as Sophy was dark—of that golden Saxon race which came before the Dane. Not that he could be called handsome. He was simply a clean, clear-

skinned, well-groomed young Englishman, such as can be seen everywhere. Of a strong character, he exercised great control over his somewhat frivolous betrothed.

Miss Vicky, as the little spinster was usually called, cast romantic glances at the dark head and the fair one so close to one another. As a rule she would have been shocked at such a sight, but she knew how keenly Sophy grieved for the death of her father, and was only too willing that the girl should be comforted. And Miss Vicky occasionally touched the brooch, which contained the portrait of a red-coated officer. She also had lived in Arcady, but her Lieutenant had been shot in the Indian Mutiny, and Miss Vicky had left Arcady after a short sojourn, for a longer one in the work-a-day world. At once, she had lost her lover and her small income, and, like many another lonely woman, had had to turn to and work. But the memory of that short romance kept her heart young, hence her sympathy with this young couple.

'Poor dear father!' sighed Sophy, looking at the sea below, dotted with white sails. 'I

can hardly believe he is gone. Only two weeks ago and he was so well, and now—oh! I was so fond of him! We were so happy together! He was cold to everyone else, but kindly to me! How could he have died so suddenly, Alan?’

‘Well, of course, dear, a fit is always sudden. But try and bear up, Sophy dear. Don’t give way like this. Be comforted.’

She looked up wistfully to the blue sky.

‘At all events, he is at peace now,’ she said, her lip quivering. ‘I know he was often very unhappy, poor father! He used to sit for hours frowning and perplexed, as if there was something terrible on his mind.’

Alan’s face was turned away now, and his brow was wrinkled. He seemed absorbed in thought, as though striving to elucidate some problem suggested by her words.

Wrapped up in her own sorrow, the girl did not notice his momentary preoccupation, but continued :

‘He never said good-bye to me. Dr. Warrender said he was insensible for so long before death that it was useless my seeing him. He

kept me out of the room, so I only saw him—  
afterwards. I'll never forgive the doctor for it.  
It was cruel!

She sobbed hysterically.

'Sophy,' said Alan suddenly, 'had your  
father any enemies?'

She looked round at him in astonish-  
ment.

'I don't know. I don't think so. Why  
should he? He was the kindest man in the  
world.'

'I am sure he was,' replied the young man  
warmly; 'but even the kindest may have  
enemies.'

'He might have made enemies in Africa,'  
she said gravely. 'It was there he made his  
money, and I suppose there are people mean  
enough to hate a man who is successful,  
especially if his success results in a fortune of  
some two millions. Father used to say he  
despised most people. That was why he lived  
so quietly at the Moat House.'

'It was particularly quiet till you came,  
Sophy.'

'I'm sure it was,' she replied, with the

glimmer of a smile. 'Still, although *he* had not me, you had your profession.'

'Ah! my poor profession! I always regret having given it up.'

'Why did you?'

'You know, Sophy. I have told you a dozen times. I wanted to be a surgeon, but my father always objected to a Thorold being of service to his fellow-creatures. I could never understand why. The estate was not entailed, and by my father's will I was to lose it, or give up all hope of becoming a doctor. For my mother's sake I surrendered. But I would choose to be a struggling surgeon in London any day, if it were not for you, Sophy dear.'

'Horrid!' ejaculated Miss Marlow, elevating her nose. 'How can you enjoy cutting up people? But don't let us talk of these things; they remind me of poor dear father.'

'My dear, you really should not be so morbid. Death is only natural. It is not as though you had been with him all your life, instead of merely three years.'

'I know; but I loved him none the less for

that. I often wonder why he was away so long.'

'He was making his fortune. He could not have taken you into the rough life he was leading in Africa. You were quite happy in your convent.'

'Quite,' she agreed, with conviction. 'I was sorry to leave it. The dear sisters were like mothers to me. I never knew my own mother. She died in Jamaica, father said, when I was only ten years old. He could not bear to remain in the West Indies after she died, so he brought me to England. While I was in the convent I saw him only now and again until I had finished my education. Then he took the Moat House—that was five years ago, and two years after that I came to live with him. That is all our history, Alan. But Joe Brill might know if he had any enemies.'

'Yes, he might. He lived thirty years with your father, didn't he? But he can keep his own counsel—no one better.'

'You are good at it, too, Alan. Where were you last night? You did not come to see me.'

He moved uneasily. He had his own reasons for not wishing to give a direct answer.

'I went for a long walk—to—to—to think out one or two things. When I got back it was too late to see you.'

'What troubled you, Alan? You have looked very worried lately. I am sure you are in some trouble. Tell me, dear; I must share all your troubles.'

'My dearest, I am in no trouble'—he kissed her hand—'but I am your trustee, you know, and it is no sinecure to have the management of two millions.'

'It's too much money,' she said. 'Let us dispose of some of it, then you need not be worried. Can I do what I like with it?'

'Most of it—there are certain legacies. I will tell you about them later.'

'I am afraid the estate will be troublesome to us, Alan. It's strange we should have so much money when we don't care about it. Now, there is Dr. Warrender, working his life out for that silly extravagant wife of his!'



'He is very much in love with her, nevertheless.'

'I suppose that's why he works so hard. But she's a horrid woman, and cares not a snap of her fingers for him—not to speak of love! Love! why, she doesn't know the meaning of the word. We do!' And bending over, Sophy kissed him.

Then promptly there came from Miss Parsh the reminder that it was time for tea.

'Very well, Vicky, I dare say Alan would like you to give him a cup,' replied Sophy.

'Frivolous as ever, Sophia! I give up all hope of forming your character—now!'

'Alan is doing that,' replied the girl.

In spite of her sorrow, Sophy became fairly cheerful on the way back to the hotel. Not so Alan. He was silent and thoughtful, and evidently meditating about the responsibilities of the Marlow estate. As they walked along the parade with their chaperon close behind, they came upon a crowd surrounding a fat man dressed in dingy black. He was reciting a poem, and his voice boomed out like a great organ. As they passed,

## 42 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

Alan noticed that he darted a swift glance at them, and eyed Miss Marlow in a particularly curious manner. The recitation was just finished, and the hat was being sent round. Sophy, always kind-hearted, dropped in a shilling. The man chuckled.

'Thank you, lady,' said he; 'the first of many, I hope.'

Alan frowned, and drew his *fiancée* away. He took little heed of the remark at the time; but it occurred to him later, when circumstances had arisen which laid more stress on its meaning.

Miss Vicky presided over the tea—a gentle feminine employment in which she excelled. She did most of the talking; for Sophy was silent, and Alan inclined to monosyllables. The good lady announced that she was anxious to return to Heathton.

'The house weighs on my mind,' said she, lifting her cup with the little finger curved. 'The servants are not to be trusted. I fear Mrs. Crammer is addicted to ardent spirits. Thomas and Jane pay too much attention to one another. I feel a conviction that, during

my absence, the bonds of authority will have loosened.'

'Joe,' said Alan, setting down his cup; 'Joe is a great disciplinarian.'

'On board a ship, no doubt,' assented Miss Vicky; 'but a rough sailor cannot possibly know how to control a household. Joseph is a fine, manly fellow, but boisterous—very boisterous. It needs my eye to make domestic matters go smoothly. When will you be ready to return, Sophy, my dear?'

'In a week—but Alan has suggested that we should go abroad.'

'What! and leave the servants to wilful waste and extravagance? My love!—Miss Vicky raised her two mittened hands—'think of the bills!'

'There is plenty of money, Vicky.'

'No need there should be plenty of waste. No; if we go abroad, we must either shut up the house or let it.'

'To the Quiet Gentleman?' said Sophy, with a laugh.

Alan looked up suddenly.

'No, not to him. He is a mysterious

person,' said Miss Vicky. 'I do not like such people, though I dare say it is only village gossip which credits him with a strange story.'

'Just so,' put in Alan. 'Don't trouble about him.'

Miss Vicky was still discussing the possibility of a trip abroad, when the waiter entered with a note for Sophy.

'It was delivered three hours ago,' said the man apologetically, 'and I quite forgot to bring it up. So many visitors, miss,' he added, with a sickly smile.

Sophy took the letter. The envelope was a thick creamy one, and the writing of the address elegant in the extreme.

'Who delivered it?' she asked.

'A fat man, miss, with a red face, and dressed in black.'

Alan's expression grew somewhat anxious.

'Surely that describes the man we saw reciting?'

'So it does.' Sophy eyed the letter dubiously. 'Had he a loud voice, Simmonds?'

'As big as a bell, miss, and he spoke beautiful; but he wasn't gentry, for all that,' finished Simmonds with conviction.

'You can go,' said Alan. Then he turned to Sophy, who was opening the envelope. 'Let me read that letter first,' he said.

'Why, Alan? There is no need. It is only a begging letter. Come and read it with me.'

He gave way, and looked over her shoulder at the elaborate writing.

'Miss' (it began),

'The undersigned, if handsomely remunerated, can give valuable information regarding the removal of the body of the late Richard Marlow from its dwelling in Heathton Churchyard. *Verbum dat sapienti!* Forward £100 to the undersigned at Dixon's Rents, Lambeth, and the information will be forthcoming. If the minions of the law are invoked, the undersigned will vanish, and his information lost.

'Faithfully yours, Miss Sophia Marlow,  
'CICERO GRAMP.'

## 46 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

As she comprehended the meaning of this extraordinary letter, Sophy became paler and paler. The intelligence that her father's body had been stolen was too much for her, and she fainted.

Thorold called loudly to Miss Vicky.

'Look after her,' he said, stuffing the letter into his pocket. 'I shall be back soon.'

'But what—what——' began Miss Vicky.

She spoke to thin air. Alan was running at top speed along the parade in search of the fat man.

