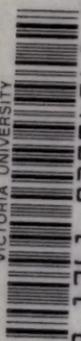


Alice Devine
Edgar Jepson

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ALICE DEVINE

ALICE DEVINE

By

EDGAR JEPSON

Author of POLLYOOLY, HAPPY POLLYOOLY
THE TERRIBLE TWINS, ETC.



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ALICE DEVINE

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CHAPTER I

I BECOME A HOUSE-AGENT

I AM Garthoyle; but the Gardens were not called after me. My uncle, Algernon Garthoyle, built them, a triangle of twenty-one houses in the heart of Mayfair, and called them after himself. When after the poor old chap's funeral, his will was read, and I found that he had left them to me, I was indeed surprised. I had always taken it for granted that he would leave them to that strenuous politician, my cousin, Herbert Polkington. So had Herbert; and he did look disgusted. I should have thought myself deucedly lucky if my uncle had left me half of the hundred thousand pounds he had invested outside the Gardens; the Gardens themselves, twenty-five thousand a year, sounded too good to be true.

But there is always a fly in the ointment; and the clause in the will in which the Gardens were

left to me, ended with the words: "Certain conditions are attached to this bequest, which will be communicated to Lord Garthoyle by my solicitors." All that evening I wondered what those conditions were, of how many of its joys they robbed that twenty-five thousand a year; and very soon after breakfast I motored round to the offices of Messrs. Brayley and Wills, my uncle's lawyers, to hear the worst.

Old Brayley, the head of the firm, received me; and I told him why I had come.

"Yes, yes; I was expecting you, Lord Garthoyle," he said, "I have the papers here. You know that Garthoyle Gardens were, if I may say so, the apple of Mr. Algernon Garthoyle's eye. Originally they were an investment. He sank four hundred thousand pounds in them. Then he grew interested in them; and they became his hobby."

"Well, I should have called them his passion—they were more than a hobby," said I. "He was even keener on them than he was on his spooks—psychical research."

"Yes, I should say that that was so," said Brayley.

"It was. Why, when Number 15 remained empty for eight months it so worried him that he began to lose weight. I'm told he broke up a most important séance when word was brought him that Number 9 was on fire," I said.

"I see you know all about it, Lord Garthoyle. Well, your uncle's idea seems to have been to bequeath to you not only the Gardens but also his keen interest in them. The conditions attached to the bequest are that you should manage the Gardens yourself."

"Manage them?" I cried.

"Yes; that you should be your own house-agent, deal with all matters connected with the letting of the houses, their upkeep and repairs," said Brayley.

"But I've no experience whatever, not only of the work of a house-agent, but of any kind of business."

"Oh, you'll soon gain it. The property is in excellent order at present. Every house is let to a good tenant. And if you do make a few mistakes at the beginning, the property can stand it."

"But it must mean work—a lot of work," I said.

"Oh, yes. There are a thousand details connected with a large property like that; and they

would need perpetual attention. But of course you would have assistance—a clerk—two clerks.”

I considered a while; the matter was beginning to look more serious than I had feared. I had never done any work; and it might be dangerous to begin so late in life—at twenty-eight. Besides, I did not see how I was going to find time to do any work; my life was already arranged and full up.

Then I said: “I suppose if I don’t fulfil these conditions, I lose the Gardens.”

“No,” said Brayley. “That is the curious thing about it. I suggested such a clause, of course; but your uncle would not have it inserted. It rests entirely with yourself to fulfil the conditions. But here are the conditions in detail.” And he handed me some sheets of typewritten paper.

I said good morning to him and motored back to my flat in Mount Street. There I read over the conditions; and as I expected, I found that it did mean a lot of work. Well, there was no help for it. I must buckle to. The first thing to do was to get help. As I motored down to the Temple and climbed the stairs to Jack Thurman’s rooms in the King’s Bench Walk, Garthoyle Gardens—all

the twenty-one houses—weighed heavily on my mind.

Jack himself opened his door to me; I greeted him gloomily; and we went into his sitting-room.

“Jack,” I said sadly, “within the last two hours I’ve become one of the workers of the world.”

“Never!” cried Jack. “Well, I *am* glad to hear it! I’ve always been worrying you to stop leading your idle, rackety life and use those brains of yours.”

“And you call yourself my friend,” I said reproachfully.

“Well, you have brains, you know; all vertebrates have brains. What’s happened?”

“I’ve become the owner of Garthoyle Gardens.”

“Well, but—but that only means you’ve thirty thousand a year to spend on racketing about instead of five,” said Jack, with a perplexed air.

“No, it means that I shall have no time to racket about. You didn’t know my Uncle Algeron: Garthoyle Gardens were his passion. They were almost his monomania. I dined with him once every month, a family dinner, don’t you know—just he and I. And I give you my word he bored me to death with his talk about those Gar-

dens. I didn't let him see it, of course; for I was fond of the old chap. He knew everything about the Gardens—the history of every tenant in every house, how he made his money, if he hadn't inherited it, how many sons and daughters he had, how many servants—male and female—he kept, how many horses, carriages and motor-cars."

"He must have had a capacious brain," said Jack.

"Oh, he kept a record of all these things in a big book, like a ledger. He even entered in it all the births, deaths and marriages which took place in the Gardens. At one time when I dined with him I used to ask him how many babies had been vaccinated in the Gardens during the month. But I gave that up. It set him talking about the Gardens at once; and I was the sooner bored. Those Gardens were the apple of his eye—yes, the apple of his eye."

"Then I wonder he left them to you," said Jack frankly.

"So did I. He was always down on me—worse than you—for my idle life. He wanted me to take my duties as a hereditary legislator more seriously,

take lessons in elocution, engage a political expert as my secretary, and deliver such speeches as he composed for me to the House of Lords. He was always grumbling at my idleness, and I thought that he'd leave the Gardens to Herbert Pölkington; so did Herbert. I should have thought myself deucedly lucky if he'd left me fifty thousand pounds. And now I've got the Gardens. But—Garthoyle Gardens are a gilded pill."

"I should like to have the swallowing of it," said Jack; and he smacked his lips. "But what do you mean?"

"I mean that Garthoyle Gardens mean the strenuous life. They are left to me on the conditions that I am my own house-agent, that I run them myself. I've got to interview proposed tenants, examine their standing, their references and their leases; I've got to see to all matters connected with the upkeep of the Gardens, estimates, and contracts for repairs. I've got to run those Gardens ever so much more than my uncle did himself."

"Good! Excellent!" cried Jack.

"And I thought you were my friend," I said again reproachfully.

"Do you all the good in the world," said Jack. "And if you fail to fulfil the conditions, you lose the property?"

"No, that's where my uncle had me. There's no such provision. If I accept the bequest, it's left entirely to my honor to fulfil the conditions. Of course, I accept it. No one refuses twenty-five thousand a year."

"Hardly," said Jack.

"Besides, I want money. It's been the deuce of a job to keep up the title on five thousand a year; and I hate having to let Garth Royal to that Hamburg money-lender."

"Yes; that certainly is a nuisance," said Jack.

"But taking the Gardens on these terms means chaining a log—a gold log—round my neck for the rest of my life. I can't go off to the States for six months, as I did last year. I can't go shooting in Uganda again—not for long enough to be worth while. You see, my uncle has shown such utter confidence in me that I can't go back on him. Hard labor is what it means for me."

"You'll soon get used to work," said Jack.

I shook my head. "I'm very doubtful about that," I said. "Mine is an untrammelled spirit. And there is also a terrible danger attached to the bequest. My uncle's last words in the document containing these conditions were that he was sure I should grow as fond of the Gardens as he was himself. That would be awful. It's a terrible danger. I might grow to talk of nothing else, choke off my friends one by one by boring them about the Gardens, and bring myself to an old age of lonely desolation. Think of it!"

"I can't," said Jack.

"Well, you see how things are: I'm one of the workers of the world—in for the strenuous life of the house-agent. Now, what I want is a right-hand man. I want you. I'll give you a thousand a year, and you'll give me all the time you can spare from the Bar."

Jack's eyes opened wide; and they shone. He did brilliant things at Oxford; but that period had come to an end, and he was now in his briefless stage of a barrister's career and hard up. Then his face fell and he shook his head.

"My good Garth, it's very nice of you to make

this offer, but it's absurd. You can get a clerk for a hundred and fifty a year who will give you all his time and do everything for you."

"You're wrong," I said. "A clerk can't do what I want. I want some one to teach me the work—to explain everything to me from the beginning, patiently. And above all I want some one to keep me up to my work. That's the important thing. No clerk would do that. He'd always be saving me the trouble. You're the only man who can really help me to carry out my uncle's wishes; and I must have you. It's settled. There's nothing more to be said about it."

Jack seemed to think that there was more to be said about it; and he said it for nearly an hour. But since I was doomed to the strenuous life, I thought I might as well begin; and I was strenuous with him. In fact, I wore him down to a compromise. He agreed to become my right-hand man on a salary of five hundred a year; and I was very glad to get him.

The next day I fully realized that I had burned my boats—for the first time in my life I had an occupation. I settled down to prepare for it gloomily. I moved from Mount Street to my uncle's

house in Garthoyle Gardens, Number 18. As I have said, the Gardens are a triangle of twenty-one houses, seven houses on either side, and seven at the base. They look on a triangular garden in the middle, of which all the occupants of the houses have the use. Number 18 is in the center of the base of the triangle; and it affords a good view of the whole of it. My uncle had made the library on the first floor his watch-tower; and I am sorry to say that he carried his vigilance to the point of having two pairs of extremely powerful field-glasses on a little table beside the window at which he used to sit. I say that I am sorry, because when I picked up the largest pair and turned them on Number 3, I not only got a perfect view of the Luddingtons at lunch, but also I got a perfect view of their being acrimonious with one another. It is hardly fair that one should know so much about one's tenants.

It was quite plain to me that to be a real house-agent I must have an office; and it was also quite plain that it must be in the house, so that I could always step into it without having to make a tiresome journey. I decided that I would not use the library, as my uncle had done, but that I would fit

up a pleasant room on the ground-floor, looking out on the garden at the back of the house, as a complete office with desks, pigeonholes and a safe. I did not bother Jack about this; I was paying him for legal help. I motored up into Oxford Street and along it till I found a likely looking shop, and there I ordered everything that seemed right. When the room had been fitted up, I had all the books and documents connected with the Gardens moved into it from the offices of Messrs. Siddle and Wodgett, who had acted as my uncle's house-agents.

When they had all been brought in and put tidily away, and at last I stood in my own complete office, I had a proud sense of being truly one of the workers of the world. Then it occurred to me that I needed some one to work the typewriter; I could not do it myself—not properly. I tried.

Jack told me the best way to get some one was to advertise; and I advertised for a lady-typist, stenographer and bookkeeper, as he suggested. But he was not at hand when I wrote out that advertisement, and we had not discussed the question of salary. Therefore I offered three guineas a week, which seemed to me fair to begin with. I

got my first experience of what a hard life a house-agent's is.

I invited applicants for the post to call at ten. At nine, when I got up, I heard a good deal of noise out in the Gardens, and I observed that Mowart, my man, was pale and scared. Mowart is not allowed to speak to me before breakfast.

But I saw that he was dying to speak, and I said: "What's the matter with you, Mowart? Has there been an earthquake in the night?"

"No, your Lordship. But there's some young persons waiting see your Lordship," said Mowart.

"That's all right. I advertised for them," I said.

"There's a good many young persons, your Lordship," said Mowart in a shaky voice.

I went to the window and my eyes and mouth opened wide as I gazed down on a surging, seething sea of wide-spreading hats. Among them rose scores of policemen's helmets, and a column of police was marching into the triangle through its apex. For a moment I thought I had assembled round my door half England's womanhood, and all the Metropolitan police.

"Ain't it awful, your Lordship?" said Mowart

over my shoulder. And I could scarcely hear him for the volume of shrill sound which rose from that female sea.

His voice recalled me to myself. I remembered that in great emergencies England looks to her peers, and with an effort I got my mouth shut.

"I shall have a wide choice," I said calmly; and I went to my bath. I did not trust my chin to Mowart's hands that morning; they were too shaky.

When I came down-stairs, I found an inspector of police, three policemen and four newspaper reporters, all wild-eyed, in the hall. They seemed to be in about the state of men leading a forlorn hope. They could not keep still; they shuffled about and danced.

The inspector wrung his hands and said: "Oh, my Lord, this is worse than suffragettes; and it's nothing to what it'll be when the trains comè in from the Midlands and the North. Three guineas a week! What is your Lordship going to do?"

"I suppose I must interview them—after breakfast," I said calmly.

"All them thousands?" asked the inspector.

"If I have to do it to get what I want," I said calmly. And I went in to breakfast.

At breakfast, Richards, my uncle's old butler, was in such an emotional condition, clattering dishes and dropping plates, that I had to pause to assure him—in a shout (the volume of shrill chattering was deafening)—that women did not bite—often.

After breakfast I began to interview the applicants. Ten policemen admitted them, one at a time, through the front door. I sat down at my desk in the office, and asked them questions and wrote down their answers and qualifications in a most business-like way. At the end of the interview each one was let out by the back door.

Of the first hundred applicants, forty-three were actual typists; the other fifty-seven, as far as I could make out, had come just for the pleasure of a little conversation with a peer. Some of them took it blushing, others did not. I was much touched by their devotion to the Upper House; but they rather wasted my time; and you can not be strenuous and have your time wasted too. I grew rather short and quite monotonous with that kind before the end of the morning. The hundred and eleventh girl, Miss Delicia Wishart, was the girl I wanted. She was fully qualified; she spoke and looked as if she were capable, and she was undoubtedly attractive,

with a soft pleasant voice. I thought that I should work better with an attractive assistant—Jack Thurman is not; he has a nose like the beak of a full-sized eagle. I engaged her.

Then I went out into the hall. It was very full of policemen and journalists now, and the inspector looked as if he had the whole of the British Empire on his mind; and it was compressing it.

“Inspector,” I said gently, “I have engaged a typist. You may clear the triangle.”

He looked at me as if he were rather hard of hearing.

“Clear—clear the triangle?” he said in a faint whispering voice; and he sat down on the knee and note-book of a journalist who sat, writing, on one of the hall chairs.

“Yes; I have finished with these ladies,” I said, and I went up to the library and looked out of the window.

The triangle was now full. The trains from the Midlands had come in. I took my hat and a stick, and went quietly out by the back door. I had done my duty as a house-agent; the police must do the rest.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE THAT PAID NO RENT

LATER in the day I learned from an evening paper that the police *had* done the rest, and Garthoyle Gardens were again peaceful. Also Richards telephoned to me at the Palladium to say that nine papers wanted my photograph. I told him that I had not had my photograph taken since I was at Eton, and that if he put them in the way of snapshotting me, I would sack him. However, they learned somehow or other that I was at the Palladium, and members who came into the card-room, where I settled down for a quiet day's bridge, kept wondering whom those journalist Johnnies with cameras were after, because none of the members was in the Divorce Court at the moment. When the evening papers got into full swing about my advertisement, they knew, and they did not forget to talk about advertising for the rest of the day and all the evening. I did not mind, of course, but it grew rather monotonous.