But all search was vain. Cicero, the astute, had vanished.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANOTHER SURPRISE

HEATHTON was only an hour's run by rail from Bournemouth, so that it was easy enough to get back on the same evening. On his return from his futile search for Cicero, Alan determined to go at once to the Moat House. He found Sophy recovered from her faint, and on hearing of his decision, she insisted upon accompanying him. She had told Miss Vicky the contents of the mysterious letter, and that lady agreed that they should leave as soon as their boxes could be packed.

'Don't talk to me, Alan!' cried Sophy, when her lover objected to this sudden move. 'It would drive me mad to stay here doing nothing, with that on my mind.'

'But, my dear girl, it may not be true.'

'If it is not, why should that man have written? Did you see him?'

'No. He has left the parade, and no one seems to know anything about him. It is quite likely that when he saw us returning to the hotel he cleared out. By this time I dare say he is on his way to London.'

'Did you see the police?' she asked anxiously.

'No,' said Alan, taking out the letter which had caused all this trouble, 'it would not be wise. Remember what he says here: If the police are called in he will vanish, and we shall lose the information he seems willing to supply.'

'I don't think that, Mr. Thorold,' said Miss Vicky. 'This man evidently wants money, and is willing to tell the truth for the matter of a hundred pounds.'

'On account,' remarked Thorold grimly; 'as plain a case of blackmail as I ever heard of. Well, I suppose it is best to wait until we can communicate with this—what does he call himself?—Cicero Gramp, at Dixon's Rents, Lambeth. He can be arrested there, if necessary. What



I want to do now is to find out if his story is true. To do this I must go at once to Heathton, see the Rector, and get the coffin opened.'

'I will come,' insisted Sophy. 'Oh, it is terrible to think that poor father was not allowed to rest quietly even in his grave.'

'Of course, it may not be true,' urged Alan again. 'I don't see how this tramp could have got to know of it.'

'Perhaps he helped to violate the secrets of the tomb?' suggested Miss Vicky.

'In that case he would hardly put himself within reach of the law,' Alan said, after a pause. 'Besides, if the vault had been broken into we should have heard of it from Joe.'

'Why should it be broken into, Alan? The key——'

'I have one key, and the Rector has the other. My key is in my desk at the Abbey Farm, and no doubt Phelps has his safe enough.'

'Your key may have been stolen.'

'It might have been,' admitted Alan. 'That is one reason why I am so anxious to get back

to-night. We must find out also if the coffin is empty.'

'Yes, yes; let us go at once!' Sophy cried feverishly. 'I shall never rest until I learn the truth. Come, Vicky, let us pack. When can we leave, Alan?'

Thorold glanced at his watch.

'In half an hour,' he said. 'We can catch the half-past six train. Can you be ready?'

'Yes, yes!' cried she, and rushed out of the room.

Miss Vicky was about to follow, but Alan detained her.

'Give her a sedative or something,' he said, 'or she will be ill.'

'I will, at once. Have a carriage at the door in a quarter of an hour, Mr. Thorold. We can be ready by then. I suppose it is best she should go?'

'Much better than to leave her here. We must set her mind at rest. At this rate she will work herself into a fever.'

'But if this story should really be true?'

'I don't believe it for a moment,' replied Alan. But he was evidently uneasy, and could

not disguise the feeling. 'Wait till we get to Heathton—wait,' and he hastily left the room.

Miss Vicky was surprised at his agitation, for hitherto she had credited Alan with a will strong enough to conceal his emotions. The old lady hurried away to the packing, and shook her head as she went.

Shortly they were settled in a first-class carriage on the way to Heathton. Sophy was suffering acutely, but did all in her power to hide her feelings, and, contrary to Alan's expectations, hardly a word was spoken about the strange letter, and the greater part of the journey was passed in silence. At Heathton he put Sophy and Miss Vicky into a fly.

'Drive at once to the Moat House,' he said. 'To-morrow we shall consider what is to be done.'

'And you, Alan?'

'I am going to see Mr. Phelps. He, if anyone, will know what value to put upon that letter. Try and sleep, Sophy. I shall see you in the morning.'

'Sleep?' echoed the poor girl, in a tone of

anguish. 'I feel as though I should never sleep again!'

When they had driven away, Alan himself took the nearest way to the Rectory. It was some way from the station, but Alan was a vigorous walker, and soon covered the distance. He arrived at the door with a beating heart and dry lips, feeling, he knew not why, that he was about to hear bad news. The gray-haired butler ushered him into his master's presence, and immediately the young man felt that his fears were confirmed. Phelps looked worried.

He was a plump little man, neat in his dress, and cheerful in manner. He was a bachelor, and somewhat of a cynic. Alan had known him all his life, and could have found no better adviser in the dilemma in which he now found himself. Phelps came forward with outstretched hands.

'My dear boy, I am indeed glad! What good fairy sent you here? A glass of port? You look pale. I am delighted to see you. If you had not come I should have had to send for you.'

'What do you wish to see me about, sir?' asked Alan.

'About the disappearance of these two people.'

'What two people?' asked the young man, suddenly alert. 'You forget that I have been away from Heathton for the last three days.'

'Of course, of course. Well, one is Brown, the stranger who stayed with Mrs. Marry.'

'The Quiet Gentleman?'

'Yes. I heard them call him so in the village. A very doubtful character. He never came to church,' said the Rector sadly. 'However, it seems he has disappeared. Two nights ago—in fact, upon the evening of the day upon which poor Marlow's funeral took place, he left his lodgings for a walk. Since then,' added the Rector impressively, 'he has not returned.'

'In plain words, he has taken French leave,' said Thorold, filling his glass.

'Oh, I should not say that, Alan. He paid his weekly account the day before he vanished. He left his baggage behind him. No, I don't think he intended to run away. Mrs. Marry says he was a good lodger, although she knew

very little about him. However, he has gone, and his box remains. No one saw him after he left the village about eight o'clock. He was last seen by Giles Hale passing the church in the direction of the moor. To-day we searched the moor, but could find no trace of him. Most mysterious,' finished the Rector, and took some port.

'Who is the other man?' asked Alan abruptly.

'Ah! Now you must be prepared for a shock, Alan. Dr. Warrender!'

Thorold bounded out of his seat.

'Is he lost, too?'

'Strangely enough, he is,' answered Phelps gravely. 'On the night of the funeral he went out at nine o'clock in the evening to see a patient. He never came back.'

'Who was the patient?'

'That is the strangest part of it. Brown, the Quiet Gentleman, was the patient. Mrs. Warrender, who, as you may guess, is quite distracted, says that her husband told her so. Mrs. Marry declares that the doctor called after nine, and found Brown was absent.'

'What happened then?' demanded Alan, who had been listening eagerly to this tale.

'Dr. Warrender, according to Mrs. Marry, asked in what direction her lodger had gone. She could not tell him, so, saying he would call again in an hour or so, he went. And, of course, he never returned.'

'Did Brown send for him?'

'Mrs. Marry could not say. Certainly no message was sent through her.'

'Was Brown ill?'

'Not at all, according to his landlady. We have been searching for both Brown and Warrender, but have found no traces of either.'

'Humph!' said Thorold, after a pause. 'I wonder if they met and went away together?'

'My dear lad! Where would they go to?' objected the Rector.

'I don't know; I can't say. The whole business is most mysterious.' Alan stopped, and looked sharply at Mr. Phelps. 'Have you the key of the Marlow vault in your possession?'

'Yes, of course, locked in my safe. Your question is most extraordinary.'

The other smiled grimly.

'My explanation is more extraordinary still.' He took out Mr. Gramp's letter and handed it to the Rector. 'What do you think of that, sir?'

'Most elegant caligraphy,' said the good man. 'Why, bless me!' He read on hurriedly, and finally dropped the letter with a bewildered air. 'Bless me, Alan!' he stammered. 'What—what—what——'

Thorold picked it up and smoothed it out on the table.

'You see, this man says the body has been stolen. Do you know if the door of the vault has been broken open?'

'No, no, certainly not!' cried the Rector, rising fussily. 'Come to my study, Alan; we must see if it is all right. It must be,' he added emphatically. 'The key of the safe is on my watch-chain. No one can open it. Oh dear! Bless me!'

He bustled out of the room, followed by Alan.

A search into the interior of the safe resulted in the production of the key.



'You see,' cried Phelps, waving it triumphantly, 'it is safe. The door could not have been opened with this. Now your key.'

'My key is in my desk at the Abbey Farm—locked up also,' said the young man hastily. 'I'll see about it to-night. In the meantime, sir, bring that key with you, and we will go into the vault.'

'What for?' demanded the Rector sharply. 'Why should we go there?'

'Can't you understand?' said Alan impatiently. 'I want to find out if this letter is true or false—if the body of Mr. Marlow has been removed.'

'But I—I—can't!' gasped the Rector. 'I must apply to the Bishop for—'

'Nonsense, sir! We are not going to exhume the body. It's not like digging up a grave. All that is necessary is to look at the coffin resting in its niche. We can tell from the screws and general appearance if it has been tampered with.'

The clergyman sat down and wiped his bald head.

'I don't like it,' he said. 'I don't like it at

all. Still, I don't suppose a look at the coffin can harm anyone. We'll go, Alan, we'll go; but I must take Jarks.'

'The sexton?'

'Yes. I want a witness—two witnesses; you are one, Jarks the other. It is a gruesome task that we have before us.' He shuddered again. 'I don't like it. Profanation!'

'If this letter is to be believed, the profanation has already been committed.'

'Cicero Gramp,' repeated Mr. Phelps as they went out. 'Who is he?'

'A fat man—a tramp—a reciter. I saw him at Bournemouth. He delivered that letter at the hotel himself; the waiter described him, and as the creature is a perfect Falstaff, I recalled his face—I had seen him on the parade. I went at once to see if I could find him, but he was gone.'