The evening papers had a good deal to say about my advertisement—men read bits of it out between the rubbers and the hands. But the morning papers had even more to say. All of them were agreed that three simple guineas a week had brought together the largest crowd of women known in history; and they drew moral lessons from it, different ones. Some papers said that it afforded a striking tribute to the resources of our civilization; others seemed very angry about it because it threw a sinister light on the economic subjection, whatever that may be, of women. All of them agreed that I must be rather a fool (they did not say it outright, they suggested it) to offer three guineas a week, when thirty shillings would have been enough. I do not care much for the papers as a rule, but that morning I found them quite interesting. I seemed to have become all of a sudden one of the most important people in England. Fourteen papers sent interviewers round to ask my opinion of the Budget. I did not know what it was or anything about it; but the first interviewer explained it to me; and after that I got on very well. It seemed to me a matter of one-and-twopence in the pound; and I simply said that I did not mind, that I had plenty to spare.

It seemed that I said the wrong thing, for next morning my cousin, Herbert Polkington, came round in the middle of breakfast, and begged me to be more discreet in my utterances to the Press. In fact he hinted that it would be a good thing if I did not do any uttering at all. In the middle of his visit a note came from my tenant, Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury, begging me "in the interests of my order to be less frank." I argued the matter with Herbert—I never take anything from Herbert without arguing—pointing out that what I had said was just common sense, that with thirty thousand a year, one-and-twopence in the pound was neither here nor there. I got Herbert quite heated. He went away saying something nasty about taking steps to have the House of Lords educated. I did not mind; I never do anything Herbert says; and this time I was quite sure I was right. Some of the papers did not print my views; but those that did, praised them.

The papers kept on making a fuss about my advertisement for some days. I grew rather tired of it. I had other things to attend to; for three days after it I really began work.

Jack and Miss Wishart came to the office at nine.

I came at ten. This had to be because I keep later hours than they do. They had spent the hour planning an honest day's work for me. There was plenty of it; they had not stinted me. It began with answering letters, forty-nine of them, fifteen from tenants. It seemed that whenever a tenant had five minutes to spare, he, or she, sat down and dashed off an unpleasant letter to the house-agent. Also they were at a loss to understand something. Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury was at a loss to understand why, in a well-appointed house, there were only three gas-brackets in the wine-cellars? Lady Pedders was at a loss to understand why, in a well-appointed house, there was no gate to the stairs at the third landing to prevent her children falling down them? Sir Hector Kilsluthery was at a loss to understand why a well-appointed house was not fitted with double windows from top to bottom, back and front.

I was soon grinding my teeth; then I perceived that, if they were at a loss to understand, I had better be unable to see my way. I replied that I could not see my way to make these structural alterations (a good filling phrase of Miss Wishart's, that), but I gave them permission to make them themselves.

On Jack's suggestion, I signed all the letters "Garth and Thurman." He said it would be safer; that, if I did not, I might have my tenants bothering me about things out of business hours, whenever they chanced to meet me. I was quite sure that they would, and I jumped at his suggestion. Now, when they tackled me, I could always refer them to Garth and Thurman. It turned out very useful.

The letters done, I wrestled with leases, assessments and repairing contracts, trying to get the hang of things. Jack assured me that my uncle had paid too much for everything; that I should need fresh contracts; and probably fresh contractors; and it would mean studying dozens of price lists to check them. It was cheerful news.

Then he said: "I've come across one curious thing—Number 9 pays no rent."

"The deuce it doesn't!" said I. "Well, I suppose it wouldn't. My uncle always told me that it was an unlucky house. It has been on fire; the water-pipes burst every winter; the roof will suddenly leak without just cause; and poor little Mrs. Bulkeley committed suicide there by jumping out of a second-floor window. I'm not really surprised that it doesn't pay rent."

"Yes; here's a letter from the tenant—J. Quintus Scruton, to Siddle and Wodgett, saying that he has arranged with your uncle to have the house rent-free, and your uncle has endorsed the letter."

"I must look into this," I said. And I reached for my uncle's record, which I had handy on my desk, and turned up Number 9.

It had indeed a black record—eleven tenants in fifteen years.

The last entries ran :

Tenant: J. Quintus Scruton. Gum millionaire from New Zealand. Age about forty-seven. Widower. No family—Theosophist.

Servants. Butler, chef, two footmen, house-keeper, and eight other females.

Vehicles. Nine.

Lease. Seven, fourteen or twenty-one years, at two thousand pounds a year.

"February 20. Painful discovery—the house is haunted."

That was all; no *dossier* of the ghost, no reason why the gum millionaire paid no rent. We discussed the matter and came to the conclusion that

the best thing to do was to write to him demanding prompt payment of the last quarter's rent. Then he would inform us of the reason. Miss Wishart wrote the letter, and when I had signed it, I struck work for the day. I had a strong feeling at the moment that mine was a delicately-poised brain, and that it needed to be accustomed to the strain of work quietly and by slow degrees. I told Jack and Miss Wishart this; Miss Wishart smiled; but Jack said in a grumbling tone:

"I wanted you to put in a little work at some price lists of house-fittings. You ought to go carefully into the matter of house-fittings."

"I will to-morrow," I said. "And I see that the sooner I acquire a defensive habit of procrastination, the safer I shall be."

With that I left them.

The next morning, after I had answered thirty-nine letters, I did betake myself to the study of the prices of house-fittings, and it was a tedious job. Jack suggested that I should get a more profound understanding of house-fittings if I went myself and bought those I had not been able to refuse my correspondents, and so come to know the house-fitting in its lair. After lunch, having answered

eleven more letters, four from tenants, which came by the two-o'clock post, I went. After three hours among the house-fittings, I came home a broken man. It seemed to me that house-fittings were the study of a lifetime; and that I ought to have begun it the moment I went to Eton.

Parkhurst met me with the information that Mr. J. Quintus Scruton had called to see me on business, and was awaiting me in the library. I was feeling very strongly that I had been house-agent enough for one day; but business was business, and I had to see him. As I went up the stairs it occurred to me that the affair seemed queer. That J. Quintus Scruton might be out after the gullible peer. It seemed a pity he should not find one. I stuck my eye-glass in my eye, opened my mouth and went into the library, looking as gullible a young peer as any one could wish to see. I had found the look useful before.

Mr. J. Quintus Scruton rose as I entered. He was a broad, thin, active-looking man, torpedo-bearded, with a deeply-lined brown face, out of which stuck a big hooked nose. He looked as if he had spent most of his life out-of-doors in very

bad weather. I took rather a dislike to him at the very first sight. The checks of the trousers he was wearing with his gray morning coat were quite impossible.

“How do you do?” I drawled.

“How do you do, Lord Garthoyle? I am pleased to make the acquaintance of my new landlord,” he said in a rough hoarse voice. “I came to see you about a letter I have received from your house-agents—a new firm, apparently—demanding the payment of my rent for the last quarter. I gather that you are not aware that I arranged with your uncle to occupy Number 9 rent-free.”

“Ya-as, I know that, don’t you know?” I bleated. “But it’s a funny arrangement, your living in my house rent-free. I dare say it suited my uncle, but it doesn’t suit me. Why did he let you have it rent-free?”

He looked at me very hard; he raised one hand, and he said in a very solemn voice: “Number 9 is haunted; and your uncle thought it better that I, who don’t mind ghosts, should live in it rent-free than that it should be empty.”

My eye-glass nearly fell out of my eye. I had

expected to find something in the way of black-mailing at the bottom of the matter—but spooks! This gum millionaire *had* pulled my uncle's leg.

“Well, of all the reasons for making any one a present of a house!” I cried, forgetting to drawl.

“I knew it would surprise you, Lord Garthoyle; but haunted it is. And that's a very good reason—a very good business reason indeed, for not charging any rent for it,” he said earnestly, wagging a finger at me. “It would never do for the newspapers to have columns about a haunted house in Garthoyle Gardens. Your uncle felt that strongly.”

I wanted to hear some more, and I said: “Yes; haunted houses in London are a bit off color.”

“Just so. It would reduce the property to the level of Bloomsbury. I'm glad you see it,” he said eagerly.

“I see that. But I don't see why I should let you have the house for nothing, and wear it out, don't you know? If I shut it up for a year or two the ghost might get tired of an empty house, and go.”

“No; ghosts don't care whether there's any one in a house or not. They haunt it just the same,” he said more solemnly than ever. “As an earnest

theosophist, I have studied these psychic phenomena; and you may take it from me that it is so."

"All the same, I may as well give this one a chance to get tired and go, don't you know?"

"But an empty house in Garthoyle Gardens—a house empty for months, perhaps years. It injures the rest of the property. It empties other houses. Your uncle saw that very clearly. Why, he asked me—I may say, he begged me—to remain on in Number 9 rent-free. He preferred a tenant who paid no rent to no tenant at all."

"I don't, don't you know? And I can get over that emptiness all right," I said. "I'll keep the blinds and curtains and leave it looking inhabited. Either you'll have to pay rent, or you'll have to go."

He lost his look of persuading me for my own good and frowned: "Well, in that case," he said, "I need not keep my mouth shut about it any longer. I undertook to keep it quiet, of course, and put up with the discomfort. But if I have to pay rent, I do not see why I should not have a thorough investigation of the most interesting phenomenon I have ever come across—an investigation by a committee of experts under the supervision of the *Daily Mail*."

It was so near a blackmailing threat that my first thought was to kick him down-stairs. My second thought was that, judging from his build and look, it would be an hour's steady work; and I had already done my work for the day. My third thought was that boots were not business. He was certainly playing with his cards upon the table. He had shown me how he had worked upon my uncle's belief in spooks and his fondness for the Gardens. A newspaper ghost-story would harm the property; and what was worse I should have to answer scores and scores of letters from my leisured tenants about it. I thought of those letters, and I quailed.

But then the rent was two thousand pounds a year; and any one who has had to live on five thousand pounds a year for seven years knows what two thousand pounds a year is. I was not going to give it up without an effort.

I had been sitting, looking at Scruton, with my mouth open, while I thought it out. Now I tried another tack, and said: "Well, I'm not going to pay for this absurd fancy. A ghost in the twentieth century! It's nonsense, don't you know?"

"Fancy? Nonsense? Why, out of my twelve

servants only two will sleep in the house. Some sleep in the rooms over the stables; some in lodgings in Green Street. Your uncle did not find it nonsense, Lord Garthoyle. He slept in the haunted room and saw the ghost."

"Yes, my uncle would; he had leanings that way, don't you know? But, of course, there's no chance of my seeing it. It wouldn't come if I were there, don't you know?" I drawled.

"But *you* shall see it. It will come, any night you like. It's always there at night!" he cried in a quite excited way.

I pretended to hesitate; then I said: "Well, I don't believe I shall see any ghost—but if I do, and it is a ghost, I'll let you have the house rent-free for another year. If I don't you pay your rent."

He hesitated a moment; then he said: "It's a bargain. What night will you come and sleep in the haunted room? How will Saturday night suit you?"

"Saturday night at eleven-thirty. What kind of a ghost is it?" I said.

"It's a woman, who walks, sighing, up and down

the room from which Mrs. Bulkeley threw herself. But she's sometimes seen on the stairs. That's what has driven the servants out of the house."

"A woman that sighs doesn't sound very terrifying," I said.

"She is, though. She made me sweat with fright," he said. And he said it so sincerely that either he was telling the truth, or he was a first-class actor.

"Well, I'll come and see if she'll frighten me," I said.

"She will—you'll see," he said solemnly; and he rose and said good-by solemnly. He had the solemnest manner I have ever seen.

I walked down to the front door with him; and I fancied that he was looking pleased with himself, rather as if he had done a good day's work.

"Till Saturday night," he said solemnly, as he went down the steps.

I went into the office and told Jack, Scruton's tale. He howled at it. But when he had grown quiet again, he agreed with me that Scruton could make trouble. The people who can afford a house in Garthoyle Gardens are just the very people who believe in all those psychical phenomena. They

support the palmists, the mediums, the crystal-gazers and the clairvoyants. They have nothing else to do. My tenants would fuss like fury; many of them would see ghosts in their own houses. It was much better to jog along quietly with Scruton for a while, and see what did happen, before putting the pressure on him and getting a first-class fuss.

Jack could not understand why a millionaire should stand the inconvenience—why he did not clear out of a house in which the servants would not sleep. I had to explain to him that millionaires love to get things cheap; that's how they become millionaires; and a house in Garthoyle Gardens for nothing would tempt any one. Of course, we discussed the question whether Scruton was a millionaire at all. I thought that he was. An ordinary swindler would be more of a gentleman; he would never wear those trousers with a gray morning-coat. Jack, too, thought that a swindler would have found a better reason for paying no rent—that a ghost in the twentieth century was too thin. But it seemed to me that the tale and the ghost had worked very well with my uncle.

“And after all,” I said, “one night when I was a child I saw the White Lady come down the stairs

at Garth Royal, or I fancied I did; and it came to exactly the same thing."

I did not get much time to think about the ghost during the next few days; letters, price lists and house-fittings kept me too busy. On the Wednesday I played polo at Hurlingham. A piercing June breeze was blowing from the east, and there were squalls of driving drizzle, colder than sleet. I caught a bad cold; and on Saturday night I went to Number 9 as hoarse as a crow. I did not know my own voice.

A disagreeable butler, looking like a mute, took me to Scruton. Scruton received me as if I had come to a funeral; and I returned his greeting with hearty sneezes.

"I suppose you've quite made up your mind to go through with it?" said Scruton in a gloomy voice.

"Rather!" I said. "Ah-tish-u! Ah-tish-u! Ah-tish-u!"

"Come along, then," he said; and he led the way up-stairs.

He took me up to a front room on the second floor, a large room, rather barely furnished, with two windows. We had each a candle, and he said

that the electric light had not been installed on this floor, and he never used gas. He paused and looked at me seriously; then he said:

“It doesn’t really matter. You won’t want much light to see her. I didn’t.”

He paused again, then with a sudden start he looked over his shoulder.

I started, too, and looked over his shoulder. I saw nothing. Scruton gave a little shiver, and said quickly: “I think I’ll be going. I don’t like this room. Good night.”

He slipped quickly out of the door; and I heard him hurry along the corridor and down the stairs. I felt rather uncomfortable. The candle did not light much of the room, but I set myself to examine it. The walls were not papered, but painted. There was no paneling; and there was not a crack in the surface of the paint. There was no trap-door in the ceiling. There was a thick Turkey carpet on the floor, and I turned it up for five feet round the edges and made sure that there were no cracks, traps, or loose boards in the floor. I looked out of the windows for anything in the way of a ladder from the story below, and left up the blinds to let in the moonlight. I locked the door leading to the

corridor, and shot the bolt that was just above the lock. There was another door in the corner, at the other end of the room, opposite the bed. It opened into an unfurnished dressing-room. The door from the corridor into the dressing-room was open; and there was no key in it to lock it. The other rooms on the floor were unoccupied. Some of their doors were open, some shut, none was locked. I locked the door between the dressing-room and my bedroom, and shot the bolt over the keyhole.

Well, I was in quite an ordinary room; and no human being could get into it without forcing the door. There was no doubt about that. I should get a genuine ghost—a real psychic phenomenon—or I should get nothing at all. Of course, I should get nothing at all.

But I was going to do the thing properly; and I pulled off my coat and waistcoat and collar; took a warm dressing-gown from my bag, and put it on. I lay down on the bed, pulled a blanket over me, and waited. Everything was very quiet, except when I sneezed. I began to think about poor Mrs. Bulkeley, and her throwing herself out of the window. I wondered which of the two windows it was. It was an uncomfortable thing to think of;

and I tried to think of something else. Then I began to hear noises: boards creaked and made me start; there were footsteps in the corridor—two—and then silence. I heard a sob, far away, and then another and another, and was some time making out that it was a cistern gurgling. I had firmly made up my mind that it was a jolly uncomfortable room to be in when I fell asleep.

When I awoke the room was much dimmer, as if the moon were setting on the other side of the house. I did not want to look around, and was turning over to go to sleep again, when I heard a sigh, distinctly.

I jerked myself on to my elbow; and my eyes fell on a figure crossing the room to the farther window. As it came near the window I saw that it was a woman. I could not see her face, for her long hair fell about it. At the window she turned and sighed. A cold chill ran down my back, and my mouth went dry. She crossed the room nearly to the wall, and turned and sighed, came to the window, turned and sighed again. The cold chills raced down my back, my heart hammered at my ribs, my scalp prickled with the rising hair, and a cold sweat broke out on me. *I was seeing what*

Mrs. Bulkeley had done before she threw herself out of the window.

Paralyzed, I watched her cross and recross the room a dozen times, noiseless but for sighs. A rustle, ever so faint a rustle, would have made her less uncanny somehow.

Presently my heart was not hammering so hard against my ribs. I began to pull myself together; and at last with a great effort, I said in a croaking whisper: "What is it? What do you want?"

The dead woman never turned her head; she crossed and recrossed the room and sighed.

Suddenly I let off a terrific sneeze.

At the sudden burst of sound, the figure started—just the slightest start.

Slight as it was, it was enough for me. The blood rushed through my veins again, and rage drove it. I gathered myself together noiselessly, flung off the blanket, and sprang clean over the foot of the bed, and across the room. With a shriek the ghost threw up her arms to ward me off; and I clasped an armful of flesh and blood in a soft, soundless woolen robe.

"You little wretch!" I cried, shaking her till her teeth chattered, for I was furious.

"Don't! Don't! You're hurting me! Let me go!" she cried, struggling.

"Not a bit of it! You want a good whipping!" I cried. "Hanged—hanged if I don't kiss you!" And I did.

"You brute!" she cried, and slapped my face with a most unwraith-like vigor.

The slap sent me sneezing and sneezing, and she took advantage of it to twist out of my grip. When I had done sneezing my righteous anger had cooled a little. I laughed; rubbed my stinging cheek, and said: "And now, my young friend, I'm going to have a look at you."

I walked to the mantelpiece, struck a match, lighted the candle and gazed round an empty room.

Not a creak of door or click of lock had marked her going. I gasped and rubbed my eyes. Then I examined the doors; both were locked and bolted. I opened them, and looked out into the corridor and dressing-room. They were empty, dark and silent. I ran to the head of the stairs, and looked down into silent blackness.

I came back into my room and trod on something soft. It was a slipper of knitted wool. No wonder she had been noiseless. My unsophisticated gum

millionaire had provided against everything but my sudden leap.

I locked and bolted the doors again, and went to bed. I thought for a while about the ghost—she had a really charming voice—then I went to sleep. When I was awakened by a knocking at my door, the room was bright with sunshine. The disagreeable butler conducted me to the bathroom. I took the slipper with me. There might be a hunt for it while I was in my bath.

When I had dressed I made another examination of the walls. There was not a crack in them. I went into the corridor and examined the outside of them, and came into the dressing-room. I was just turning back, for I had not unlocked it, when an odd thing about the lock caught my eye. It had two handles, a big one and a little one. I turned the little handle, and the woodwork of the door swung open, leaving the lock held in its place by its catch and the shot bolt. I turned the little handle back, and two little bolts shot up out of the top of it. They held the lock in the woodwork of the door. It was a most ingenious device; and it was any odds that no one would think to look at the lock when the door was opened, for it stood back against the

wall. I should never have noticed it myself, had I not left the door locked. No wonder my poor uncle had been tricked—what a night he must have had!

I had got all I wanted, and a trifle more, by looking like an idiot. I did not trouble to put my eyeglass in my eye and open my mouth. I came downstairs looking like a peer of ordinary intelligence.

Scruton came hurrying out of the library into the hall; and he looked as if he were ready to sympathize deeply.

I said cheerfully: "Ah, Scruton, good morning. The young woman you employ as ghost is quite kissable, but she has rather large feet." And I waved the woolen slipper at him.

"Young woman! What young woman? What do you mean?" cried Scruton, and his surprise was very well done.

I laughed and went on down the hall toward the door.

"There was only one young woman in the house last night, the under-housemaid . . . Jennings. Where is Jennings, Wheatley?" he said, turning to the butler.

"I've not seen her this morning, sir. She had

gone out when I got up, and she hasn't come back," said Wheatley; and when I came to look at him, I saw that he had the same New Zealand kind of look as his master. They were both in it.

"Has this wretched girl been playing this ghost trick on us all? It's monstrous! I'll prosecute her!" cried Scruton.

He ~~was~~ a good actor.

"She's an awfully good locksmith, too," I said gently. "That trick lock on the dressing-room door is a marvel. Send round that rent, please."

Scruton and his butler gaped at each other. I opened the door and went down the steps.

Later in the morning came a note from Number 9. It contained a check for the rent with just Scruton's compliments.

CHAPTER III

THE ANARCHISTS

I THOUGHT about the ghost-girl for several days. She was no more a housemaid than I was; housemaids don't have voices like that, and it was her voice that chiefly stuck in my mind. I kept an eye, or rather both eyes, through my uncle's field-glasses, on Number 9, on the chance of seeing her come out of it. I wanted to see whether her face matched her voice.

All the while I was hard at work; and I did not find work such a bore as I had expected. For one thing, it was a change to have things to do that had to be done, and its being a change softened it. Besides, it was pleasant to find that I could do things. Mugging up price lists of house-fittings sounds an awful grind, but when I found that I did get prices into my head, it did not bore me. I found that knowledge of price lists useful in interviewing contractors.

Jack Thurman and I, but chiefly Jack, of course, were not very long in discovering that, thanks to the broad and generous ideas of Siddle and Wodgett, his house-agents, my uncle had paid through the nose for the upkeep and repairs of the Gardens. I felt that I could spend my money just as well as my contractors could spend it for me. Therefore I set about getting fresh estimates, and making fresh contracts for all the work. Every contractor came to his interview with an iron resolve to pull my leg. Most of them seemed to want to lick my boots, too, because I was a peer. But it was quite clear that they were not going to let that fact, which seemed to make the leg-pulling process so very easy, interfere with it. The idea seemed to be to pull my leg while they were licking my boots.

I just humored them. I stuck my eye-glass in my eye, left my mouth open and drawled at them like a perfect ass. After a dozen drawls the prices soared and soared. Then I dropped my eye-glass, shut my mouth and explained to them that I was not going to pay fifty per cent. too much for things. In the jar of the surprise I got better terms than I should have done if I had not started with the eye-glass.

I was getting on nicely with the new contracts, when there came the trouble with the kitchen-ranges. Complaints about their kitchen-ranges had come from seven out of the twenty-one houses in the Gardens. An expert examined them for me, and reported that they were nearly worn out. Jack and I discussed the matter, and we decided that it would save a good deal of money to buy twenty-one kitchen-ranges, and have one contract for the fixing of the lot. It would be far better than buying the seven needed at the moment and then two or three at a time as others wore out. I mugged up some price lists, and went forth to examine the kitchen-range in its lair. They will not send kitchen-ranges for your inspection.

I had had no idea that there were so many tricks to a kitchen-range, or that to the inexperienced they are such a tiresome business. The Rockies are not in it with them; I have tried both. All the morning I looked at kitchen-ranges, and explored their tricks till my head hummed with them. After lunch I started out to see more at some works at Fulham. I was bent on finding the best kitchen-range in England before I interviewed a contractor about putting them in.

At Hyde Park Corner we were held up by the traffic going into the Park. When we started again, Gaston, my chauffeur, asked me to stop. His acute ear had caught something wrong with the sound of the engine. I pulled up just in front of Saint George's Hospital; he got out and raised the bonnet of the car.

My mind was full of kitchen-ranges, and I was paying no particular attention to anything outside me. Then I saw the pretty girl and the children. She was such a pretty girl that she cleared the kitchen-ranges out of my mind. Her eyes were big, and they shone like the stars . . . wonderful eyes in the prettiest face . . . a face like a flower.

The children were standing round her; a slip of a girl about fourteen, pale-faced and thin, holding a thin baby; a boy of eleven; and a thin little girl of seven or eight. They were very poor children, and, judging from their patched clothes, they did not belong to the pretty girl. She was dressed very simply but prettily in a light summer frock, and she was wearing it as if she knew how to wear clothes. The children were watching her anxiously.

I just glanced at them, but stared at her. I could not help it. She did not notice it—she did not even

see me. She was in trouble of some kind, and was frowning anxiously as she grappled with one of those out-of-the-way pockets women love.

She stopped grappling with it, and her eyes shone brighter than ever because there were tears in them, and the corners of her mouth drooped.

"I'm so sorry, children, dear," she said. "But I've lost my purse, and I shan't be able to take you after all. It's no good my going home for more money; it was my last half-sovereign."

Her voice matched her eyes—it was charming. But the odd thing was, I seemed to know it, yet I could not think where I had heard it.

The elder girl looked at her in a way that made me feel uncomfortable, it was so despairing. Then she lifted the baby so that he was against her face, hiding it, and her shoulders shook. The little girl burst into a howl, and the boy stamped on the pavement once, hard. The pretty girl blinked her eyes, and I saw her teeth catch on her quivering lips. It was like the end of a sad play, only it made me ever so much more uncomfortable, and I stepped out of the car.

The boy pulled himself together, and said in a husky voice to the elder girl: "Buck up, Cherlie!

Don't tyke on. We'll go inter the Park, an' Miss Alice'll plye wiv us."

"The Park ain't Kew Gardings! It ain't Kew Gardings!" wailed the little girl.

"What's the matter?" I said.

The boy looked me up and down distrustfully; and I fancied he liked my face better than my clothes. Then he said:

"Miss Alice's lost 'er purse with 'alf-a-suvrin' in it. She was tyking hus to Kew Gardings for a treat—an' now she can't."

The elder girl took her face, wet with tears, out of the baby's frock, and said in a heart-broken voice: "It's Steppie! Steppie's never bin funder out of London than Kensington Gardings; an' 'e was looking forward to it so." I gathered that Steppie was the baby. "And Verie was lookin' forward to it, too. But she's bin to Kew Gardings once . . . when she was older nor Steppie. She remembers them, though." And the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I wants to go agyne—now," wailed Verie. "There was a squir'l in a tree."

The boy turned to her and said gruffly: "It ain't no use you tykin' on, Verie—it ain't really. The morn's gorn."

Verie broke into a louder howl; Cherlie sobbed twice; and I feared that the baby would join in.

I turned to the pretty girl, raised my hat and said: "This is a regular tragedy, don't you know? And it's got to be stopped. Suppose we take them out into the country in my car?"

She drew back, frowning a little; and I went on: "I can't handle them myself, don't you know. I couldn't give them a good time."

She looked from me to the children, and from the children to me; she wrung her hands, and said softly: "Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

It was hard for her, of course, to make up her mind what to do . . . Whether she ought to go motoring with a perfect stranger, or let the children slide?

I did not say anything; it was the kind of thing she must settle for herself. She looked at them again, and the children won.

Her face cleared, she smiled at me, and she said: "Oh, it would be good of you! It is such a cruel disappointment for them."

I turned to the children, and said: "It's all right. I'm going to take you into the country—the real county—in my motor-car."

Verie stopped howling. Cherlie's eyes opened wide, and so did her mouth, and I never saw such thankfulness in any one's face before.

"Oh, Steppie, the real country . . . Steppie in the real country . . . where the cows are!" she said, in a whispering voice.

"In you get," I said cheerfully. And the two girls stepped quickly toward the car.

"'Ere, 'old on! Wyte a bit!" said the boy. "She don't mind, Miss Alice don't, but this gov'ner won't want to tyke the likes of us." Then turning to me, he added sternly: "We're anarchists, we are—and don't you myke any mistyke abart it!"

Cherlie stopped with the thankfulness dying out of her face, and she looked at the boy as if he had to be obeyed. Verie looked at him, scowled at him defiantly, and climbed into the tonneau.

"Come out of it, Verie!" he said sternly.

"Oh, Robbie, don't you think we might . . . just fer once? Think of Steppie in the country," said Cherlie, in such a pleading voice that it gave me a lump in my throat.

"Oh, that's all right! I don't mind!" I said quickly. "Anarchists . . . I rather like 'em. In

fact, I'm a bit of an anarchist myself. I never could stick the House of Lords—never—give you my word. I tell you what—I'll be a full-blown anarchist myself all the afternoon."

I said it straight off without a break, for the children had got to go.

"Strite?" said the boy.

"Straight," said I.

"If it's like that, thank yer, gov'ner," said the boy with a grunt of thankfulness. And he grinned all over his face as he held Cherlie's arm while she got into the car.

I held open the door for Miss Alice.

"It *is* good of you," she said, as she stepped into it. And she looked at me in a way I couldn't have deserved if I had given the children a house in Garthoyle Gardens and an income to keep it up.

"Harrod's!" I said to Gaston, and got in after her.

The tonneau is big; but it was only when I saw how much room the children left on the broad seat that I realized what thin little things they were. As we settled down I took stock of them. I saw that there were a great many patches in their clothes.

But their faces were clean, and all the more recent dirt had been scrubbed off their discolored little claws. They *were* claws.

It struck me that there had been a lot of careful preparation for their jaunt to Kew.

They were sitting rather stiffly, looking very serious, as if they were a bit overcome by the grandeur of their position. They were still busy getting used to it when we came to Harrod's.

Gaston stopped the car; I stepped out and went to the provision department, said that I wanted a picnic hamper for a dozen children, and that it must have lots of nourishing food in it, chickens and tongues. Also I wanted a kettle and tea-things; and I wanted it now—right away—my car was waiting. They know me in that department, and they bustled. In about five minutes I followed the hamper out, saw it set in front, beside Gaston, and got into the car.

“Chipperfield Common,” I said to Gaston.

Verie's words about a squirrel in a tree had suggested it to me; and he set the car going.

The children had been chattering in an excited way when I came out of Harrod's; but when I got into the car, they turned stiff again.

Then Robbie broke the ice by saying: "My! Ain't it fine? A real motor-car!"

Cherlie bent down to the baby in her lap, and said: "In a motor-car, Steppie . . . ridin' in a motor-car!"

"So you're anarchists, are you?" I said, to set them going.

All their faces turned to me; and Robbie said promptly: "Yes, we're anarchists, and so's father. My name's Robespierre Briggs . . . after 'm what myde the French Revolution. And Cherlie's name is Charlotte Corday Briggs; and Verie is Vera Sassiliwitch Briggs . . . after 'er wot threw bombs at the Czar. 'And Steppie. . . . He's Stepniak Briggs. He threw bombs, too."

"I'm going to throw bombs when I grow up," said Verie.

"And so am I when Steppie's grown up enough not to want me lookin' after 'im any more," said Cherlie in a cheerful voice.

"An' I'm goin' to myke bombs for 'em to throw. I've got a book on chemistry, and father 'elps me to learn it in the evenin's," said Robbie.

"Well, they are a desperate band!" I said to Miss Alice.

She was looking at them with pitiful eyes; and she said: "I think it's rather dreadful."

"But if you throw bombs, you'll go to prison!" I said to the children.