'A fat man,' said the Rector. 'Humph! He was at the Good Samaritan the other night. I'll tell you about him later.'

The two trudged along in silence and knocked up Jarks, the sexton, on the way. They had no difficulty in rousing him. He came down at

once with a lantern, and was much surprised to learn the errand of Rector and Squire.

'Want to have a look at Muster Marlow's vault,' said he in creaking tones. 'Well, it ain't a bad night for a visit, I do say. But quiet comp'ny, Muster Phelps and Muster Thorold, very quiet. What do ye want to see Muster Marlow for?'

'We want to see if his body is in the vault,' said Alan.

'Why, for sure it's there, sir. Muster Marlow don't go visiting.'

'I had a letter at Bournemouth, Jarks, to say the body had been stolen.'

Jarks stared.

'It ain't true!' he cried in a voice cracked with passion. 'It's casting mud on my 'arning my bread. I've bin sexton here fifty year, man and boy—I never had no corp as was stolen. They all lies comfortable arter my tucking them in. Only Gabriel's trump will wake 'em.'

By this time they were round the Lady Chapel, and within sight of the tomb. Phelps, too much agitated to speak, beckoned to Jarks

to hold up the lantern, which he did, grumbling and muttering the while.

'I've buried hundreds of corps,' he growled, 'and not one of 'em's goed away. What 'ud they go for? I make 'em comfortable, I do.'

'Hold the light steady, Jarks,' said the Rector, whose own hand was just as unsteady. He could hardly get the key into the lock.

At last the door was open, and headed by Jarks, with the lantern, they entered. The cold, earthy smell, the charnel-house feeling shook the nerves of both men. Jarks, accustomed as he was to the presence of the dead, hobbled along without showing any emotion other than wrath, and triumphantly swung the lantern towards a niche wherein reposed a coffin.

'Ain't he there, quite comfortable?' wheezed he. 'Don't I tell you they never goes from here! It's a lovely vault; no corp 'ud need a finer.'

'Wait a bit!' said Alan, stepping forward. 'Turn the light along the top of the coffin, Jarks. Hullo! the lid's loose!'

'An' unscrewed!' gasped the sexton. 'He's bin getting out.'

'Unscrewed—loose!' gasped the Rector in his turn. The poor man felt deadly sick. 'There must be some mistake.'

'No mistake,' said Alan, slipping back the lid. 'The body has been stolen.'

'No 't'ain't!' cried Jarks, showering the light on the interior of the coffin. 'There he is quiet an'—why,' the old man broke off with a cry, 'the corp ain't in his winding-sheet!'

Phelps looked, Alan looked. The light shone on the face of the dead.

Phelps groaned.

'Merciful God!' he groaned, 'it is Dr. Warrender's body!'

## CHAPTER V

### A NINE DAYS' WONDER

THERE was sensation enough and to spare in Heathton next morning. Jarks lost no time in spreading the news. He spent the greater part of the day in the taproom of the Good Samaritan, accepting tankards of beer and relating details of the discovery. Mrs. Timber kept him as long as she could ; for Jarks, possessed of intelligence regarding the loss of Mr. Marlow's body, attracted customers. These, thirsty for news or drink, or both, flocked like sheep into the inn.

'To think that a corp of mine should be gone!' creaked he in his aged voice. 'Man and boy, I niver heard tell of such things—niver! Why Muster Marlow should go beats me—ay, that it does!'

'It doesn't beat me,' cried Mrs. Timber in

her most acidulated voice. 'I know who took the body.'

'That you don't!' contradicted Jarks incoherently; 'fur passon, he don't know, so I don't know as how you'd know, Mrs. Timber.'

'It was that fat play-actor out of this very house,' snapped the landlady.

'And how can you prove that, Mrs. Timber?' asked the sexton contemptuously.

'Why, he had no money for a bed, and he had to sleep in the open. I dare say he slept in the churchyard, and stole the body to sell it back again, it being well known as Miss Sophy's a Queen of Sheba for riches.'

'All very well,' said Slack the schoolmaster; 'but if he took away Mr. Marlow's body, how did he put Dr. Warrender's in its place? And how could he without the key of the vault?'

'No,' said the stonemason, 'he couldn't get into that there vault without a key. I built him myself, me and my mates. If that fat man put the doctor there, he must have killed him. There's a hole in his heart as you could put your fist in. It's murder!' cried the man, dashing his hand on the table, 'sacrilege and murder!'

## 64 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

It took a good many tankards of Mrs. Timber's strong ale to wash down the sinister word 'murder.' Every point of the matter was discussed, but no one could arrive at any decision. Slack voiced the general sentiment when he rose to go.

'We must wait for the police,' said Slack.

But Alan Thorold was of the contrary opinion. He did not wish to wait for the police, or to have anything to do with the police. The difficulty was that he could not get the Rector to take this view, and the next morning Mr. Phelps sent the village constable for the inspector at Burchester, the big market town twenty miles away across the heath. Meantime, at an early hour, Alan presented himself at the Moat House. He broke the news as gently as he could. Both Sophy and Miss Vicky were horrified.

'To think of such things taking place in a Christian graveyard!' cried the little woman, wringing her hands. 'Sacrilege and murder! It makes one believe in the existence of atheists and anarchists, and such-like dreadful people—it does, indeed!'



Contrary to Thorold's expectation, Sophy proved to be the more composed of the two. She neither wept nor fainted, but, very pale and very still, listened to all that he had to say. When he had finished, she had only one question to ask.

'Who did it?' she demanded in the calmest voice.

'I can't say—I don't know,' stammered Alan, taken aback by her attitude generally. 'We must find out. If your father had enemies—but even an enemy would have had no object in doing this.'

'What about the man in Bournemouth?'

'Cicero Gramp? I intend to go up to London to-morrow and see him. If he can tell the truth, it will be well worth the money he demands.'

'So I think, Alan. Can't you go to-day?'

He shook his head.

'There is so much to do here, Sophy. The Rector has gone to break the news of her husband's death to Mrs. Warrender. And he has sent over to Burchester for the police. The inspector—Blair is his name—will be

here at noon. I did not want the police brought into the matter, but Mr. Phelps insisted.'

'Why did you not want to consult the police?'

'I am afraid if this vagabond gets wind that the law has intervened he may give us the slip. However, I shall go up to Dixon's Rents first thing in the morning, before the case gets into the papers.'

'Do you think this man Gramp has anything to do with the murder, and with the removing of poor father's body?'

'No, I don't,' replied Alan promptly. 'He would not dare to give evidence if he were. I hear that he was turned out of the Good Samaritan on the night of the funeral. It is likely enough that he saw the removal of the body, and possibly the murder. Naturally, such a creature as that wants to sell his information. He is a blackmailer, this man, but I don't credit him with murder or body-snatching.'

'Body-snatching!' cried Miss Vicky, who was dabbing her red eyes with eau-de-Cologne. 'Oh the terrible word!'

'Alan,' said Sophy, after a pause, 'do you believe the man who took my father's body killed Dr. Warrender?'

'I do. Warrender was out on that night, and might have come across the man carrying away the body, and the murder might have arisen out of that.'

'How do you know Dr. Warrender was out?' cross-examined Sophy.

'Mrs. Warrender told the Rector so. Warrender went to see the Quiet Gentleman, but not finding him in, said that he would return. He never did, and now we know the reason.'

'Why don't you make certain whether he saw the Quiet Gentleman?'

'Brown? That's impossible; he also has disappeared.'

'Who was he?'

'I don't know,' said Alan gloomily.

'Does anyone know?'

'Not to my knowledge. Perhaps the police may find out. Sophy, what is the matter?'

For the girl was clapping her hands and laughing hysterically.

'It was Brown who took my father's body

and killed the doctor!' she cried. 'I am certain of it!'

'Why are you certain?'

'I feel it. I can't say why.'

'But your father did not know this man. I never heard him allude to the Quiet Gentleman.'

'I dare say not,' returned Sophy doggedly; 'but if the man had nothing to do with it, why should he disappear? And Dr. Warrender went to see him. Oh! I am sure he is the guilty person. He might be an enemy of father's.'

'Sophia, your father did not know him,' put in Miss Vicky, who was listening open-mouthed to all this.

'Oh, I am not so sure of that!' cried the girl impatiently. 'If he did, Joe will know. Ring the bell for him.'

'Did Joe know the Quiet Gentleman?' Alan asked when he had rung.

'I do not think that Joseph did,' said Miss Vicky. 'He told me that he tried several times to speak to him, but got no reply.'

'I don't wonder at that,' replied the young man dryly; 'the man was dumb.'

'Dumb!' echoed the ladies.

'Didn't you know? Ah, well, perhaps not. I didn't know myself until the Rector told me last night. Yes, he was dumb—that was why the village called him the Quiet Gentleman. Oh, here is Joe!'

'Joe,' said Sophy, going directly to the point, 'have you heard about——'

'Yes, miss,' said Joe, interrupting to save her mentioning so painful a subject, 'I know, and if I find the swab as did it, I'll kill him.'

Joe said this in a quietly savage way, which made Miss Vicky shudder.

'Have you any idea who carried off the body, Joe?'

'No, sir, I have not—but,' added the man grimly, 'I'm going to look for him.'

The old maid shuddered again at the expression in his bloodshot eyes.

"Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord," she put in severely.

'All werry good,' said Mr. Brill, 'but I guess the Lord needs an instrument to carry out that text.' He spat on his hands and added slowly, 'I'm that instrument!'

'Had my father any enemies that you know of, Joe?'

'No, miss, not that I know'd of. He had rows, as a man should, had the Cap'n, but I don't know any swab as 'ud have stolen his corpse.'

'And murdered Dr. Warrender,' said Alan, who was watching the man.