"Yes, but then we'll be martyrs of the Revolution, an' that's a glorious thing to be," said Robbie.

"P'raps we'll be 'anged," said Verie cheerfully.

"An' if you're 'anged, you're hever so much more a martyr of the Revolution," argued Robbie.

"I'm goin' ter throw bombs at ministers," said Verie. "I told Carrie Evans I was goin' ter throw a bomb at 'er minister, an' she pulled my 'air."

"There you go agyne, Verie. You do mix things up so," said Robbie in a vexed tone. "I keep telling yer that it's Cabinet Ministers, and not chapel ministers as you throw bombs at."

"Carrie Evans said she'd got a minister, an' I said I'd throw a bomb at 'im, an' she pulled my 'air; an' I will throw a bomb at 'im," said Verie firmly.

"She won't understand; an' I've told her agyne and agyne," said Robbie in a tone of aggravation.

"I'm goin' ter throw a bomb at Carrie Evans's minister when I grow up," said Verie in a sing-song.

Cherlie had been holding Stepniak up and pointing things out to him. Now she cried: "Look!

There's a cow! Look, Steppie! Look! There's a cow in a field."

The sight diverted the minds and talk of the other anarchists from bombs, and little by little, as it slid deeper into the country, the car became a perfect babel. They were all calling to one another at once to look at this and look at that; and all at the same time asking us questions about what they saw. Always there was something fresh; and the eyes of the anarchists grew bigger and bigger.

Miss Alice was charming with them. She answered their questions, her pretty eyes hunted the countryside for things to point out to them. Her face was glowing with pleasure at their pleasure. I did enjoy looking at it, and helping her find fresh things for the anarchists to admire.

But all the while her voice bothered me. I could have sworn that I had heard it before; but for the life of me, I could not remember when or where. It was odd, too, that I did not believe that I had ever seen her face before. I could not have forgotten it if I had: for I never forget a pretty face; and I can very soon recall when and where I have seen it before. It was certainly strange that I should know her voice and not her face.

Bushey and Watford gave the children a rest from their excitement. Once in the streets again, they did not trouble even to look about them. They gave their eyes a rest; and they sat back, telling one another again and again of things they had seen.

In the middle of it, Robbie said: "What's yer nyme, gov'ner? We can call Miss Alice by her'n; but we don't know your'n to call yer by."

I hesitated a moment; then I said: "My name's Garth."

Somehow I couldn't say Lord Garthoyle. . . . It did not seem to go at all with these children. Besides, all my friends call me Garth; and it is my business name. After all I had come out to buy kitchen-ranges for Garth and Thurman.

When we came out of Watford into the country again, the anarchists again grew excited; and I grew yet more friendly with Miss Alice, helping her to tell them things. We reached Chipperfield Common, all rather hot and out of breath, though we had been sitting still for nearly an hour. But when once the anarchists were out of the car, on the Common itself, among the flowers and the pine-trees, they just went mad. Robbie and Verie ran round us in rings, screaming; and Cherlie jumped

up and down, with her eyes starting out of her head, as she tried to point out to the staring Stepniak everything at once.

"Look 'here, they're going mad! What are we going to do with these mad anarchists?" I said to Miss Alice.

"They won't go mad, they're too nappy," she said, smiling at me.

"Well, it's your show, not mine. You'll take the responsibility," I said.

"Oh, no, no! It's your show. They owe it to you. I could never have given them anything like this," she cried.

"Not a bit of it. It's your idea altogether. I should never have dreamt of it. Therefore it's your show. And it's awfully fine of you to do this kind of thing."

"Fine? Why, I love it!" she cried.

"I expect you do love fine things," I said.

She turned away from my eyes with a little blush. I fancy I was looking what I thought of her.

"Cherlie, give Steppie to me. You must want to run about with the others," she said.

She gave Steppie a finger, and I gave him another; and he toddled along between us like a kind of link.

"How did you meet these anarchists?" I said.

"I found them in the Park one afternoon, and then they came several times to see me, and by degrees I've got to know them quite well. They are such nice children."

"And I suppose you have spent all your pocket money on them ever since?"

"I haven't enough to do anything really for them," she said with a sigh. "I can only give them a treat now and then—tea and cakes. The expedition to Kew was quite out of the common—a great affair. At least it would have been, if it had come off. But this is much better—absolutely splendid. . . ."

"Have you many of these protégés, or are these all?" I said.

"There are two other lots of small children I have found in the Park; but they're not so poor as the Briggses and not nearly so interesting."

"That anarchist talk is rather strong, though."

"Oh, do you think so? Don't you think it's very natural . . . for them? Why, even I . . . sometimes . . . when I think of the wretched, poisonous life these children lead . . . I feel I could be an anarchist myself."

"And throw bombs?" I said.

"Yes; I feel that I could," she said quite seriously.

"There are thousands and thousands of children like them. But, of course, you don't understand. . . . You haven't seen them faint with hunger."

"Things do seem wrong. I wonder that the Government doesn't do something to stop it," said I.

"Things are so stupid . . . so utterly stupid," she said, frowning.

We were silent a while. I was thinking that I might look into this matter of the children a little. I was finding my work as house-agent not half bad. I might put in a little work in the House of Lords, and try to get this matter of the children looked into. In the meantime I might arrange a series of anarchist outings; and she might help me with them, as she was helping me this afternoon. And I wanted her to help me very much. I did like the way she carried herself; and she walked so lightly.

We went on among the pines slowly, to suit Stepniak's toddles, and the other anarchists kept rushing up to show us the wonderful things they had found, or to shout at us the wonderful things they had seen. She kept smiling at them, and encouraging them, and congratulating them on their finds.

Then we came to the pool of the Twelve Apostles; and she said: "You have brought us to a beautiful place."

"I never saw it look so beautiful," I said; and I never had. I had never seen it with her in it before.

I think she understood, for she flushed a little.

"Fancy being able to motor here any day you like, and to be able to bring children—children like these—with you! Oh, if only I could do things like that for the children!" she said.

I nearly offered then and there to put myself and my cars at her disposal as often as she wanted us. But I am not impatient; and I thought it wise to go slow. If I tried to hurry things, it was very likely that I should spoil it all.

Then Verie came rushing up, purple with joy, screaming: "There's a squir'l in a tree! There's a squir'l in a tree! Bring Steppie to see the squir'l!"

I picked up Stepniak, and we hurried off to see the squirrel, Miss Alice as excited and delighted as the anarchists. We all tried in an excited way to get Stepniak to see the squirrel; I grew as keen on making him see it as Cherlie and Miss Alice. They were sure he saw it; I was not; and we argued about it almost in a heated way. Stepniak seemed awfully

solemn for his age, and I did not believe that he was really keen on seeing a squirrel. Miss Alice said I underrated his intelligence.

The squirrel took us to a tree where he found two other squirrels, and they played about in it. The anarchists were a long time getting tired of watching them, and I found it was nearly four o'clock.

"Hadn't they better have tea now?" I said to Miss Alice. "Then they will be ready for supper before we start back. They may as well have two meals while they are about it. They look as though they could do with them."

"Oh, you do have good ideas! That will be splendid!" she said; and her eyes shone brighter than ever.

"It's just common sense," I said. "By the way, is Alice your Christian name or your surname?"

"It's my Christian name; my surname's Devine," she said, with a shade of hesitation.

"I suppose you spell it with an 'i'? You ought to," I said firmly.

"No; it's spelt with an 'e'; and that's how it ought to be spelt," she said, smiling.

"With an 'i,'" I said.

"With an 'e,'" said she.

"Well, I know best, but we won't argue about it," said I.

We went back in a body to the car. Gaston had got hot water for the tea, and a big jug of milk for the anarchists. I thought that a fire would be better fun for them than a spirit stove, and they grew immensely excited about it. There seemed to be no limit to their power of getting excited.

When it had burned up a little we began to unpack the hamper.

We laid the table-cloth between two pine-trees, and set the knives and forks and teacups on it. Then Alice took a cake out of the hamper. At the sight of it the children, who had been crying out to one another how pretty the cups were, and how the spoons and forks shone, suddenly were quite silent. We paused in our unpacking and looked at them. They were staring at the cake in a painful kind of way, with a horrible craving in their eyes. They made me think of hungry little wolves. Verie's mouth was working as if she were already eating. Then Stepniak wailed, and held out his hands.

"Why . . . Why . . . They must have been hungry all the while . . . All the time they have been laughing and screaming and enjoying them-

selves. . . . Hungrier than ever I was in my life . . . all the way from town," I said, more than a bit shocked.

"Yes . . . they forgot it. How dreadful!" said Alice in a hushed voice.

She had turned rather pale.

It took me about five seconds to cut up that cake and hand it round. To see the look of thankfulness on those children's faces as their mouths filled made me feel positively beastly.

"Steady, now, children! Don't wolf it," I said.

I might just as well have spoken to real wolves.

Alice had already mixed a cup of cake and milk for Stepniak, and was feeding him slowly. I got out a dish of chicken and tongue, and a pile of bread and butter, and sat the children down to it. They seemed to find cutting up the slices of meat too slow for their appetites. When they got a leg or wing-bone, they just took it in their fingers and gnawed it happily.

Alice kept saying: "Gently, children. . . . Gently! Don't eat so fast, please."

They looked at her in a helpless sort of way, as if they would have liked to do as she wanted, but could not. I did not get out any more food, and when

they had come to the end of that, I said: "Nothing more to eat for five minutes. Come along and let's boil the kettle."

They came, and were interested in the boiling of the kettle and the making of the tea; but all the while they kept looking at the hamper as if they couldn't keep their eyes off it. When the five minutes were up, their eyes still glistened at the food, but they ate it slower. They did enjoy it. But it was only toward the end of the meal that Cherie remembered their manners and reminded them sternly. When Stepniak was full he went to sleep, and when the other anarchists were full, they lay on their sides, looking drowsy and very happy, talking in jerks about the chicken and cakes.

They were not quiet long; they were soon on their feet again, and running about, leaving us to talk to each other. I had made up my mind that after all I had never heard Miss Devine's voice before, but I did not find it any the less pretty. We talked about the children. She told me that they were motherless; that their father worked for a sweating tailor, and that his earnings were wretched. We talked over the whole state of things in the slums; but of course we did not know how

it was to be stopped. Only it was plain that that was what the Government was there for; we were both sure of that; and I began to think seriously about going down to the House of Lords and looking into the matter. I might put the fat in the fire, and get a little quiet fun out of doing it.

Then Robbie came running up, very eager, and said: "Will you come and plye anarchists wiv us, Miss Alice? There ain't no one to throw bombs at!"

We rose; and I said, "This is a new game. How do you play it?"

"She knows. She's plyed it wiv us in the Park," said Robbie, and he ran off.

"It's very simple," she said, smiling. "They throw bombs at us, and we fall down dead."

"It sounds a cheerful game," said I.

We walked along the pines, and, suddenly, with loud cries of "Bang!" the hidden anarchists threw bombs of bracken at us. We fell down dead, and the anarchists fled, yelling joyfully, to their lairs. Then we rose, and they stalked us again, and threw more bombs at us.

When they threw the fifth lot of bombs, to make it a little more realistic, Alice gave a little scream.

I fell down all right, but I got up very slowly, almost as upset as if the bombs had been real. I knew now where I had heard her voice; the scream had brought it back to me. She was the ghost-girl—the girl whom Scruton had employed as ghost to frighten me into letting him live there rent-free at Number 9. So she had screamed when I sprang across the bedroom and caught her.

I *was* sick. When I got up, I found that a kind of dulness had come over the Common, though I suppose the sun was shining as bright as ever. This girl had taken a hand in Scruton's shady game; she actually had helped him trick my uncle out of a quarter's rent.

It seemed just incredible, but it wasn't. I could swear to the ghost-girl's voice among a million voices; and it was the voice of Alice Devine. I looked at her, and sure as I was, it was hard to believe it. She looked too pretty; far too pretty, with her flushed face and shining eyes, to have been mixed up in a shady game like that. She was so happy because the children were happy. And then the way she had treated those children—spending her last half-sovereign to take them to Kew; trying all she knew to give them a good time. It was past

understanding; it did not go with that ghost trick at all. I must be wrong. But I wasn't.

We went on playing at anarchists, but I had lost interest in the game. Then the children tired of it. We sat down on the bank of the pool, and she told them stories. For anarchists they seemed to me uncommonly fond of fairies. I did not listen much to the stories, though she told them very well. The ghost trick was worrying me. . . . The stories did not fit in with it . . . and I was glum. She seemed to see that something had gone wrong with me, for two or three times she looked at me in a questioning way.

I was glad when we set about giving the anarchists their supper. It took my mind off the ghost trick. They were very hungry again; and she was hungry, too, and enjoyed her supper thoroughly. I wished I had thought to bring some champagne for her.

Supper refreshed the anarchists, and we played hide-and-seek in the twilight. It ought to have been delightful playing hide-and-seek with Alice Devine among the pines, but the ghost trick stuck in my mind. It had spoilt everything.

It was dusk when we started back to town. I

carried the sleeping Stepniak to the car, for the ghost-girl and Cherlie had about run their legs off. At the car the anarchists lingered a little as though they could not drag themselves away from the Common. In the car they chattered for a little about the things they had seen, and done, and eaten.

Cherlie said: "Oh, it was a beautiful day! Such a beautiful day for Steppie!"

Then they all fell asleep in a lump.

The ghost-girl took the sleeping Stepniak from the sleeping Cherlie. I covered the sleeping children with a rug, and drew another round ourselves. We sat quiet for a while, and I could see her eyes shining. Then she began to talk about the anarchists again, and the children like them. . . . How she wished she could take a hundred of them into the country every day, and feed them. Her voice grew angry and thrilling as she talked of what a shame it was that they should live half-fed and half-clothed in the pigsties they did. But somehow or other I had lost my keenness, and I did not think any more about the House of Lords.

She was sincere enough in her talk, and that again did not go with the ghost trick. All the time

she talked I kept thinking of it; and two or three times it was on the tip of my tongue to ask her why she had played it. But I pulled myself up. She said she had had a beautiful time; why should I spoil the end of it?

We ran into London, and the children slept on. I could see her face again now in the light of the lamps. She told me that the anarchists lived in Lambeth, in one room with their father; and on the way she helped me slip the gold out of my sovereign-case, wrapped in a tenner, into the pocket of the sleeping Charlie.

Then we awoke Robbie to guide us; and he piloted the car through very dirty streets to the very dirtiest. As we pulled up, a man came rushing out of the house, and cried in a frightened shaky voice: "My Gord! Which of 'em's bin run over?"

"We're all right, father. We've bin for a moter-ride in the country," said Robbie in an important voice.

"Lor'! what a turn the car did give me! I thought for cert'in as 'ow one of yer 'ad bin run over," said Mr. Briggs, and he panted.

We helped the sleepy children out, and their father took Stepniak. He stood looking rather

dazed from the fright the car had given him, and they huddled round him, telling him of their afternoon. I pulled the hamper out of the car—there were a couple of meals left in it—and set it down beside them.

Cherlie was saying: "Think of it, father! Steppie in the country. . . . The real country . . . all the afternoon. An' ridin' in a moter-car!"

I told Gaston to start the car, to get off before the thanks began. As it slid away we called back, "Good night, children!" And they called good night to us, shrilly, again and again.

I was glad, very glad, that I had been able to give them a good time; but I did wish that I had not found out that Alice Devine was the ghost-girl.

When we came out of the slums, I said: "And now, where shall I drive you home?"

"Garthoyle Gardens, please," she said.

"Oh, you live in Garthoyle Gardens? Do you know Lord Garthoyle himself?" I said.

"No. Is there a Lord Garthoyle? I didn't know," she said.

She was certainly speaking the truth; and it made things more puzzling than ever. She had

evidently played the trick on me without knowing who I was. It was a good thing I had been as hoarse as a crow that night, and therefore she had not recognized my voice as I had recognized hers. That would certainly have robbed the anarchists of their afternoon. Besides, there was that kiss.

At the end of the Gardens she asked me to stop, and I helped her out of the car. The light fell full on her face and shining eyes as she thanked me for having given the children such a happy afternoon. Then she paused. I felt that she was waiting for me to suggest taking them out again, but I would not arrange anything of the kind.

I could keep an eye on the anarchists—I knew their address. I could send them money at times or I might find a job for their father down at Garthoyle. But at the moment I did not want to see Miss Devine again. At least I did want to; but I thought I had much better not.

“Good night, and again thank you a thousand times,” she said, and held out her hand.

I shook it and said good night. She turned and walked away. A few steps off I heard her sigh.

I got into the car feeling very gloomy. If only I had not recognized her as the ghost-girl!

CHAPTER IV

THE HIEROGLYPHICS AT NO. 12

IT is curious how I went on feeling annoyed that Alice Devine was the girl who had played the ghost trick on me. I had only spent an afternoon and part of an evening with her, and during most of that time I had been occupied with the anarchists; yet the fact that she was the ghost-girl stuck in my mind and became a rankling grievance. It began to spoil my temper; and I was getting quite morose.

Jack Thurman, too, was in a gloomy state about something or other, and when, one day, I cursed things generally, he surprised me by agreeing with everything I said.

My grievance about the ghost-girl seemed to affect everything. It made me less keen on running the Gardens, and even my polo bored me. However, I got my twenty-one kitchen-ranges, and made a very fair contract for the fixing up of them

in the twenty-one houses, not all at once, but one at a time. Also I sold the twenty-one old kitchen-ranges at a very fair price to a Yorkshireman of an unusually speculative turn of mind. At least it seemed to me that he must be. What on earth can there be in the way of openings for a worn-out kitchen-range? However, it was not for me to balk his fancy.

I had already found that being a house-agent means continual work. Just as you think you have got everything cleared up for a week ahead, something fresh crops up, and it crops up every day of that week. If there was not actually anything to be done, there were always letters from fussy tenants to answer.

Of all the tenants who ever rented a house, Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury is the fussiest. I suppose that I get eight fussy letters a week from him; and the only consolation is that they are typewritten and easy to read—not like Lady Pedders'—because he ambles about in public affairs, and keeps a secretary to write his correspondence. One morning there came from him a letter addressed to me personally, and not to Garth and Thurman. It ran:

"DEAR LORD GARTHOYLE,

"I am addressing myself to you personally and not to Messrs. Garth and Thurman, because you are one of my own order. I am sorry to have to inform you that circumstances have arisen which will compel me to abandon the rest of the lease of this house. Hieroglyphics are written nearly every day on the inside wall of my porch; and I have the gravest suspicion of their purport. I will do myself the honor of calling on you at twelve o'clock to acquaint you with the matter. Under these circumstances, you will not be surprised by my requesting you to release me from the rest of my tenancy; and I am sure that, making the request to one of my own order, it will not be refused.

"Yours sincerely,

"MARMADUKE PONDERBURY."

"What does the preposterous old idiot mean?" I said; and I read the letter aloud.

Miss Wishart, my stenographer and bookkeeper, smiled; Jack Thurman laughed.

"He can't suppose that I'm going to let him off his rent because somebody scrawls on the wall of his porch?" I said.

"Can't he, though?" said Jack. "You don't know old Ponderbury. He's the largest spoilt child in England, and the most spoilt. His mother spoilt

him, his tutors spoilt him, he never went to a school or a university; his wife spoilt him; he has always lived surrounded by the oiliest gang of sycophants the world holds; and they spoil him worse. He believes that the world was made for him, and that he's the most important man in it, or, at any rate, will be, when he's got the peerage he's after. I've heard him say the most incredible things—quite incredible. The only person who doesn't spoil him is Mur . . . his daughter; and he hates her."

I was a little surprised. Jack does not often let himself go; and his eyes were sparkling, and he was scowling.

"Oh, you know them?" I said.

"Yes, I know them," said Jack, scowling worse than ever.

"What does he mean by calling me one of his own order? His father got the baronetcy for making crockery," I said.

"The old snob thinks himself the born aristocrat of the bluest blood. He's trying to get a peerage to make it bluer."

"These new rich ones make me feel tired every time," I said.

"Then old Ponderbury should make you collapse. He's the most tedious old swollen-headed rotter that breathes!" said Jack savagely.

"You seem to have made up your mind about him fairly distinctly," I said.

"I have," said Jack.

"I suppose he has played the spoilt child with you?"

"All over me," said Jack.

"And you say he has a daughter?" I said.

"Yes, he has," said Jack. And he hunched himself over the ledger he was working at, as if he did not wish to talk about it.

When at five minutes past twelve I went to the library to interview Sir Marmaduke, I thought it well to stick my eye-glass in my eye, leave my mouth open and look like an idiot. I thought it probable that Sir Marmaduke would be quite open with me; but it was just as well to give him every encouragement. We should get on quicker. We would start the leg-pulling process without delay; and I should know what he was up to without wasting time.

When I came into the room a large, round, gray man bounced up out of a chair, and bounced across the room at me; just bounced.

“My dear Lord Garthoyle, I am charmed to make your acquaintance,” he squeaked in a high voice which did not go with his round largeness. “But I regret—I regret that it should be under these painful circumstances—these extremely painful circumstances.”

He seized my hand and waggled it flabbily in a hand uncommonly like a big uncooked sole.

“How are you?” I drawled. “What—er—er—are they?”

He sat down slowly and solemnly; and I sized up his large oblong, flabby face, and green eyes under thin eyebrows at the bottom of a forehead which ran well on to the top of his head, owing to the retiring hair.

“These hieroglyphics—these menacing hieroglyphics,” he squeaked.

“Ah, er—yes; the scrawls on your porch,” I drawled.

“Scrawls! No, no, Lord Garthoyle. I wish I could think it. I tried to think of it as a freak of some idle boy—even a hoax. They are hieroglyphics drawn with a deliberate intent.”

“Does it matter?” I drawled.

“Matter? Matter? It is a most serious affair.

But I see that you don't appreciate its seriousness—its public importance. But perhaps you do not follow public affairs—the affairs of the great world—with close interest?"

"They're not much in my line, don't you know," I drawled; and I opened my mouth a little wider.

"No, no. I quite understand. It is a weakness of our order. I have always deplored that so large a percentage of it should devote itself to other vocations. Why, if the whole of our order devoted itself to public affairs, we could absorb them. We should have a monopoly. There would be no room for those wretched middle classes and the rest of the lower orders. Still, there *are* a few of us who devote ourselves to public affairs. I myself have figured largely in public life for many years, not only as President of the Landlords' Defense League, but in many other ways as the staunch opponent of the forces which threaten our order with destruction. I have made enemies—many dangerous enemies, by stemming the flood of Anarchy and Socialism which is striving to sweep us away. I am a barrier, Lord Garthoyle—a barrier." And he paused to look tremendously impressive.

"A barrier? Where they take tickets?" I drawled, looking as puzzled as I could.

"No, no, no!" he squeaked, frowning. "I am a barrier to the advance of that flood; I am the lion in the path." He looked more like a codfish in the path. "It can not move on to its task of fell destruction till it has overwhelmed *me!* It has recognized this; and it is gathering its energies to sweep me away."

"That's deucedly interesting," I said. "Are you backing yourself not to be swept? I'm backing the flood. What odds will you take?" And I pulled out my betting-book and looked quite lively.

Sir Marmaduke was pulled up short; he stuttered:

"This is not a matter for an idle w-w-wager. I've n-n-never made a b-b-bet in all my life."

"It's never too late to begin," I said cheerfully; and I drew out my pencil and opened the betting-book.

"No, no, no! I'm not going to bet—I won't bet!" he spluttered, pouting exactly like a spoilt child which is not getting its own way. "I've come about these heiroglyphics. You don't understand."

"But this is such a good bet for you, don't you

know," I said, looking quite lively. "Why, it's the chance of a lifetime. If you lose, you don't pay. Your executors pay."

"No, no, no!" he spluttered.

"Come, I'll lay you even money, and we'll fix a time limit—say a year," I said.

"No . . . no!" he squeaked.

"Well, I'll make it nine months. I lay you even money that they out you in nine months."

I pretended to be tremendously excited about it.

"No . . . no!" he almost squealed.

"But think what a comfort it will be to you when the bomb bursts, or the knife jabs in your back, to think that your *executors* will have to pay," I said as persuasively as I could.

"I will *not* bet!" he squealed. "I came to talk about these hieroglyphics, and you won't listen!"

"Oh, all right . . . fire away!" I said in a disgusted tone.

He panted a little, and then he began: "These hieroglyphics are a warning and a threat. I am sure of it. When I first saw them I took no notice of them beyond telling my butler to wipe them away. He did so; they . . . were . . . renewed. My suspicions were awakened; they have been con-

firmed. The hieroglyphics are not only renewed, when they are wiped away; they change. Every three or four days, Lord Garthoyle, they change. They grow more threatening. To-day there is a distinct coffin and a bomb."

"That's—er—pretty thick, don't you know," I said.

"Thick? Thick? It would appal the stoutest heart. And we *can't* find out who draws them. One of the most astute firms of private detectives in London has been watching the house night and day for a fortnight. The hieroglyphics are drawn under their very eyes. They must be. The affair has grown so sinister that the time has come for me to decide whether I should retire from the fight or continue the conflict. There is a great meeting of the Landowners' League shortly; if I speak out, the forces of anarchy will dash themselves upon me. But it has been suggested that I might speak out, and then retire into a prudent seclusion for a few months. That is why I have come to you. You are a large owner of property; I am its chief defender. Are you willing to stand by me if I pursue this desperate course, by releasing me from the rest of my tenancy? Then, when these miscreants

come along to accomplish their fell purpose, they will be balked by an empty house."

"I think I'd rather not," I drawled. "Two thousand a year is two thousand a year."

"But what is a paltry two thousand a year compared with the enormous interests at stake—the dearest interests of our order? Consider that, Lord Garthoyle. We owners of property stand or fall together."

"I don't fall; the flood isn't out after me," I said.

"But your order—you will surely stand by your order?"

"You're doing the standing by, and I'm doing the looking on—admiring, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Why, I shouldn't wonder if I didn't manage to back the flood to out you for as much as a monkey."

"But this is callousness," he said.

"Not a bit of it," I drawled. "But rent's so uninteresting. It's the sort of thing that's bound to happen. At least it always happened to me till I came to live in my own house. There's no point in interfering with rent. But a bet's quite another thing—more sporting—and I'll lay you . . ."

"I'm *not* going to bet! I'm *not* going to bet! I keep telling you so!" he squealed. "And you don't realize that I'm making this proposal in your own interest. You don't want to see Number 12 shattered with a bomb?"

"I don't mind. It's insured. In fact, I should like to touch the Insurance Company for a bit. I'm always shelling out to it," I said calmly.

"But the loss of life—surely you are not indifferent to that?" he cried.

"No! Oh, no! I shall be very sorry, don't you know. But it's your game. I don't put up the stakes," I said.

He jumped up and began bouncing. He did look uncommonly like a large gray, india-rubber ball. And as he bounced he spluttered; and I caught sentences about "Astonishing insensibility," "Blind to the clarion call of duty," and something about Imperial Rome being wrecked by callousness. There seemed to be a lot of the orator about him.

At last I said in a hopeful voice: "It's quite likely they won't throw any bomb at all. They'll just knife you on the quiet, or plug you from behind with a revolver. I don't think you need worry about Number 12. I shan't."

He stopped bouncing and stared at me with his eyes wide open; and his face turned green in places.

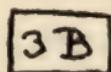
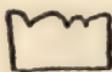
"And is this the gratitude one gets from one's order?" he said in a kind of squeaky whisper.

"Oh, I'm quite grateful," I said, smiling at him pleasantly. "I should send—a what-d'ye-call-it?—a wreath to your funeral. I couldn't do less, don't you know."

He went a little greener; but he did not seem to be able to find anything to say. I fancied I was getting square with him for bothering me with his fussy letters. Then I had a happy idea; I said I would come and take a look at the hieroglyphics myself, and I hustled him out of the house and across to his own. He did not say much, he seemed to be thinking hard; and he did not bounce. He walked rather feebly. Two or three times he looked back over his shoulder; I fancied he was looking for that knife.

We came to Number 12, and went up into the porch of it. On the left-hand, inside wall were these figures, drawn in chalk:

4



I looked at them and said: "I suppose this thing on the right is what you call the coffin? I don't call it a coffin; it might be anything, don't you know. Is the round thing with the cross in the middle the bomb?"

"Yes; that is undoubtedly the rough drawing of a bomb," he said in a fainting kind of voice.

"I don't see it a bit," I said. "What's the thing next it?"

"An infernal machine," he said.

The door opened, and a very pretty, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl came out. As she came out she looked quickly from us to the hieroglyphics, and back again. I dropped my eye-glass and shut my mouth. There was no point in looking like a perfect ass before her.

Sir Marmaduke introduced her to me as his daughter Muriel, and I said: "I was just looking at the hieroglyphics. I don't see that they're coffins and bombs and infernal machines."

"I say they are, and Mr. Manders agrees with me," said Sir Marmaduke solemnly, in a disagreeable tone.

"Mr. Manders always agrees with you. They're just scrawls," she said sharply.

"I never expect any sympathy or understanding from *you*, Muriel. I do not look for it. *We* are agreed that the figures are a coffin, a bomb, an infernal machine, a bomb of a different pattern and the figure four."

"I'm not agreed," I said. "I think they might be anything."

"I'm sure that they're a chocolate-box, a hot-cross-bun, a cake, a plum-pudding and the figure four," said Miss Ponderbury.

"Of course I might have known it. I stand on the verge of a tremendous peril; and all I get from my daughter—my only daughter—is mockery!" he snapped; and he was no longer greenish, but a nice bright red.

"You're so silly, father. You let the Manders humbug you about anything," she said.

"It is like you to sneer at my faithful friends!" he snapped.

It did not seem to me that it was part of the duty of the complete house-agent to assist at the family scraps of his tenants; and I said in a loud voice, "I think I'll just take these figures."

They stopped scrapping to watch me draw the

figures in my betting-book. In the middle of it I looked up and found Miss Ponderbury smiling at me in an odd sort of way, as if she thought me silly to bother with them.

With a little bow she said: "Good-by, Lord Garthoyle. It is silly of you, father, to let the Manders worry you about these scrawls." And she went down the steps and along the pavement toward Mount Street.

I was just finishing the drawings when a small sharp-looking woman bustled out of the house and went off down the pavement after her.

"That's got them," I said, putting my betting-book into my pocket.

"It only remains to discover what the hieroglyphics mean as a whole," said Sir Marmaduke.

"They do look pretty bad," I said.

Sir Marmaduke looked very gloomy. He seemed to be thinking about the funeral wreath.

"Perhaps you had better chuck it and go abroad," I said.