'As you say, sir,' replied the sailor calmly, 'and murdered Dr. Warrender. No, I can't rightly call anyone to mind.'

'Did you know the Quiet Gentleman, Joe?'

'I did not, miss. Brown he called himself—leastways, Mrs. Marry told me so, for Brown had no tongue. I tried to pass the time o' day, meeting him friendly like on the road, but he only put his hand to his mouth and shook his white head. I don't know nothing about him.'

'Do you know a tramp named Cicero Gramp?' asked Alan, after a pause.

'Well, I did in a way.' Joe drew his huge hand across his mouth, and seemed to be considering his reply. 'In this way, sir. He comed here to the kitchen and put 'em all wrong with his lies. I kicked him out—least-

ways, I giv 'im something to take 'imself orf.'

'What did he come here for?'

Joe clenched his teeth and frowned dreadfully.

'I wish I knowed, I'd ha' broken his cocoa-nut!' said he. 'He was a liar, miss, savin' your presence. Said 'e knowed your father, the Cap'n, which,' said Joe slowly, 'was a d——d lie—beggin' your pardon, miss.'

'Said he knew my father?' echoed Sophy anxiously. 'What did he know about him?'

'Nothin',' replied Joe firmly. 'Make your mind easy, miss—nothin'.'

It seemed to Alan as though the old sailor wished to intimate that there really was something in Marlow's past which might be known, but that the tramp was ignorant of it. He evidently wanted to reassure the girl, yet Alan was well aware that Sophy knew practically nothing of her father's life. He resolved to try the effect of a surprise.

'Joe,' said he slowly, 'it was this tramp who told me the body had been stolen.'

Joe's hard, shiny hat, which he had been

twisting nervously in his hands, fell to the ground. His face was a dark crimson when he stooped to pick it up, and he stammered :

‘Hi, sir! that—that lubber. How did he know?’

‘That I have to find out. He offers to sell the information for a hundred pounds.’

Joe rubbed his hands and looked ferocious.

‘What I want to know, sir, is, where is the swab?’

‘In London. I’m going up to see him to-morrow.’

‘This afternoon,’ put in Sophy sharply.

‘You are going this afternoon, Alan.’

‘Certainly, my dear,’ Alan said promptly; ‘I’ll go this afternoon—if the police don’t want me.’

‘The police!’ gasped Joe, shifting nervously from one leg to the other.

‘Yes.’ Alan darted a keen glance at him.

‘Mr. Phelps has sent for the police to investigate this murder of Dr. Warrender.’

‘Well, I hope they’ll find him, sir,’ said Joe, recovering his stolidity, ‘for I make no doubt that the swab as killed the doctor carried off the Cap’n’s body.’



'So I think, Joe, and I am going to London to find out from Cicero Gramp.'

'You'll find he'll tell you that the Quiet Gentleman killed Dr. Warrender,' put in Sophy.

The old sailor choked, and looked at her with absolute terror.

'How do you know that, miss?' he asked.

'I only think so. The Quiet Gentleman has disappeared. Probably he killed the doctor, and then took my father's body.'

'It might be so, miss. If I find him——'

Joe repeated his former savage declaration, and Miss Vicky duly shuddered.

'Then you can't help us in any way, Joe?' said Alan, eyeing him thoughtfully.

'No, sir, I can't. I don't know who carried off the Cap'n, and I don't know who stabbed the doctor. If I did, I'd kill him. When you find him, sir, let me know.'

After which speech the old sailor again pulled his forelock, scraped his foot, and rolled out of the room. He appeared somewhat relieved to get away.

Alan did not quite know what to make of

Joe. The man was so nervous that it seemed as though he knew something and was afraid of committing himself. On the other hand, this sailor was devoted to Sophy, and had been in Marlow's service for thirty years. It was only reasonable to conclude, therefore, that he would wish her to benefit by any knowledge he might possess. On the whole, Alan was perplexed, but he kept it to himself, determining, nevertheless, to keep an eye on Joe. When the door was closed, Sophy turned to Alan.

'Alan,' she said slowly, 'I love you dearly, as you know, and I wish to become your wife. But I swear by the memory of my father that until you find out who has done this wicked thing and bring the man to justice, I will not marry you!'

'Sophy!' cried Thorold entreatingly.

'I mean what I say,' repeated the girl, in a low, fierce voice. 'We must avenge my father. When the wretch is caught and hanged, then I'll marry you, Alan.'

'Sophia, a marriage under such circumstances——'

'Miss Parsh,' cried Sophy, turning on the meek old maid, 'do you think I can sit down tamely under this insult to the dead? My father's body has been carried off. It must be found again before I marry—before I can think of marriage, Alan.'

'Sophy is right,' cried Thorold, drawing the girl to him and kissing her. 'She is right, Miss Parsh. I swear also that I will devote my life to solving this mystery. Your father's body shall be brought back, Sophy, and the murderer of Dr. Warrender shall hang. Good-bye, dear. To-day I go to London. The first step towards the discovery of this crime will be to see Cicero Gramp. He may supply the clue.'

'Yes, yes. Bribe him; pay him anything, so long as you get at the truth.'

Alan kissed the girl again, and then left the room. Before he started, he intended to see the Rector and the local inspector of police. As he stepped out on to the road, he noticed Phelps coming along in the hot sunshine. The little parson was puffing and blowing and wiping his forehead.

76 THE MILLIONAIRE MYSTERY

'Alan! Alan!' he called out in short gasps as he came within speaking distance. 'She's gone! She's gone to——'

'She! Gone! Who's gone? Where?'

'Why, Mrs. Warrender! She's disappeared. Oh, dear me; how terrible all this is! Whew!'

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MISSING KEY

So excited was the little parson that Alan feared lest he should take a fit. The Good Samaritan was no great distance away, so thither he led him, into Mrs. Timber's private parlour.

'Now, sir,' said Alan, when his old tutor seemed somewhat more composed, 'tell me all about Mrs. Warrender.'

But before Mr. Phelps could reply, the vixenish landlady made her appearance. She was highly honoured at seeing the Rector within her doors, and curtsied a hint for orders. And, in truth, the little clergyman, undone with excitement, was quite ready to stimulate his jaded nerves.

'Eh, Mrs. Timber?' he said. 'Yes; you might get us a little Cognac, I think. Old;

the best you have, Mrs. Timber, and a jug of fresh-drawn water from the well, please. Alan ?'

'I'll join you,' said young Thorold promptly.

He, too, felt that he was in nowise beyond reach of a little stimulant.

Silent for once in her life, Mrs. Timber brought of her best, which, be it said, was passing good. Mr. Phelps lost no time in brewing his measure and drank it down with gusto.

'That's good, Alan, my boy; very good,' said he, setting down the tumbler with a sigh of relief. 'God forgive me, I fear to think what my good brethren would say did they see their Rector in a public-house! though to be sure the Good Samaritan is a most respectable hostelry. But, Alan, why did you bring me here?'

'Indeed, sir, I feared you would be ill out there in the blazing sun. I did only what I thought wise. But about Mrs. Warrender—you say she has disappeared?'

'Eh, yes.' Mr. Phelps wiped his bald head vigorously. 'I went to break the news to

her after you had gone to see Sophy, and I found she had left for London.'

'London? Why London?'

'That is just what I wanted to know, my dear Alan. It seems she received last night a letter which threw her into a state of great excitement. She was bad enough that way, as it was, the servant said; but this letter, it appears, drove her into a perfect frenzy.'

'Do you know what was in the letter?'

'I asked that—oh, trust me, Alan, to be precise about details—but the servant said she did not know. Mrs. Warrender put it in her pocket. That spoke volumes from the servant's point of view. All night long, it appears, she was walking about the room using the most fearful language—God forgive her!—and this morning at eight o'clock she started off to catch the 9.30 express at the Junction.'

'And is she coming back?'

'That I don't know, my boy.'

Mr. Phelps looked round cautiously and lowered his voice to a whisper.

'She took her jewels with her.'

'Her jewels!'

'Yes; she had a quantity of jewellery. She put all the money she could get from her husband into clothes and diamonds—a most extravagant woman, Alan. Well, she's gone, that's certain, jewels and all. She left no address, and said no word about returning. What do you think of it?'

'Upon my word, sir, I don't know what to think! The whole place has gone mad, it seems to me; the entire village is topsy-turvy. Marlow's body stolen, Warrender murdered, and his body placed in poor Marlow's coffin; and now here is Mrs. Warrender cleared out significantly with her jewels; and the Quiet Gentleman——'

'Brown, the dumb man? What about him? I know he, too, has vanished; but what else?'

'I'm going to tell you, sir. The key of the vault——'

'Not your key, Alan?'

'Yes, my key, Mr. Phelps; the Quiet Gentleman has it!'

'God bless me—that is, God forgive me, Alan, are you mad, too?'

'No, sir, not yet; though I admit I'm fairly



on the way, with all this. Tell me, do you know who this so-called Quiet Gentleman really is ?

'No, Alan, I don't. I spoke to him, but found he was dumb. Now he too is gone.'

'Yes, with Marlow's body on his hands, and Warrender's death on his soul !'

'You don't mean that ! Are you sure ?'

Mr. Phelps was greatly agitated.

'I go only by circumstantial evidence, it is true. You know, of course, the funeral of Mr. Marlow took place in the morning ?'

'Yes, yes ; and at two o'clock you took Sophy and Miss Parsh to Bournemouth.'

'I did. Well, about five o'clock, Brown—we'll call him that instead of the Quiet Gentleman, though I don't believe it really is his name—well, about that time Brown walked over to Abbey Farm. He brought a letter purporting to come from me to my house-keeper, Mrs. Hester.'

'From you, Alan ?'

'Yes, the letter was forged,' said Alan with emphasis. 'It directed Mrs. Hester to allow Brown to remain at the farm until I returned. It was in my handwriting, and signed with my

name. She knew nothing about Brown, save that he was staying at Mrs. Marry's, and she thought it somewhat strange he should come to stop at the farm during my absence. But as the instructions in the letter were quite plain, and she knew my handwriting well—that shows how expert the forgery was—she gave Brown the run of the place. In the meantime she wrote to me at Bournemouth asking me if all was right, and enclosed the forged letter. Here it is!

As he saw the handwriting, Mr. Phelps started.

'Upon my word, Alan, I don't wonder Mrs. Hester was deceived, especially when you consider her sight is not good! Why, I myself with my eyes should certainly take it for yours.' (Mr. Phelps wore pince-nez, but nevertheless resented any aspersion on his optical powers.) 'But why on earth didn't she telegraph to you?'

'Well, you know how old-fashioned and conservative she is, sir. She makes out through the Scriptures—how, I cannot tell you—that the telegraph is a sinful institution. Therefore

it is not to be wondered at that she trusted to the post. I got her letter only this morning, as, of course, it followed me on from Bournemouth. Nevertheless, I knew about the loss of the key last night.'

'Ah! the loss of the key. Yes, go on, Alan.'

'Very well. Brown, being allowed to remain in my house, proceeded to make himself quite at home in the library. Mrs. Hester, writing her letter—no easy task for her—took no further heed of him. He was in the room for quite an hour, and amused himself, it appears, in breaking open my desk. Having forced several of the drawers, he found at last the one he wanted—the one containing the key of the vault. Then he made all things beautifully smooth, so that Mrs. Hester should not see they had been tampered with, and leaving a message that he would return to dinner, went out ostensibly for a walk. He returned, it appears, to his lodging, and left there again about nine o'clock in the evening. Since then nothing has been seen or heard of him.'

'God bless me, Alan! are you sure he has the key?'

'Positive. I looked in my desk last night, and it was not there. But everything was done so nicely that I am strongly of the opinion that Mr. Brown has served his apprenticeship as a cracksman, and that under a pretty good master too. No one but he could have stolen that key. Besides, the forged letter shows plainly that he came to the farm with no honest intentions. But what I can't understand,' continued Alan, biting his moustache, 'is how the man came to know where the key was.'

'Extraordinary—yes, that is extraordinary. Undoubtedly he it was who stole the body and gained access to the vault with your key. But the murder of Dr. Warrender——'

'He committed that too; I am convinced of it. Warrender called to see him, found he was out, and I have no doubt followed him. He probably saw Brown remove the body, and of course interfered, upon which the villain made short work of him. That is my theory, sir.'

'And a very sound one, too, in many respects,' said the Rector. 'But Brown could not

have removed the body alone. He must have had an accomplice.'

'True; and it is for that very reason I am going to town this afternoon. Cicero Gramp may be able to supply some information on that point. It is quite possible he slept in the churchyard and saw the whole business—murder and all.'

'Alan! Alan!' cried Mr. Phelps, horrified. 'Do you believe this murder was committed on the sacred soil of the churchyard, in God's own acre, Alan? No one, surely, could be so vile!'

'I do, sir; and at the door of the vault. Brown, as you say yourself, cleverly concealed the body in Marlow's coffin. He had no time to screw it down again, apparently. He must have had a pretty tough job to cut through that lead. He had to trust to chance, of course, that the vault would not be visited until he had got a safe distance away with his booty. And, indeed, but for Gramp's letter, no one would ever have thought of going there. In fact, this Brown is a most ingenious and dangerous criminal.'

'He is; indeed he is. But what could he possibly want the body for?'

'Ha! that's just it! I fancy this is a case of blackmail. If you remember, a millionaire's body was stolen in America some few years ago, and only restored to the family on payment by them of a very large sum of money.'

'Oh, that is what you think he is after?'

'Yes, I do. It is highly probable, I think, that in a few weeks, or perhaps even in less time, we shall receive a letter demanding some thousands for the return of the body.'

'But surely the police——'

'Oh, Mr. Brown will look after all that. You may depend upon it he'll make himself quite safe before he goes that far. So talented a gentleman as he, would not be likely to omit all necessary precautions of that kind.'

'Humph!' muttered Mr. Phelps, considering, 'and of Mrs. Warrender's suspicious flight, what think you?'

'I confess I don't know quite what to make of that. I have no great opinion of her as a woman; still, I should hardly credit her with being in league with this ruffian.'

'No, indeed, for that, she is the worst of women,' said Mr. Phelps without marrying her. 'Why, Alan, poor Warrender was simply mad about her. He worked day and night to provide her with the finery she craved for. Besides, she seemed really fond of him.'

'Who was she?' asked Alan bluntly.

'Well, I shouldn't like to say it to everyone, Alan, but Mrs. Warrender had been an actress.'

'An actress! Under what name?'

'That I cannot tell you. I called there one day and I heard her reciting Shakespeare. Her elocution seemed to me so fine that I complimented her upon it. Then she told me that she had been on the stage, and had retired when she married Warrender.'

'That's very strange! I always thought she had somewhat of a professional manner about her.'

'And her hair, Alan! *Flava coma*—yellow hair; not that I mean, for one moment, she was what the Romans referred to by these words. Well, my boy, what is to be done now?'

'I am going up to London in an hour's time.'

---

## NOVEMBER MYSTERY

glanced at his watch while speaking.

'You'll miss seeing Blair, the inspector,'  
constrated Mr. Phelps.

'I'll see him when I return: you can explain the case as well as I, sir. I shall bring Gramp back with me if I can manage it.'

'And Mrs. Warrender—shall I tell Blair about her?'

'I fear you must. But let him be circumspect. It is not necessary to take any steps against her until we are tolerably sure of the reason for her sudden flight. When do they hold the inquest on Warrender?'

'To-morrow.'

'Well, I'll be back to-night and tell you what I've done.' And Alan rose to go.

'One moment, my dear boy. What about Sophy?'

'I've seen her, and, of course, I was judicious in what I told her. She knows nothing about the loss of the key and my suspicions of Brown, although, funnily enough, she herself suspects him.'

'Bless me! on what grounds can she do that?'



'Oh, on the purely feminine grounds that she suspects him. She declares she will not marry me until her father's body is discovered.'

'Very right; very proper. I quite agree with her. You should start your married life with an absolutely clean sheet, Alan.'

The young man nodded, and as he left the inn he delivered himself of one warning.

'Whatever you do, keep your eye on Joe Brill,' he said significantly.

'Why—why? What for?'

'Because I fancy he knows a good deal more than he is inclined to tell,' replied Alan.

Then, without further comment, he drove off, leaving the Rector considerably bewildered at this abrupt interpolation of a fresh name into the persons of the drama.

Meanwhile, Alan caught his train, and in due time, or a very fair approach to it, arrived in London. He took a hasty lunch at Waterloo, and drove to Westminster Bridge. Here he dismissed his cab, and set about inquiring for Dixon's Rents. The slum—its name was highly suggestive of its being such—appeared to be well known. The first constable he

asked was both familiar with and communicative about it.

'It's within easy distance of Lambeth Palace, sir,' he said. 'A bit rough by night, but you'll be all right there in the daytime. Ask any constable near by the Palace, sir, and he'll put you right. Thank you, sir.'

Alan left the officer of the law well pleased with his unlooked-for half-crown, and walked on towards the Palace. The second constable could not leave his beat, but the bestowal of another half-crown elicited from him the practical suggestion that a certain young shoeblack of repute should act as guide. The shoeblack was quite near at hand, and very shortly was enrolled as guide for the occasion. Together he and Alan started off, leaving the constable well content, though withal a trifle mystified, not to say curious.

The shoeblack led the way, and Alan followed closely. They turned away from the river into a mass of houses, where the streets became more and more squalid, and the population more and more ragged and unkempt. At length, after many twistings and turnings, they

arrived at the entrance to a narrow cul-de-sac, and he was informed that this was his destination. He rewarded and dismissed the shoe-black, and proceeded down the dirty lane. Almost the first person he saw was a tall woman standing at the entrance of the court, closely veiled. She seemed to be hesitating whether she would come on or not. Then, suddenly, she threw up her veil. As she did so, Alan uttered an exclamation of surprise.

It was Mrs. Warrender!

## CHAPTER VII

### IN DIXON'S RENTS

AT the sound of Alan's voice Mrs. Warrender started like a guilty thing. He was astonished beyond measure at finding her in the same unsavoury neighbourhood as himself, bound, for all he knew, on the same errand. At all events, it was surely more than a coincidence that she should be on the threshold of Gramp's dwelling, so to speak.

'Mrs. Warrender,' he said, gravely lifting his hat, 'this is indeed a surprise. Of course, you know what has happened at Heath-ton?'

'I know all,' answered the woman, in a rich, low voice. 'Jarks, the sexton, told my servant this morning what has happened to poor Julian, and that his body has been found in the Marlow vault.'

'Are you sure you did not know of it last night?' asked Alan quietly.

'Mr. Thorold!'

The colour rushed to her face.

'I mean that the letter which disturbed you so much, might have hinted at the murder.'

'A letter? How do you know I got a letter last night?'

'The Rector called to break the news to you this morning, and your servant told him that you already knew it; also that you had left for London—with your jewels, Mrs. Warrender,' added Alan significantly.

'And you followed me!' cried the woman savagely. 'Do you intend to accuse me of my husband's murder?'

'I certainly do not; and I did not follow you. I am here on the same errand as yourself.'

She looked terrified.

'How do you know what my errand is?'

'Because I can put two and two together, Mrs. Warrender. I also received a letter—at least, Miss Marlow did, and from the same man—the man who lives here.'

'Cicero Gramp?'