"Never! I will never desert my order!" he squeaked; but he did not seem very full of enthusiasm.

"Well, I'll bet fifty to forty that these anarchists, if they are anarchists—will out you all right. Your executors to pay," I said.

"I won't bet about such a thing! I consider the suggestion monstrous," he squeaked furiously.

"Well, if you won't, you won't. But anyhow I'll leave the bet open. You may change your mind, you know," I said cheerfully. "Good-by."

He said good-by peevishly.

I went home and into my office. I showed Jack my drawings of the hieroglyphics, and he did not take much interest in them. But he was interested in Miss Ponderbury's scrap with her gutta-percha papa, and said that she was treating him as he wanted treating.

"Well, I hope I helped to frighten the silly old india-rubber ball into some out-of-the-way corner where he can't bother me with his infernal fussy letters," I said.

"It's possible. Let's hope for the best," said Jack.

We discussed the question (at least I did; Jack did not seem interested in it) of who was playing the trick on Sir Marmaduke.

At last Jack said: "It might be anybody. If

any one were introduced to the preposterous old idiot, the first thing he would go and do would be to go and scrawl hieroglyphics on his porch wall."

"He *is* a bouncing temptation to the average sportsman," I said.

It was plain that Sir Marmaduke's theory about anarchists was rubbish, but to make quite sure, I went round to see that rising young politician, my cousin, Herbert Polkington, and asked him if Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury were sufficiently important for anarchists to throw bombs at.

Herbert is an austere fish, and meek; but at my question his eyes flashed, his pasty face turned pink, he thumped his table and cried: "Important! Ponderbury important? If being the most pestiferous old busybody in London, and badgering everybody to be made a peer for it, is being important, then he is important. He pesters my life out, since I'm one of the people who look after the party rewards. I get hundreds of letters from him, and he's always forcing himself on me here and everywhere. I wish to heavens the anarchists would blow him up!"

I had not seen Herbert so excited for years; and I spent a good half-hour trying to persuade him

that it was a very serious matter and he ought to come round to the Gardens and look at the hieroglyphics himself. He grew even more excited, refusing to waste his time on doing anything of the kind; and I left him ruffled.

He had cleared my mind of the last bit of uneasiness about the hieroglyphics; but I decided to back Ponderbury to get his peerage every time I got the chance. A man who could so infuriate Herbert that he turned rose-pink at just the mention of his name, was dead certain of it. He must be a perfectly pertinacious beggar.

I soon had proof of it. I had five letters in the next three days, begging me to stand by my order and release him from his tenancy. Then he advertised in the *Daily Mail*, offering a hundred pounds reward for information about the person who scrawled the figures on the wall of his porch.

I laughed when Jack showed me the advertisement; but I did not laugh when the Ponderbury mystery, with pictures and explanations of the hieroglyphics, filled columns in the papers, and the swarm of amateur detectives settled in the Gardens. There were scores of them. There must have been

forty clean-shaven young men who looked like the pictures of Sherlock Holmes; there were dozens of retired Army and Naval men, all trying to look like born detectives, and there were about twenty women, young, middle-aged and old—English and foreign. I could not go out of the house without getting nine piercing glances from eagle eyes, and being dogged by half a dozen men and women to my club. There was always a group in the porch of Number 12, examining the scrawls, and twice I saw Muriel Ponderbury in the window, watching them with great enjoyment. I learned that Sir Marmaduke was having a glorious time; his correspondence was delivered in big sacks; and all the papers called him "The man who stands by his Order." It really looked as if the Government would have to give him a peerage at once.

I went round and saw Herbert again, and asked him if this was not so. He only turned rose-pink, like a blushing *débutante*, as I told him—and cursed me.

Then I met Ponderbury coming out of one of my clubs—the Palladium; he bounced once and squeaked: "England has responded nobly to my

peril, Lord Garthoyle. I have had letters from all over the country, bidding me fight on against the flood of anarchy."

"I'm still laying five to four on the flood. All this will make them keener than ever to out you," I said.

"Never a word of sympathy or congratulation from my own order," he squeaked. And he bounced, pouting, down the steps.

There were no new hieroglyphics, for there were always four or five amateur detectives in the porch of Number 12. They were a nuisance. They were all over the place; they were always being turned out of the Numbers 10 and 11. One had to be removed by the police with a fire-escape from the roof of Number 10. They positively nested in the trees in the garden of the triangle which overlooked the porch, and they fought one another for places in the shrubbery opposite it. But since they were always there, on the watch, they prevented any new hieroglyphics being written, and began to lose their keenness. They grew fewer and fewer quickly; and in a few days the last one had gone.

The very next morning, on the same wall of Sir Marmaduke's porch, there was a freshly-scrawled

figure, the figure which he had called a bomb. This one:



He must have wired the news to the evening papers, for before noon the amateur detectives were swarming again. And for the rest of the day they were all over the place.

After dinner that night, I was strolling across to the garden to smoke a cigar in the moonlight, when I saw Muriel Ponderbury go through the gate of it just in front of me. I strolled after her to ask her the latest news of the hieroglyphics. She passed out of sight round the corner of a shrubbery. As I came round it I heard voices, and the sound of a kiss; and I came right on to her and Jack Thurman standing very close together. I was naturally shocked to find that people kissed each other in this exclusive garden; but I managed to say a few kind words about the moonlight and strolled on trying to look as if I hadn't been shocked.

I had never guessed that Jack had a love affair. But I was pleased to see that he was not letting

his barrister's brieflessness prevent him kissing a pretty girl because she was the daughter of a very rich man. It set me wishing that I had a love affair myself; and somehow or other I found myself staring at Number 9 where Alice Devine lived. The house was lighted up: Scruton was evidently giving a party. Then I caught myself wishing that I went to his parties and met her. I pulled myself up very short. It would never do to get into the way of thinking about the ghost-girl. I did not want to get into the mess of a lifetime. I cleared out of the garden and the moonlight, off to one of my clubs, and played an honest game of auction bridge.

Next morning Jack said to me: "I say, I'd rather you didn't tell any one you saw me with Miss Ponderbury last night."

"I shouldn't dream of it," I said.

"We're going to be married as soon as she's of age—in seven months. Her silly old dunderhead of a father is dead against it. He's made her promise not to write to me; and he employs the wife of that sponger Manders to see that she never speaks to me. We don't often get a chance of meeting."

"I hope you make up for it when you do," I said.

"Oh, we try. But it's hard work waiting," he said.

"It must be," said I.

He said nothing for a minute or two; then he said: "It's time you were getting married yourself."

"I know it is. But I stave it off—I stave it off," I said; and I don't know why on earth I should have seen a sudden picture of Alice Devine's flushed face and shining eyes, just as I had seen them on Chipperfield Common.

Parkhurst interrupted us to say that Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury wanted to see me particularly, and was waiting in the library. When I went into it with my eye-glass in my eye, and my mouth well open, he was standing before a window, bouncing gently.

He turned and squeaked very shrilly: "Lord Garthoyle, I've come to make a last appeal to you, as one of my own order, to release me from my tenancy."

"What's happened now? I thought you were going so strong," I drawled.

He *was* a pertinacious beggar.

"The result of my defying these miscreants by my advertisement is that yesterday there was a single hieroglyphic—the figure of a bomb," he squeaked. "It's the last warning. They will act at once! Any minute! After a sleepless night I have resolved to balk them by flight."

"Well, *I* don't object. I haven't got a bet with you about it, or I might call on you to stick it out," I said.

"But my rent—are you going to let me off the rest of my lease?" he squeaked.

"No; I'm not going to interfere with your paying your rent. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll lay you seven to four now that, whether you bolt or whether you don't, the flood of Anarchy outs you."

He was looking rather green—he turned greener. Then he bounced from side to side, two or three times, and cried: "It's incredible! Absolutely incredible! If the ordinary landlord had refused, I could have understood it. But that one of my own order should refuse, when I'm fighting for that order—it's incredible!"

"I'm not going to spoil sport, don't you know.

Here are you and these anarchists having a little set-to, and I want to see the best man win. Come, will you take seven to four that they out you?" I said cheerfully.

"The sporting spirit is the curse of our order!" he howled. And out of the room and down the stairs he bounced.

Next morning I got a letter from him marked "Urgent." It ran:

"The bomb has been drawn on the porch wall *again*. In spite of the fact that the police are watching the house. I fly this afternoon. Will you release me from my tenancy?"

"M. P."

I expected he had bounced all over his house, and I wrote in the name of Garth and Thurman saying that we could not see our way to let him off his rent.

Later in the morning I strolled out into the garden of the triangle to see what the amateur detectives were doing. They were buzzing in a swarm in front of Sir Marmaduke's house, in the porch, on the pavement, in the roadway, and in the shrubbery of the central garden. About fourteen alter-

cations were going on in a lively way, and I waited for a while in the hope of seeing a general scrap. But there was nothing but altercations, and making up my mind that amateur detectives are noisy, but peaceful, I strolled on round the garden, to see how the gardeners were doing their work.

In the middle of the garden I suddenly came on the ghost-girl, and my heart gave quite a jump. She was walking toward me, looking at the ground, her pretty forehead wrinkled with a frown, thinking hard. I thought for half a second that I would bolt before she saw me, then I thought that I would do nothing of the kind. Then she looked up and saw me and flushed.

We shook hands, and she said: "Have you too come into the garden to find out about the hieroglyphics?"

"I'm afraid my brains wouldn't run to it," I said.

It was plainly on the tip of her tongue to ask me what I was doing there, since only residents are allowed in the garden, and of course she no more knew that I lived in the Gardens than she knew my name, or that I was the man on whom she had played the ghost trick.

She did not ask, she looked at me earnestly, and said:

“Oh, Mr. Garth, you helped me to take those poor children into the country when I had lost my purse. I wonder if you’d help me now?”

“Of course I will,” I said.

“I’ve found out the secret of the hieroglyphics, but I don’t quite know what to do.”

“The dickens you have!” I cried.

“Yes. I want that hundred pounds reward awfully—for some more poor children I’ve made friends with. My stepfather said that it was quite plain that the hieroglyphics were drawn by some one who lived in Number 12. So I’ve been watching and watching the house with glasses. Yesterday I found out that it is the pretty girl—Miss Ponderbury, I think it is—who writes them; and she writes them for a dark young man with a big hooked nose, who lives at Number 18.”

Jack Thurman! That was his beak. It could be no one else’s. And as I thought of Sir Marmaduke’s terrors, and all the fuss in the papers, I burst out laughing—all that fuss about a lovers’ signal code!

Miss Devine stared at me, and then she said: "Yes, it is funny—all that fuss. But she did do it. There was nothing on the wall of the porch at six yesterday morning. At half past six she came out of the house, stopped just a few seconds in the porch and walked across into the garden. I slipped out at the far gate, came down past the house, ran up the steps, and saw the hieroglyphic on the wall."

"Excellent!" I said.

"I came back to the garden and went on watching. I saw a housemaid find the hieroglyphic, and I saw all the fuss that the servants and Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury and the police made when the hieroglyphic was found. Sir Marmaduke was highly excited, talked very shrilly, and jumped up and down."

"He does bounce," I said.

"And I saw Miss Ponderbury go back into the house soon after eight. Then at ten minutes to nine the young man with the big nose came by, ran up the steps, took one look at the hieroglyphic, and came down the steps, looking ever so pleased. I saw quite plainly from his face that he knew all about it, that it was drawn for him. I'm quite sure of it."

“So am I,” I said. “You must claim the reward at once.”

“That’s just the difficulty. It’s why I want your help, or rather your advice. Last night I saw Miss Ponderbury and the young man in the garden here, and they—and they—oh, well, they seemed very fond of each other. It would be a shame to get them into trouble. Yet I should like to get that hundred pounds reward. What am I to do?”

“I see. You want that money, but you don’t want the path of true love to run rough. Let’s think,” I said. But I did not find it easy to think with her standing before me looking so charming with her frowning, puzzled face.

“I think I see a way,” I said presently. “But old Ponderbury will be as mad as a hatter. He’ll be the laughing-stock of England. It will knock his precious peerage on the head for good and all.”

“His being angry is just what I’m afraid of,” she said. “It is quite plain that he’s already angry with them, or they wouldn’t have to meet secretly. This will make him worse than ever.”

“If you like to leave it with me, I think I can work it without harming them; and I’ll send Sir Marmaduke’s check along to you, if I get it.”

"It *would* be splendid if you could—a hundred pounds! But you mustn't make trouble for those two," she said.

"Oh, I won't do that. I wouldn't roughen the path of true love on any account. I might be there myself one of these days," I said.

"One never knows," she said, smiling.

"And what have you been doing since the expedition? And how are your young anarchists?" I inquired.

She told me she had given some teas in Hyde Park to two or three other lots of poor children, and that the anarchist family of Briggs was going very strong. She had been invited to join Charlotte Corday Briggs on a great shopping expedition; and from Robespierre to Stepniak the family was resplendent.

It was past one before we had finished our talk; and she hurried away to lunch. I walked across to Number 12, and was taken straight to Sir Marmaduke, in a small room at the back of the house—out of reach of the bombs. He was sitting in an arm-chair, and looking as if he were out on a rough sea, and it was not agreeing with him.

"Ah, at the last moment you have decided to

stand by your order, and release me from my tenancy?" he said.

"No, I've come for the hundred pounds reward," I said.

"You've found the miscreants? Then I can bring them to justice at once! I must act swiftly and terribly! The country will expect it of me! Their names?" And he was up and bouncing.

"Well, there's only one, and it's Miss Ponderbury," I said.

"Miss Ponderbury? My daughter?" he gasped.

"It seems you made her promise not to write to my friend, Jack Thurman, and these hieroglyphics are their signals."

"But this is monstrous!" he squeaked.

"It's very natural, don't you know?" I drawled.

"Incredible! Monstrous!" he squealed, bouncing. "My own daughter! I'll have no more to do with her! I'll send her away! She shall never enter this house again!"

He went on for a long time about the ungratefulness of tricking one's father; and I let him bounce and squeal.

Then I said: "I should have thought you would have been glad to be rid of your fear of anarchists."

"When I think of what I have suffered, I could curse my daughter—curse her, Lord Garthoyle!" he squeaked.

"Yes. That's all right; it's relieving," I said. "But the worst thing is, your public work is spoiled for good and all."

"Why, how?" he squeaked.

"When it comes to be known that you've made all this fuss about some lovers' signals, you'll be the laughing-stock of the country; and no one will ever take you seriously again."

"I never thought of that," he gasped. And he collapsed into his armchair.

I lighted a cigarette, and let him think of it; then I said: "You won't be able to do any public work at all, and you'll never get that peerage, unless you can hush it up."

"Yes, yes; you're right! I'll send my daughter away at once—to-night," he cried.

"What good would that do? That wouldn't shut Jack Thurman's mouth. It would open it. You've got to shut it," I said.

"Curse that young man! Curse him!" he squeaked.

“Oh, yes. By all means. But he’s got you in a cleft stick. You’ve *got* to let them get married.”

“Never! Never! They shall never marry!” he squealed. And he was bouncing up and down again.

I let him bounce till he was tired, then I said: “It seems rather silly to become the laughing-stock of the country and lose a peerage for a fad like this. Really Jack Thurman has done you a real service. He’s brought your name before the public as no work of your own ever did. He’s really got you a peerage, if you sit tight and take it. But you know best. I’ll let the papers know about this discovery at once, myself.”