'That is the name. You see, I was right. Does he intend to blackmail you also, and did you bring your jewels to satisfy his demands?'

She looked down the court. They were comparatively alone. A few ragged children were playing about, and some slatternly women were watching them from doorways. A man or two, brutalized by drink, hovered in the distance. But a smart constable, who passed and re-passed the entrance of the cul-de-sac, casting inquisitive glances at Alan and his companion, kept these birds of prey from any nearer approach. Finding that they were out of earshot, Mrs. Warrender produced a letter and handed it to Alan. It was written on the same thick, creamy paper, and in the same elegant handwriting as had been the communication to Sophy. He read it in silence. As he had expected, it informed Mrs. Warrender that her husband was dead, and that Cicero Gramp, on payment of two hundred pounds, could inform her where the body could be found. His price had evidently gone up. But what struck Alan most was the nature of

the information now offered, Cicero declared that he could tell the widow where her husband's body was to be found. The body had already been discovered in the Marlow vault. Ergo, Cicero Gramp knew it was there. If so, had he seen the murder committed and the body taken into the vault? It seemed probable. Indeed, it seemed likely that he could solve the whole mystery; but, strangely enough, the prospect did not seem to afford Mr. Thorold much satisfaction. He handed back the letter with a dissatisfied smile.

'I think you have wasted your time coming up,' he said. 'Jarks, no doubt, told your servant that the doctor's body had already been discovered. Why, then, come up to pay blackmail?'

'I want to find out who killed Julian,' she said.

'Then you are on your way to see this man?'

'Yes.' She shuddered. 'But this terrible place. I am afraid.'

'Then why come here? I am going to see Mr. Gramp on Miss Marlow's behalf. If you like, I will represent you also.'

'No, thank you ; I must see him myself.'

'Very well. I suppose you are not staying in town ?'

'Yes, at the Norfolk Hotel. I shall remain until to-morrow, so as to sell my jewels and bribe this man.'

'There will be no need to sell your jewels,' said Alan soothingly. 'I will be responsible for the blackmail. Have you the jewels with you ?'

'No, I dare not bring them. He might have robbed me. They are in my bedroom at the hotel.'

'Then go back at once and look after them. I will bring this man there in, let us say, an hour.'

'Thank you, Mr. Thorold,' she said. 'I accept your offer. I am really afraid to go down that slum.'

He gazed after her fine figure as she walked hurriedly away. Somehow that haughty air and resolute gait did not fit in well with her expression of fear. It was curious. He felt there was something strange about Mrs. Warrender. However, she had been open enough



with him, so he did not choose to think badly of her.

The man he sought was not easy to find. Mr. Gramp had his own reasons for keeping clear of the police. The whole alley was known by the name of Dixon's Rents, and Thorold had no idea in which of the houses to ask for him. He questioned a stunted street Arab with wolfish eyes, emphasizing his request with a sixpence.

'Oh, Cicero!' yelped the lad, biting the coin. 'Yuss, he's round about. Dunno! Y'ain't a 'tec?'

'What's that?'

'A de-tec-tive,' drawled the boy. 'Cicero ain't wanted, is he?'

'Not by me. Is Cicero generally—er—wanted?' inquired Alan delicately.

The urchin closed one eye rapidly, and grinned with many teeth. But, instead of replying, he took to shouting hoarsely for 'Mother Ginger.' The surrounding population popped out of their burrows like so many rabbits, and for the next few minutes 'Mother Ginger' was asked for vigorously. Alan

looked round at the ragged, blear-eyed slum-dwellers, but could see nothing of the lady in question. Suddenly his arm was twitched, and he turned to find a dwarf no higher than his waist trying to attract his attention. Mother Ginger, for it was she, had a huge head of red hair, fantastically decked with ribbons of many colours. Her dress, too, was rainbow-hued, like Joseph's coat. She had carpet slippers on her huge feet, and white woollen gloves on her large hands. Her face was as large as a frying-pan and of a pallid hue, with expressionless blue eyes and a big mouth. Alan saw in her a female Quasimodo.

'Wot is it?' she inquired. Evidently Mother Ginger was vain of her finery and of the attention she attracted. 'Is it Mr. Gramp you want, m'dimber-cove?'

'Yes. Can you take me to him?' asked Thorold, wincing at the penny-whistle quality of her voice. 'Is he at home?'

'P'raps he is, p'raps he ain't,' retorted Mother Ginger, with a fascinating leer. 'Wot d'ye want with him?'

'This will explain.' And Alan put Cicero's letter into her hand. 'Give him that.'

She nodded, croaked like a bull-frog, and vanished amongst the crowd. Mr. Thorold found himself the centre of attraction and the object of remark.

This somewhat unpleasant position was put an end to by the appearance of Mother Ginger, who clawed Alan, and drew him into a house at the end of the court. The tatterdemalions gave a yell of disappointment at the escape of their prey, and their prey congratulated himself that he had not made his visit at night. He felt that he might have fared badly in this modern Court of Miracles. However, it appeared that he was safe under the protection of Mother Ginger. With the activity of a monkey, she conducted him up a dirty staircase and into a bare room furnished with a bed, a chair, and a table. Here Alan was greeted by a bulky creature in a gorgeous red dressing-gown, old and greasy, but still pretentious. He had no difficulty in recognising the man whom he had seen reciting on the parade at Bournemouth.

'I welcome you, Mr. Thorold,' said Cicero in his best Turveydrop style. 'Mother Ginger, depart.'

To get rid of the woman, Mr. Thorold placed a shilling in her concave claw, upon which she executed a kind of war-dance, and vanished with a yelp of delight. Left alone with the pompous vagabond, the young man took the only chair, and faced his host, who was sitting majestically on the bed, his red dressing-gown wrapped round him in regal style.

'So you are Cicero Gramp?' began Alan. 'I have seen you——'

'At Bournemouth,' interrupted the professor of elocution and eloquence. 'True, I was there for the benefit of my health.'

'And to blackmail Miss Marlow.'

'Blackmail—a painful word, Mr. Thorold.'

'How do you know my name?'

'It is part of my business to know all names,' was the answer—'*ex nihilo nihil fit*, if you understand the tongue of my namesake. If I did not know what I desire to know, my income would be small indeed. I visited the salubrious village of Heathton, and learned there, that

Miss Marlow and Mr. Thorold, to whom she was engaged, were recreating themselves at the seaside with an inferior companion. Bournemouth was the seaside, and I went there. On seeing a young lady with a spinster and a gentleman in attendance, I noted Miss Marlow, Mr. Thorold, and Miss Parsh.'

'And made yourself scarce?'

'I did,' admitted Cicero frankly. 'I departed as soon as you were out of sight, knowing that my letter would be delivered, and that you might call in the police.'

'Ah, a guilty conscience!'

'Far from it.' Cicero flung open his dressing-gown, and struck his chest. 'Here purity and innocence and peace are enthroned. I did not wish to be taken by the minions of the law, lest they should wrest from me for nothing what I should prefer to sell for a few pounds. Besides, I wished to see you in my own house. A poor establishment,' said Mr. Gramp, looking round the meagre room, 'but mine own.'

He bowed gracefully, as if for applause.

'Come, Mr. Gramp,' said Alan diplomati-

cally, 'let us get to business. What do you know about this matter?'

'About the hundred pounds?' asked the man with an appearance of great simplicity.

'I'll pay you that, more or less, when I know what your information is worth.'

'More or less won't do, Mr. Thorold. I want, from Miss Marlow or from you, one hundred pounds.'

'I know, and two hundred from Mrs. Warrender.'

'Ah!'—Cicero did not move a muscle—'she has told you that I can give you information about the body of her husband?'

'Yes, and she has come to town to see you. However, I have intercepted her, and she is waiting to see you in a place I know of. You must come with me, Mr. Gramp.'

But Cicero shook his head uneasily.

'An Englishman's house is his castle,' he said. 'This is my house, my keep, my donjon. *Quod erat demonstrandum!*'

'Oh, confound your dictionary Latin!' cried Alan impatiently. 'You are afraid of the police?'

'Far from it, Mr. Thorold. I have nothing to fear from them. For one hundred pounds I lay bare my heart.'

'I'll give you fifty pounds on condition you tell me all you know. From Mrs. Warrender you won't receive a penny.'

'Then she shall never know where lies the body of her late lamented partner.'

'She knows that already,' said Alan coolly.

'Ha!'—Cicero gave a dramatic start—'you seek to deceive me!'

'Indeed, I do nothing of the sort; I found the body myself.'

'Where, may I ask?' said Gramp, his thoughts going back to the hut on the heath.

'In the Marlow vault, in the coffin of the dead man who was carried away.'

Cicero's jaw fell. He was truly surprised.

'How the devil did it get there from the hut?' he said.

'The hut—what hut?'

'I want my money before I tell you that, Mr. Thorold.'

Alan took five ten-pound notes out of his pocket.

'Here is fifty pounds,' he said; 'it will be yours if you tell me all you know, and come with me to see Mrs. Warrender.'

'Aha!' Cicero's eyes glittered, and his fingers longed to clutch the money. Such wealth had not been his for many a long day. 'And the police?'

'I thought you did not fear them,' was the reply.

'I don't, for I have done nothing to put myself in the power of the law. But I am afraid, as this body has been found, that you will have me arrested, and so I shall lose the money.'

'If you are innocent of the murder and the sacrilege, you won't be arrested, Gramp. And the money I will give you after we have seen Mrs. Warrender.'

'On your word of honour as a gentleman?'

'Yes, on my word of honour. If you can throw light on this mystery, and bring home these crimes to the person who has committed them, I am quite willing to pay you.'

'I don't know about bringing home the crimes, Mr. Thorold,' said Cicero, rising, 'but



I will tell you all I know in the presence of Mrs. Warrender. Permit me to assume my visiting garb. Where is the lady ?