I rose, and was opening the door, when he cried: “Wait! Wait! I must think about it! Don’t be so hasty!”

He flung himself back in the armchair, pouting, with his eyes full of tears; and I expected him to start blubbering.

At last he said very sulkily: “I yield. They shall marry. I do not yield out of fear of ridicule. I do not abandon my just resentment. The good of my country demands my surrender, the surrender

of my private feelings; I can not let myself be paralyzed in my work for its best interest. They *shall marry!*" he squeaked solemnly.

"That's all right," I said. "And now we'll draw up the contract."

He kicked at this; but what I felt was that it was no use my being a house-agent if I did not draw up contracts. Besides, he seemed to me too peevish to trust. I just bullied him into it.

I drew up the contract myself. He gave his consent to Miss Ponderbury's marrying Jack in three months' time. He settled seven hundred a year on her (I tried to make it a thousand, but I found that that was trying him too high, and might upset the whole business). When he had signed the contract he wrote a check for the hundred pounds reward for Alice Devine.

After it he was better. He bounced beside me to the front door, and as I went down the steps, he said: "It is a relief once more to take up the work of strengthening our order with an unharassed mind." And he bounced once.

When I got home I sent the check round to Alice Devine and went into my office. Jack had just come back after his lunch.

"I've just drawn up a contract, and I should like you to look through it," I said. "I think it's all right." And I gave it to him.

He could not believe his eyes. "What? Where? How? How on earth did you get this out of the old dunderhead?" he stammered.

"Gently with your future father-in-law," I said; and I told him the line I had taken.

When I had stopped his thanks, I pulled out my drawing of the hieroglyphics, and asked him what they meant exactly.

"They showed me where Muriel would be on the fourth day after it was drawn," he said. "The four shows the fourth day, the circle with the line drawn through it at the bottom of it is the afternoon sun; if the line were drawn through the top it would be the morning sun. The ducal coronet. . . ."

"You call that a coronet?" I interrupted with surprise. "Ponderbury called it an infernal machine," I said.

"It's a coronet—a ducal coronet. It meant that Muriel would be at the Duchess of Huddersfield's in the afternoon. The circle with the cross means the night—the crossed out sun. The square with

the three in it is 3, Berkeley Square. That's where she'd be that night."

"I see," I said. "And what does the bomb—the crossed-out sun—the last hieroglyphic you drew, mean when it's by itself?"

"Oh, that meant that her duenna, Mrs. Manders, would be out, and she'd come to the garden that night. It's quite simple."

It was.

CHAPTER V.

HERBERT POLKINGTON'S UNCERTAINTY

THE discovery that he had made such a complete fool of himself seemed to have a chastening effect on Sir Marmaduke. Jack told me that now, when he went to the house to see Muriel, the Gutta-percha One was quite civil to him. Also he seemed to have grown rather shy of me since I had drawn up that marriage contract, for he ceased pestering Garth and Thurman with his fussy letters.

The Gardens, indeed, were going very nicely and quietly. It is a great advantage that the rents of the houses are two thousand pounds a year, not only from the point of view of my income, but also because it means that my tenants are desirable. Bad hats and swindlers do not run to such high rents.

Indeed, the only tenant about whom I was doubtful was Scruton; ever since the good gum millionaire had tried to get his house rent-free by that in-

genious ghost trick, I had been expecting some more games from him. He really was a millionaire, or thereabouts. I had had inquiries made about him, from some of my tenants; and my lawyer and Jack had thought it well to have the share register at Somerset House looked up, and found that he was a large shareholder in Australian and New Zealand securities. Still, I knew he was a crooked millionaire; and I could not help expecting that he would turn out to be an undesirable tenant. I myself much prefer the millionaire who has inherited his millions to the millionaire who has made them. He is straighter.

Oddly enough, it was that rising young politician, my cousin, Herbert Polkington, who brought to my knowledge the unpleasant fact that Scruton was on the way to get Number 9 the reputation of a gambling-hell. Herbert is one of those earnest and serious politicians who get up on their hind-legs and paw the air when I tell them that politics is only a game, and not so cheery a game as racing. I have often had to tell Herbert this to check his pouring out home-truths on me about my useless life, though lately, since I have been acting as my own house-agent, he has had to stop that.

Before I was a house-agent I used to think that Herbert's was a hard life. He has made up his mind to be Prime Minister; and he must not think of anything else. He has even to dress the part. He has to sit through all those dreary debates in the House of Commons, mug up blue-books by the furlong, make speeches all over the country, and write long dismal articles, or let Freddy Gage, his secretary, write them, in the monthly reviews. But now that I am a house-agent and have work to do, I do not think Herbert's life so hard after all. Besides, he is one of those morbid people who like work, especially the dull kind. If he did not, he wouldn't do it; for he has seven thousand a year, and no big place to keep up.

When he turned up one day, and said he had come to lunch with me, I was rather surprised. Herbert is always very lofty with me, and this was condescending indeed. I wondered what he wanted.

It was a stifling hot day, but Herbert was the correct politician in black top-hat, black morning coat, dark trousers, dark tie and dark gloves. It made me feel hot to look at him.

I thought that he would bear unloosening, so I

told Richards to give us a bottle of 1908 Heidsieck; and we lunched in the summer dining-room, which faces north and is cool.

As usual Herbert was looking as serious as a gate-post. He always tried to look as though he was carrying the Empire about with him—it is part of the game. He said nothing, and I had nothing to say; and we had finished our melon and our caviare before the conversation began; then I said:

“Do you never wear summer clothes—something gray?”

“Never in London. Gray clothes give a man an air of frivolity; they do not go with serious aims in life. In the country I wear tweeds of course, but always dark shades. My reputation demands it,” he said solemnly.

“I shouldn’t like to have a reputation like that,” I said.

“I fear you never will. It is, unfortunately, too late,” he said very loftily.

“Saved! Saved!” I said softly.

He looked pained, but did not rebuke me; so I knew for certain that he did want something.

I seemed to have set him going, for he talked earnestly about the dress, and the habits, and the

customs of the correct young politician. Herbert talking always makes me fidgety. He is so infernally long-winded. He can say more about nothing at all than any one I know. Also, he has a way of fixing his pale eyes on some point on the wall opposite, and speaking as if he had learned what he is saying by heart, painfully. I have never heard him make a speech—it must be awful! Besides, with his pasty, yellowish face he is not a pretty sight; and he does not only look as if he had oiled his hair but sounds as if he had oiled his voice.

I let him drone on. It is never any use trying to quicken him; he will take the most roundabout way to come to what he wants. I dare say he thinks it diplomatic. I went on with my lunch, sparing the champagne, which I did not like so young, and not paying any particular attention to what he was saying about the respect due to a man of unswerving political sincerity from his fellow-creatures.

Then he did give me a jolt. He got away from the perfect young politician, began to talk about the perfect young politician's wife, and said the important thing was that she should have brains.

I looked at the bottle of champagne. It was not that: he had not drunk enough. Then I said: "Rot, old chap! The important thing is, that she should be related to the right kind of people and know how to entertain them in the right kind of way—or else she must be a woman with a lot of money."

"No," he said solemnly. "What a man—a man dealing with Imperial affairs—needs in a wife, is a stimulating companion, some one to foster the efforts of his genius."

I looked again at the bottle of champagne. It was *not* the quantity—he had only had a couple of glasses of it. It must be stronger than I thought. Then I said:

"This is what they call poppycock in the States. If we were out-of-doors, I should say that you were talking through your hat." And I felt a little tired.

"I am quite serious. These are the conclusions I have come to after giving the matter my most careful consideration," said Herbert solemnly; and he raised his glass and looked at it as if he were perfectly satisfied with it, himself and everything else in the nice round world.

I was not going to bother with rot like this.

"All right; it doesn't matter," I said. "At any rate, you're fixed up properly. You're going to marry Anne Dressington, and she is related to the whole gang of the right people, knows exactly what they want, and has five thousand a year."

It has been understood in the family for a long while that Herbert is going to marry our cousin, Lady Dressington; and it is one of those comfortable arrangements which are good for every one.

Herbert emptied his wine-glass quickly; and his round yellow face turned a little pink.

"Not at all—not at all," he said quickly. "Neither Anne nor I have considered that seriously. But it was about a matter of that kind I came to consult you. In spite of the frivolous life you lead, you have a certain amount of common sense."

"Flatterer!" said I.

"Besides, in matters of this kind you have had a good deal of experience."

"What kind of matters?" said I.

"Women. You know all about them."

"You don't know *anything* about them, or you wouldn't say anything so silly," I said firmly.

"Oh, yes; you do!" he said obstinately. "Look at all the messes you've been in!"

"Messés? What a way to speak of grand passions! But never mind. What is it you want to know?"

"Well, I'm very much interested in a lady—a very pretty girl," he said, in a hesitating way. "I met her at the house of one of your tenants—at Scruton's, the millionaire at Number 9—a very able man."

"Very able," I said, as I thought of how the old sweep had tricked my uncle out of a quarter's rent by his ghost, and very nearly tricked me. Then my heart gave a little jump; and I felt annoyed. Herbert had been making love to the ghost-girl herself. I had no reason to feel annoyed, of course. It had nothing to do with me. Whatever a girl who had lent herself to such a shady trick as that might do, it could not possibly matter to me. Still, Herbert . . . Herbert is such a rotter.

"But I'm rather uneasy about the circumstances—the—environment," went on he. "Two or three times a week Scruton has a party after the theater—a man's party. They play baccarat, and they play very high. I was taken to one of these parties, and I met her there. And I have been again—several times. And the play is always very high. I—

I have found the atmosphere of the house suspicious."

Here it was as large as life. I had been expecting some little game from Scruton; and here it was.

"Look here, do you mean to tell me that the infernal New Zealander is running a gambling-hell in Garthoyle Gardens?" I said.

"No, no. I don't say that. I've no right to. My suspicions are quite vague—hardly suspicions. Besides, a millionaire wouldn't run a gambling-hell, would he?" he said quickly.

"You know very well a millionaire would. It's just the profitable amusement a millionaire would love. You know the sweeps," I said. "How much have you lost?"

"About three hundred. But of course I don't mind that."

"Of course you don't! You go to see the girl, and that is the price you pay for it. I should never have accused you of being young, but you're a deal younger than I ever dreamt."

"You've no right to jump to conclusions in such a hurry, I tell you. It may be all my fancy."

"Fancy or not, I can give you the advice you want at once," I said. "You keep away from

Number 9, or you'll get into a most unholy mess, and England will lose a choice Prime Minister."

"No, no. That isn't it at all. It isn't your advice I want. I want the benefit of your experience. I want you to come to one of Scruton's parties so that you may see for yourself and tell me if there is anything wrong. There's no need for any invitation, I can take you without."

"No, thank you," I said. "Outside is good enough for me."

I did not want to see any more of the ghost-girl. I had a feeling that that way lay the mess of a lifetime. Besides, it would be rather awkward: she knew me under the name of Garth, and she might be annoyed to find that I had not told her my right name when we talked about the Ponderbury hieroglyphics.

But Herbert would not take the refusal. He went on pestering and pestering me to give him the benefit of my experience, and declaring and declaring that I could not do it properly till I had looked into the matter for myself. Also, I felt that I ought to prevent him getting into a hole if I could—after all, though it is not my fault, he *is* my cousin—and in the end I gave way. But I would not dine with

him on Thursday. It was bad enough to be let in for a business I did not fancy without being bored to death by Herbert. He arranged to call for me at eleven the next Thursday night.

After he had gone, I grew even more annoyed about the business; and yet it really did not matter to me whether the ghost-girl married Herbert or not.

When he called for me I was ready for him, with two hundred in fivers in my pocket. I did not mean to plunge. We strolled round to Number 9, and were taken up to a room on the first floor. A long table covered with a green cloth was set under two of the windows in the cool, and a dozen men were playing at it. Scruton, as black-faced and hard-bitten as ever, stood on the hearth-rug talking to a man I did not know. Three or four men were clustered round two girls who were sitting on a couch on the left-hand side of the room; and all of them were talking cheerfully. One of the girls was Alice Devine; and at the sight of me her eyes opened wide and she flushed.

Scruton did not show the slightest embarrassment at the sight of me. He greeted me easily, and said he was very glad I had come round for a game. It was clear that to him his little attempt to trick me

out of his rent was neither here nor there—just a sort of diversion.

The panting Herbert drew me across the room to the couch on which the two girls were sitting. I shook hands with Alice quickly, before he could introduce me as Garthoyle. Then I greeted three of the men in the group round the girls, heartily stretching the greetings out, for I knew that all of them would call me Garth.

It was no use; Herbert would not have it. He seized me by the arm, turned me round and bawled: "Let me introduce you to Miss Maynard. Lord Garthoyle—Miss Maynard."

I did not miss the ghost-girl's little start when she heard my real name; and out of the corner of my eye I saw a little frown on her forehead as she stared at me.

I looked as innocent as I could and began to talk to Miss Maynard quickly. In two minutes I found that she was all right to talk to, very bright and quick, and ready to laugh. She was a pretty girl, too, with very fine dark eyes, and dark hair, and a very clear skin with plenty of color in it. I fancied, too, that she had one of those quick hot tempers;

that she could flare up quickly on occasion, but that she would not sulk.

In five minutes we were quite friendly; and when the other men moved to the baccarat-table, I stayed on talking to her, letting Herbert talk to the ghost-girl.

They did not seem to be getting on very fast, and then he said in a disagreeable tone: "Wouldn't you like to go and play baccarat, Garthoyle?"

I tumbled to it at once. It was not the ghost-girl who had captured Herbert's wayward heart: it was Miss Maynard. I felt ridiculously pleased. But what on earth did it matter to me?

"Conversation before cards for me, Herbert," I said coldly; and I went on talking to Miss Maynard.

She seemed all right, she looked a nice girl, and she talked like a nice girl. But you never can tell; and the Directoire frocks of the two girls were about as direct as they make them. I was really annoyed by the one the ghost-girl was wearing.

I went on talking till I felt that Herbert was champing the bit badly. When I grew afraid that at any moment he might snort, I said:

"Well, I'll go and flutter for a while."

I sat down on the farther side of the table so that

I could watch Herbert and Miss Maynard, and as I played I began to size up the gathering. It seemed harmless enough. Morrisdale was banker—a fifty-pound bank—men were staking fivers and tenners. I knew most of the men playing; half a dozen of them were serious gamblers, the others were young ones on the racket. I did not think that the game would stay so gentle as this all the evening. As I played I watched the ghost-girl and Miss Maynard. I did wish those Directoire frocks were not so confoundedly direct.

Miss Maynard was talking away to the solemn Herbert, and he was talking to her. But presently I grasped the fact that she kept looking toward the door. Three more men came in, one of them that hulking brute, Sir Theobald Walsh. They came to the table. Miss Maynard still kept looking at the door. Then in came Freddy Gage, Herbert's private secretary. I saw the look he and Miss Maynard exchanged, and I knew whom she had been looking for.

Freddy had been one of my fags at Eton, and I had always liked him. I have always believed that he wrote Herbert's speeches and articles for him. To speak roughly, he has four times as many brains

in his little finger as Herbert has in his capacious bullet head. He went to Herbert and the two girls and began to talk. I went on with my game, considering things. It was all very well, but however much she might look for his coming, I did not think that when it came to serious business, Freddy, with his brains and five hundred a year, besides his salary, stood much chance against Herbert with his seven thousand. Several times I caught the ghost-girl's eye; she was looking at me in a puzzled kind of way. Evidently she had not yet grown used to my not being a simple commoner; she was rearranging things.