'At the Norfolk Hotel.'

'I know it. Many a glass which cheers have I drained there. *Dulce desipere in loco*. You don't know Horace, perhaps ?'

'I suspect you don't,' said Alan, annoyed by this hedge-Latin. 'Hurry up!'

'Fifty pounds, Mr. Thorold.'

'After our interview with Mrs. Warrender,' amended the other significantly.

'Command my services,' said Cicero, and rapidly put on his frock-coat, battered hat and gloves.

After he had brushed his greasy broadcloth, and dusted his large boots with the red bandana, he announced that he was ready.

The oddly-assorted pair proceeded to the Norfolk Hotel through the Lambeth slums. Cicero seemed to be very well known and very popular. He exchanged greetings with shady acquaintances, patted ragged children on the head, and arrived at the hotel swelling with pride. He felt that he had shown Alan he

was a man of consequence. Arrived at their destination, they were shown by a slipshod waiter into a shabby sitting-room on the first floor, where they found Mrs. Warrender. She rose, and on seeing Cicero, gave a shriek of surprise.

‘Bill!’ she cried with a gasp.

‘Clara Maria!’ exclaimed the so-called Cicero, ‘my beloved sister! What a surprise!’

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW

'WELL, I never!' gasped the widow, who, womanlike, was the first to find her tongue. 'Is it really you, Billy?—but I might have guessed it, from your writing. Yet it never entered my head!' She stopped and grew suddenly furious. 'My husband, you wretch!—have you killed him?'

'No, Clara Maria, no! I came here to give information about his poor body. I did not expect to find my sister—the celebrated Miss de Crespigny—in the person of Mrs. Warrender!'

'What is all this about?' demanded Alan quietly. 'Is this your brother, Mrs. Warrender?'

'To my shame, sir, I confess this—this creature'—Mrs. Warrender brought out the

word with a hiss—'this degraded beast, is my brother.'

'Oh, Clara Maria, how can you——'

'Hold your tongue!' interrupted the lady angrily. 'You were always a drunkard and a scoundrel! Now you've come to blackmailing! Two hundred pounds from me, you wretch! Not one sixpence!'

'I have already,' said her brother majestically, 'arranged pecuniary matters with my friend Mr. Thorold. But I wonder at you, Clara Maria, I really do, considering how we parted. Is this the greeting of flesh and blood?' cried Mr. Gramp in a soaring voice, and standing on tiptoe. 'Is this what human nature is made of? The late Sir Isaac Newton was a prophet indeed when he made that remark.'

'Mountebank!' hissed Mrs. Warrender, curling her handsome lip.

'We were both mountebanks at one time, Mr. Thorold,' he said, turning to Alan, who, in spite of his anxiety, was watching the scene with unconcealed amusement. 'My sister was the celebrated Miss de Crespigny; I, the once noted actor, Vavasour Belgrave——'

'And his real name is Billy Spinks!' put in Mrs. Warrender scornfully.

'William Spinks,' corrected Mr. Gramp, as it may be convenient to call him. 'Billy is merely an endearing term to which, alas! your lips have long been strangers. But you needn't talk,' said Cicero, becoming angry, and therewith a trifle vulgar; 'your name is Clara Maria Spinks!'

'And a very good name, too,' retorted the lady. 'Cut the scene short, Billy.'

'That is my advice also,' put in Alan, who was growing weary. 'I do not want to know any more about your relationship. That you are brother and sister is nothing to me.'

'I hope, Mr. Thorold, that you won't reveal my degraded connection in Heathton,' cried Mrs. Warrender, much agitated. 'It would ruin me. With great difficulty I attained a position by marrying my poor dear Julian, and I don't want to fall back into the mud where this worm writhes.' She darted a vicious glance at Cicero.

'Be content, Mrs. Warrender; your secret is safe with me.'

'Denying her own flesh and blood!' moaned Gramp, and sat down.

Speech and attitude were most effective, and Mrs. Warrender, with a spark of her old theatrical humour, played back.

'Yes, I deny you,' she cried, rising quickly and stretching out a denunciatory hand. 'You were always a brute and a disgrace to me. Look at that creature, Mr. Thorold! He is my brother. Our parents were on the stage—barnstormers they were—and played in the provinces for bite and sup. They put us on the stage, and when they died, left a little money to Billy there. He was to bring me up. How did he fulfil his trust? By making me work for him. As an actor, even in the meanest parts, he was a failure. I am not much of an actress myself, although I was well known as Miss de Crespigny, and billed all over London. It was my figure and my looks that did it. I appeared in burlesque ten or twelve years ago, and I had wealth at my feet.'

'I have heard of you,' said Alan, recalling his college days and certain photographs of the most beautiful burlesque actress in London.

He wondered he had not recognised her long before. Mrs. Warrender, shaking with passion, went on as though she had not heard him.

‘Wealth was at my feet,’ went on the widow—‘wealth and dishonour. He,’ she cried, and pointed the finger of scorn at the unabashed Cicero, ‘he lived on me! He would have me stoop to dishonour for his sake! Then I lost my voice. The creature treated me basely. I left him; I ran away to the States of America, and appeared in ballets for my looks alone. In New Orleans I met Julian Warrender—he was old, but he was madly in love with me—and I married him for a home. We came to England five years ago, and settled at Heathton. I always did my best to be a good wife, although I dare say I was extravagant. Diamonds! yes, I have diamonds, and I made Julian buy me all he could. And why?—to provide against the days of poverty which I knew would come. They have come—my husband is dead. God help me!’ Her voice rose to a scream. ‘Murdered!’ she cried.

‘This,’ interpolated Gramp, addressing no one in particular, ‘is very painful.’

'You beast! Why do you come into my life again? I wanted to know about my poor husband's death, and I brought up my jewels to bribe the man who called himself Cicero Gramp into confessing who had murdered him. I find that my own brother is the blackmailer. You would extort money from me, you wretch! Never! never! never! I disown you—I cast you out! William Spinks, blackguard you were! Cicero Gramp, scoundrel, thief, blackmailer, and, for all I know, murderer, you are! Away with you—away!' and Mrs. Warrender, very white in face and very exhausted in body, sat down.

'Very good,' said her brother, rising; 'I go.'

'Without your fifty pounds?' asked Alan, sneering.

'I forgot that,' he said, smiling blandly.

'Don't give him a penny, Mr. Thorold!' cried the woman with vehemence.

'I promised him the money, and he shall have it,' replied Alan coldly. 'I have heard your story, Mrs. Warrender, and it is safe with me. No one in Heathton shall know. Your brother will not speak of it either.'



'How do you know that?' asked Cicero, with an evil look.

'Because you shall not have the fifty pounds until I have your promise to hold your tongue about your relationship to Mrs. Warrender while you are in Heathton.'

'I am not going to Heathton,' growled Gramp like a sulky bear.

'Yes, you are. You are coming to tell your story to Inspector Blair. If you don't, not only will you lose your fifty pounds, but I will have you arrested as a suspicious character.'

'You promised that the police should not touch me.'

'I promised nothing of the sort. Now, tell me what you saw of these crimes—for there are two: sacrilege and murder—and then come to Heathton. Behave well, keep Mrs. Warrender's secret, and you shall have fifty pounds and your freedom. Otherwise——' Alan held up his finger.

'Oh, Mr. Thorold!' cried the widow, wringing her hands, 'if this horrible man comes to Heathton, I am lost!'

'Indeed no! He will hold his tongue. Won't you?'

'You seem very sure of it,' said the professor of eloquence.

'Of course I am. You see, Mr. Gramp, I have the handling of the late Mr. Marlow's money, and I can buy your silence.'

'Not for fifty pounds.'

'We shall see about that. It's either fifty pounds or the police. Choose!'

Cicero folded his arms, and bowed his head.

'I will take the money,' he said, 'and I will hold my tongue—while I am at Heathton giving my evidence. Afterwards——' he looked at his sister.

'Afterwards,' said Alan smoothly, 'we will make other arrangements. Now tell your story.'

'And tell the truth!' put in Mrs. Warrender sharply.

'Clara Maria!' Cicero was about to break forth in furious speech, but he restrained himself. '*Hodie mihi cras tibi!*' said Mr. Gramp, with a strange look at Alan—'if you understand Latin.'

'I think I am able to follow you, my friend. You mean "To-day to me, to-morrow to thee," which would be all right if it was I who quoted the saying. But this time it is not your day, and as to your to-morrow, it may never come.'

'We shall see about that,' said Cicero savagely and pointedly.

Alan felt an unpleasant thrill run through him, for the man's look was evil beyond telling. But he betrayed nothing of this, and signed to Gramp to continue.

Quite understanding the position, Cicero reverted to his grand theatrical manner. He rose from his chair, rested one hand on the back of it, and thrust the other into his breast. As from a rostrum he delivered his speech, and dwelt upon his own words with the gusto of a modern Micawber.

'Mr. Thorold and Clara Maria,' he began in deep tones, 'a few days ago circumstances connected with money turned me weary and hungry from the seaport of Southampton. I went—let us be plain—I went on the tramp, and in the course of my peregrinations I drew near Heathton, a salubrious village, notorious

at the present moment for the crimes which have been committed there. I spun a coin, my only sixpence, to decide if an intrusion into that village would bring me good or evil fortune. The coin said good, so to Heatton I went. As I shall shortly pocket fifty quid—a vulgar term, but eloquent, Clara Maria, so don't frown—I dare not say that my only sixpence told me a lie. That sixpence bought me a meal in the Heatton public-house. Where is that meal or sixpence now? *Eheu! Fuit Ilium.*'

'Go on,' said Alan curtly, for the orator paused.

'At the Good Samaritan I heard much about Mr. Marlow and the funeral, and learned a few facts which were of use to me afterwards.'

'When you thrust yourself into the kitchen at the Moat House, I presume?'

'You are correct, Mr. Thorold. I did good business there; and I learned, from the irresponsible chatter of the domestics, a few other facts which may also prove valuable.'

He looked directly at Alan as he said this.

'Go on! go on!' said Thorold again. But he felt uneasy.

'I was turned out of the Good Samaritan by a hard-hearted landlady called — appropriately, I confess — Mrs. Timber. As the night was fine, I slept in the churchyard, opposite the tomb of Mr. Marlow. Soon after midnight I was awakened by voices. I looked out, and saw two men, one tall, the other short.'

'Who were they?' Alan asked anxiously.

'One I knew later; the other one I am still in doubt about, as I did not see his face.'

'But the names?'

'You shall hear the names, Clara Maria, when I am ready, not before. These men went into the tomb, remained there for some time, and came out with the body. They lifted it over the low wall of the churchyard, and went, I think, across the moor.'

'You followed?' cried Alan breathlessly.

'No. I was afraid I might get into trouble, so I ran in the opposite direction. I slept the rest of the night in a hayrick far from the churchyard. Next day I sought the Moat

House kitchen, and listened to the talk of the servants. Then I went away with the idea of seeing Miss Marlow at Bournemouth, as the servants said she was there with Mr. Thorold. On the moor I saw a hut. I went into it to eat a frugal meal. In it I found'—Cicero paused to give his words due effect—'a corpse.'

'Whose corpse?'

'That of the man who had assisted to steal the body, Clara Maria. Your husband, Dr. Warrender!'

'You liar!' shrieked the widow, making a bound at him. 'Oh, you liar!'

Alan flung himself between these affectionate relatives, or it might have fared badly with Cicero.

'Hold hard, Mrs. Warrender!' he said, holding her back; 'let us listen.'

'Listen to his lies! Do you hear that he says my husband stole Mr. Marlow's body?'

'So he did,' said Cicero doggedly. 'I'm telling you what I shall tell to the police. The tall man was Dr. Warrender. I saw his face in the lantern-light. Who the short man was I do not know.'

'How did you recognise Dr. Warrender?' demanded Alan, when Mrs. Warrender had sat down again.

'I didn't know him at the time; but I had his description from the servants.'

'Tall, yellow beard, bald head?' said Thorold rapidly.

'Yes, that was the man who assisted to remove the body, and that is the description of the corpse I found in the hut.'

'My husband's body was found in the vault, you liar!' cried the widow.

'Was it, Clara Maria? Well, all I can say is I don't know how it got there. I left it in the hut myself.'

'Why did you not give information to the police?'

'What! And get locked up on suspicion of murder? No, thank you, Mr. Thorold. I ran away from that corpse as I would have done from the devil.'

'Whose child you are,' said his sister bitterly.

'Don't miscall your own father, Clara Maria. Well, sir, I went on to Bournemouth, and wrote two letters, one to Miss Marlow, and one

to my sister, although I did not know she was my sister then. Had I known I had a relative in Heathton,' said Cicero with pathos, 'I should have asked for a bed.'

'And your sister, Billy Spinks, would have set the dogs on you.'

'I am sure you would, Clara Maria. You were always one for sentimental scenes.'

'Tell me, Gramp, is this all you know of these crimes?' put in Alan.

'All, Mr. Thorold. I think, sir, it is worth fifty pounds.'

'Humph! We'll see what the police say. You have no objection, I suppose, to come with me to Heathton and repeat this story?'

'Having a clear conscience,' said Cicero, with a superior smile, 'I can safely say that I have not. But the fifty, Mr. Thorold?'

'Will be paid after you have told Blair this story.'

'If you are so poor,' put in Mrs. Warrender, 'where did you get money to buy that writing-paper? It was costly paper.'

'It was,' admitted Mr. Gramp with pride—  
'it was, Clara Maria. I always do things in



style. If you remember, I got a prize at school for letter-writing.'

'Where did you get the money?'

'From a nautical man called Joe Brill—a sovereign.'

'A sovereign from Joe Brill?' cried Alan, starting. 'Why?'

'Ah! you may ask,' said Cicero. 'In my opinion it was hush-money.'

'Hush-money! What do you mean, man?'

'Mean! I mean that I believe Joe Brill was the short man I saw that night. Yes, Mr. Thorold, Joe stole the corpse, and Joe killed foully, with a knife, my respected brother-in-law. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!*'

## CHAPTER IX

### INVESTIGATION

WHILST Alan Thorold was dealing with Cicero and his sister in London, Inspector Blair was co-operating with the Rector in obtaining evidence relating to the murder. The inspector was a dry, dour, silent man, born in England, but of Scotch descent. He was cautious to a fault, and never expressed an opinion without having well considered what he was going to say. It was now a common sight in Heath-ton for his long, lean figure and the Rector's short, plump one to be seen constantly together.

He was now in the Rectory dining-room with a good glass of port beside him, and Mr. Phelps, standing on the hearthrug, was supplying him with all the details he had collected in connection with the mystery. The case was

getting so much more interesting than Blair, the sad and silent, had expected that he was becoming, for him, quite vivacious. He asked the Rector one question after another.

'Mr. Thorold has gone to Dixon's Rents, sir?'

'Yes, Mr. Inspector; I expect he'll have some news for us when he returns to-night.'

'He seems a clever young gentleman,' Blair said musingly. 'I dare say he will bring this man Gramp with him.'

'Do you think that Gramp can point out the guilty person?'

'That, sir, I am not prepared to say offhand. If convenient, I should like to take a look round.'

'Certainly. Where shall we go, Mr. Inspector?' and Mr. Phelps rose briskly.

'To the vault, if you please, sir. Afterwards we will call on Mrs. Marry.'

The Rector paused at the door.

'I told you all Mrs. Marry had to say about Brown.'

'Quite so, sir. But I wish to have a look at the rooms occupied by the man. Also, I think it would be as well to examine his luggage.'

'Can you do that without a warrant?'

'I'll take the risk,' said Blair coolly. 'An examination may not be quite legal under the circumstances, but as Brown undoubtedly procured the key of the vault by that forged letter, I am entitled to look upon him as a suspicious character. Should he come back, sir—of which I have my doubts—I can account for my action.'

'Humph! I think you are right. Come, then, and look at the vault.'

To the vault they went, and found Jarks showing the outside of it to a crowd of morbid sightseers. Indeed, the tragedy had drawn people from far and near to Heathton, and the usually quiet place buzzed like a hive. Mrs. Timber was making her fortune, and blessed the day she had turned Cicero the tramp out of her house. To him alone did Mrs. Timber ascribe the theft of the body. As to his connection with the murder of Dr. Warrender, she was not so certain.

'Come, come!' cried Mr. Phelps, in his fussy manner, on finding Jarks haranguing the crowd. 'This is most ridiculous—most out of place.'

Jarks, I am astonished at your desecrating the graveyard in this way.'

'No desecration, reverend sir,' said Jarks, in his rusty voice, 'I wos only showing 'em where I laid Muster Marlow by, comfortable. Go——'

'Go away—go away, all of you!'

'Come on to the right!' shouted Jarks. 'I'll show 'ee where a soocide as they brought in crazy is tucked away. A lovely grave with a good view, an' as nice a stone as I iver seed. In my young days he'd have been buried in cross-roads with a stake, but they do trate 'em kindly nowadays. Ah yis. This way to the soocide, neighbours!' And Jarks headed the crowd to the other side of the graveyard. The keen, cold eye of Inspector Blair cleared them out more quickly than Jarks' invitation.

'Dear me! most indiscreet of Jarks!' said the Rector, opening the door of the vault. 'Come in, Mr. Inspector. Here's a candle. Tut, tut! I've burnt my fingers. Deuce take—— Hum—God forgive me for bad language! This is the niche, Mr. Inspector; yonder the coffin—a very handsome one. The lead is cut, you

perceive. Ah, poor soul! And we meant it to last till the Great Day.'

While the Rector ran on in this fashion, Blair the silent examined the empty coffin. He noted that the lead casing had been cut with a sharp instrument, and very neatly done—so neatly that the inspector became thoughtful.

'That wasn't done by a man in a hurry,' he mused. But he said nothing, and merely turned to Mr. Phelps with a question: 'Who screwed down the coffin?'

'Who?—bless me, let me think! Yes, yes. Dr. Warrender—poor soul!—and Joe Brill. Faithful fellow, Joe! Would see the last of his master.'

'Wasn't the undertaker present?'

'Crank? Well, yes, he was. But I am sorry to say, Mr. Inspector'—here the face of the Rector became severe—'that on that day Crank was intoxicated.'

'H'm! Who made him drunk?'

'Himself, I suppose,' rejoined Mr. Phelps, a trifle tartly. 'Crank requires no one to tempt him.'

'Few men do, sir,' said Blair, and again

examined the coffin. He passed his long, delicate hand over every inch of it, particularly fingering the lid; then he looked round the niche where it rested, peered into the others, and considered well all that he saw, while Mr. Phelps chattered. 'Quite so,' said the detective at length; 'let us go outside.'

He examined the graveyard as carefully as he had done the vault. In the angle formed by the Lady Chapel he found the long grass crushed down, and part of it torn up to make a pillow.

'Humph! a squatting-place,' said Blair, who had read a good deal about prehistoric man. 'A tramp has been sleeping here.'

'A tramp!' repeated the Rector. 'Of course that was Cicero Gramp, who wrote the letter.'

'No doubt. I dare say he saw the whole business.' Blair continued his researches, and came to a halt at the wall which divided churchyard from pine-wood. He pointed to a loose stone which had been knocked off. 'Did you observe this before, sir?'

'No,' replied Mr. Phelps, raising his pince-nez. 'But that's nothing. You see the wall