Then Otto Steiner and the piebald duke went to the couch and began to talk to the ghost-girl. Freddy Gage seemed to do a little readjusting, for in about two minutes he carried off Miss Maynard through the window on to the balcony; and Herbert came across to the table, looking rather puzzled, and began to play.

The piebald duke went on talking to the ghost-girl; but his eyes kept straying to the table. Then he came to it. At once Walsh rose and went to the ghost-girl, pulled a chair up to the couch, and, leaning over her in a proprietary sort of way, began to

talk in her ear. I was annoyed. Walsh is not the kind of man whom one likes to see within a quarter of a mile of a decent girl.

Steiner took the bank and made it a three-hundred bank. Miss Maynard and Freddy Gage came back into the room looking very pleased with themselves, and, coming to the table, watched the play. It was higher, men were betting twenties and fifties. Then I saw the ghost-girl was sitting up very stiffly and frowning, and her eyes were sparkling angrily. Walsh was smiling in an ugly way.

I got up and went across to them.

"You look as if you found the heat of the room rather trying, Miss Devine. Won't you come out on the balcony and get a breath of fresh air?" I said.

Walsh scowled at me and said something about her being very well where she was.

She rose quickly and said: "Oh, yes; I should like to."

"Disagreeable brute, Walsh," I said, when we had settled down into two easy chairs among the plants.

"I—I don't like him. I'm very glad you took me away from him," she said in a hesitating way.

"Go on disliking him—hard," I said. "You know what these baronets are. They shouldn't be encouraged. Whenever you come across a baronet, sit on him."

She laughed softly; then she said:

"It's all very well; but what if they won't be sat on?"

"Walsh is a pertinacious beggar," I said. "But keep on sitting on him, and in time he'll understand what's happening."

"I do what I can," she said. "But he doesn't seem to understand yet."

"Never mind; keep on. It's the only way," I said.

She leaned back in her chair and looked across the gardens. Then she looked at me and said rather quickly:

"Why did you give me a false name? It wasn't fair."

"Oh, all my friends call me Garth, don't you know. And it might have made those children uncomfortable to know that they were with a lord. I've known it work that way with people; goodness knows why. Besides, peers have such a bad name.

You might have got straight out of the car and run for your life, if you had known that I was a peer."

"Are you ever at a loss for an excuse?" she said, smiling.

"No—now you come to speak of it, I don't think I ever am. But these aren't excuses, they're good solid reasons."

"Still, you might have told me when we were talking about those hieroglyphics."

"Yes; of course I might. But why should I? Besides, it was a bit difficult. I couldn't say: 'By the way, my real name is Lord Garthoyle,' could I?"

"Perhaps not. But I like things above board."

I could not see exactly how that liking went with the ghost trick. But there, women are like that; they must humbug.

"I haven't thanked you for getting that check for me," she said. "I'm awfully obliged to you."

"There's no need to be. You could have got it yourself. I was very glad to save you a little trouble."

"Oh, I should have made a dreadful mess of things," she said quickly.

"Roughened the path of true love? I don't think you would. Have you spent it all?"

"Indeed no, it will last ever such a long time. Why, there are more than a hundred treats—expeditions to Kew or to the country—in that money. I'm keeping it for it. It's splendid to have a lot of money like that."

It was an odd way for the niece of a millionaire to talk, especially since she was living with him. But I was not surprised by it. Except when they are showing off, millionaires are stingy sweeps; and I did not suppose that Scruton was any exception to the rule.

I bethought myself that I was there on Herbert's business; and I set her talking about Miss Maynard. She did not want any encouragement.

"Oh, Kitty's a darling," she said. "I don't know what I should do without Kitty." And she plunged into praises of her.

I learned that Miss Maynard's mother was a widow, and they were very hard up; that Miss Maynard was very keen on amusing herself, and always came to Scruton's parties. He had told Alice that she should invite her to help her entertain his guests.

Of course, there was no need to have a hostess at such parties; and it was clearer than ever that the two girls were used as decoys. It was no business of mine; but it vexed me. I said nothing about it; I let the ghost-girl go on talking. And I gathered that though Miss Maynard was a nice enough girl, and uncommonly clever, she was a bit on the wild side, and dead set on having a good time. I could not see her the wife of a serious, not to say dull, politician like Herbert. It would work well enough perhaps if Herbert were merely a fool; but he is such an obstinate fool. A mild brand of wife who liked being bullied, like Anne Dressington, was what he wanted. He was just the kind of man to come badly to grief with a clever wild one like Miss Maynard. Herbert was in a hole.

The ghost-girl presently stopped talking about Kitty Maynard, and I said: "You say Miss Maynard is hard up, but that dress she's wearing doesn't look like hard-upness."

Alice looked at me rather hard, and she flushed.

"Oh, these dresses," she said slowly, in a distressed voice: "It's my uncle. He arranges about our dresses—not only mine, but Kitty's, too. He says it's only fair that since she helps me act as

hostess, he should provide the proprieties. And—and he will have them like this. I—I hate them.”

“They’re very nice dresses,” I said cheerfully. “What’s the matter with them?”

“Oh, you know quite well what’s the matter with them!” she flashed out with a sudden burst of temper. Then she gave a little gasp and said: “But—but why am I talking to you like this? I—I scarcely know you.”

“Oh, yes, you do. You know all there is to know. And why shouldn’t you talk freely to me? I’m quite safe. And I like it. It’s a great compliment,” I said quickly.

“I dare say it is. But . . .”

She stopped short, rose, and we went back into the room.

Two or three men were talking to Kitty Maynard; and Alice went back to the couch and sat down on it. I saw that for the moment she had had enough of me, and I went back to the table and played. As I played I wondered about her—baccarat is a nice easy game to play; it gives you plenty of time to think. She did seem contradictory; somehow that ghost trick did not fit in with the rest of her. Once or twice I caught her glowering at me as if she were

still angry with me for telling me her feelings about that Directoire frock. It was awfully like a woman to blame me for what she had said.

The play was serious now—a thousand-pound bank. As I punted I watched very carefully; but I saw nothing wrong. Indeed, with such seasoned gamblers as Tony Le Quesne, Steiner and two or three of the other men who were playing at the table, it would have been very difficult for there to be anything wrong. I watched Scruton with particular care when he took the bank. He seemed far too clumsy a dealer to play any tricks with the cards. Besides, he lost about seven hundred over his bank.

Men kept dropping out and talking to the girls for a while and coming back again. They talked to them with too easy an air to please me. But it was no business of mine. Scruton undoubtedly used the two girls to attract men to his parties.

I dropped out myself and had another talk with Miss Maynard; and it made me surer than ever that she would never do for Herbert. Soon after two, the two girls slipped away; and then Herbert went, and then Gage, and Walsh, and two or three others. I took it that these came chiefly on account of the two girls; and I was annoyed to see that Walsh

was one of them. The rest of us broke up at about a quarter past four.

I walked home rather slowly; one way and another I had plenty to think of. Well, I had had a pleasant evening.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESCUE OF HERBERT POLKINGTON

I WAS finishing my breakfast rather late next morning, when Richards ushered in Herbert. He said "Good morning"; and I told Richards to pour him out a cup of coffee. He poured it out and went out of the room.

"Well, what do you think about Miss Maynard?" said Herbert.

"I think, my good chap, that outside is good enough for you," said I.

"Nonsense! Why?" said Herbert. "She's a thoroughly nice girl, and very clever."

"She's clever and pretty and nice. But all the same it won't do. You can't marry a girl who is acting as decoy at the gambling parties of a non-descript millionaire."

"She isn't!" said Herbert.

"I don't think she knows she is, any more than Miss Devine does. But that's what they are doing all the time."

"But it's absurd!" cried Herbert. "Scruton's is not a gambling-hell; the play's perfectly fair there. I asked Le Quesne, and I asked the duke. They were both sure that it was."

"Were they?" I said. "What does that matter? The play is quite fair at Monte Carlo. Every one will be saying that Miss Maynard was a decoy at a gambling-hell, if you bring her into prominence by marrying her. And you will bring her into prominence. You're so eligible."

"Well—well—they'll say something just as bad about any one I marry."

"Not about Anne."

"I wish you'd get that silly idea out of your head. I'm not going to marry Anne," said Herbert pettishly.

I was sure that he was; but it was no use telling him so.

"It isn't only that, but Miss Maynard wouldn't make the kind of wife you want. She's had a poor time; and if she marries a rich man, she'll make up for it—hard. She'll set up the backs of all your political crowd; and she'll never take the trouble to learn the political game—the drawing-room part of it. She won't be bothered with it," I said.

"You're wrong—quite wrong. I know that Kitty is fond of pleasure. She admits it—frankly. But she has a plastic nature; I should mold her."

I looked at Herbert hard. The idiot who could say that about Miss Maynard was worth looking at.

"You couldn't mold her in a hundred years—not with a club," I said slowly. "If there's any molding done, she'll do it. Within six months of your marriage she'll have you a regular attendant at every big race-meeting in England."

"Preposterous!" said Herbert.

"I'll bet you a tenner," I said.

"You know I never bet," said Herbert.

"No, you don't; and yet you propose to marry Miss Maynard."

"I don't see the connection," said Herbert stiffly.

"Which shows you have no business to be marrying Miss Maynard."

"But I do see that I was foolish to consult you. The fact is, Rupert, you are so incorrigibly frivolous yourself that you are incredulous of the possibility of seriousness in any one else," he said pompously.

"It isn't that at all," I said. "But there are some brands of seriousness that won't mix. Yours is one of them."

Herbert rose solemnly and said: "I see that I was foolish to consult you. I had my doubts, grave doubts, of the wisdom of it. Good morning." And he stalked toward the door.

"Good morning," I said. "But don't forget that I've told you."

He went out solemnly.

I had done no good; but that did not trouble me. I had not expected to do any good. The important thing was that I had told Herbert the facts, and my mind was quite at ease.

I went round to Scruton's next party—he gave them twice a week—for I felt that as the head of the family I ought to keep an eye on Herbert's love-affair, and besides I wanted to know if the ghost-girl had forgiven me for having been so open with me.

I talked to her two or three times in the intervals of playing; but she would not come on the balcony again. Perhaps she felt that it led to confidences. I talked to her about Kitty Maynard, of course, for I wanted to know as much as possible about her; and once more she said what a pity it was that the Maynards were so hard up.

"Well, Miss Maynard must marry a rich man," I said.

"She says she means to. But I do hope she won't. It isn't right to marry a man—you don't love," she said in a very genuine tone.

"It's often done," I said. "And Freddy Gage would be awfully cut up."

"You've noticed that? You are quick!"

"It's pretty obvious," I said.

"It would be so much the best thing to do. He's very nice. But I'm afraid he hasn't enough money," she said with a sigh.

Some one joined us; and I got no more talk with her that evening.

After that I fell into the way of going to Scruton's parties regularly. I had to keep an eye on Herbert. His love-affair was going on in a very satisfactory way, for him; and he was wearing his most important air. Freddy Gage was the only man who gave him any trouble. It lay between them plainly enough. The more I saw of Miss Maynard the less reason I found to change my belief that Herbert would come the complete cropper.

One night he and I came away together.

"I have quite satisfied myself that you were en-

tirely wrong about Miss Maynard," he said pompously. "She has a thoroughly adaptable nature. At heart she is a very serious girl."

"We'll talk about that later," I said. "When you have been married six months."

"But I must get rid of Gage," he went on, without taking any notice of my kind words. "He encourages her in her frivolity. The worst of it is, if I do, he'll go to Ambledon. Ambledon has been trying to get him from me for the last six months."

"Very good man, Freddy Gage," I said. "And we went our different ways."

Three days later I received a note from Herbert telling me that he was engaged to Miss Maynard, and that their engagement would be publicly announced in about a fortnight, when he had broken in his people to the idea.

I did not write to congratulate him. I was silent, as a disapproving head of the family ought to be. He should never say he had had any encouragement from me.

At Scruton's next party I again found Kitty Maynard, and I was a good deal surprised. I had taken it for granted that that would be the first thing Herbert would stop. It looked as if she had

already begun refusing to be molded. She was rather nervous and she looked worried. Freddy Gage looked worried, too; and Herbert was not beaming. I talked to Kitty Maynard a while; I played baccarat, and then I got Alice to come out on the balcony to get away from Sir Theobald Walsh.

For a while we talked about nothing at all, pleasantly, then I said: "My cousin and Miss Maynard don't look as if they were enjoying being engaged. What's the matter?"

"You do ask straightforward questions."

"Well, I must do my best to smooth the path of true love."

"True love," said the ghost-girl softly. "Yes, one would have to do that. But—but—oh, well, Kitty isn't happy. I think your cousin wears her a little."

"Herbert would weary a turbine if he got a fair chance at it," I said.

"And he's rather exacting. He forbade her to come here, but she would. She said she wasn't going to desert me; and he was angry."

"Herbert is a fool; but she must know that. She's really worried about Freddy Gage, I suppose?"

"I've no right to talk about it," she said quickly.

"No more have I, but we mustn't let that prevent us," I said. "It's a case of three in a hole. Now, if I were to haul Herbert out by the scruff of the neck, the other two would be happy enough. I should like to do a little rescue work."

"If you only could! But you can't! Your cousin is very obstinate. It—it distresses me to think of their marriage. I can only see unhappiness for Kitty—for both of them—in it."

"That's all there is to see."

"Oh, why doesn't he carry her off by force and marry her?" she cried.

"Herbert's other name is not Lochinvar. Besides, she wouldn't let him," I said rather densely.

"I mean Mr. Gage, not Mr. Polkington."

"Oh! She'd let *him*, would she?" I said.

"I oughtn't to have let you know," she said quickly.

But she had let me know, and it set me thinking, in fact, gave me an idea.

At Scruton's next two parties, things did not seem to be getting any better. I saw from Herbert's sulky face that the molding process was not working well, but he was very snappish when I told him how

it struck me. On the fourth evening before the announcement of the engagement, I came on Freddy and Miss Maynard in the central garden. Neither of them had any right to be in it, since they did not belong to the families of any of my tenants. They seemed to be quarreling, and not enjoying the quarrel. She went off to see the ghost-girl, and I insisted that Freddy should dine with me.

He was very like a funeral, and the champagne was some time ironing the frown out of his boyish brow.

Then I said: "I think it's a jolly shame your letting that poor girl come to grief by marrying that prig Herbert."

His face went crimson, and I thought he would throw his plate at me.

"Damn it all, Garthoyle! I've enough to worry me without you starting to nag at me!" he said.

"Well, why don't you stop it?" I said.

"Stop it! How can I stop it? Haven't I tried to stop it? Haven't I told her forty times what an aggravating rotter Polkington is? Haven't I argued with her, and begged and begged her not to ruin her life by marrying him? Don't I know him? Haven't I had two years of him?"

"You have," said I.

"She *couldn't* stand him; she's not the kind of girl."

"She isn't," said I.

"But she's made up her mind to marry a rich man, and nothing will stop her. She's sick to death of being hard up. It's hopeless."

"It may be. But you've *got* to stop it. You must be firm," I said.

If I had been within reach, I think he would have bitten a piece out of me.

"Firm!" he howled. "Firm!"

"Firm," said I.

He choked a little and called me a damned interfering idiot.

He seemed nicely wound up, and I said: "Look here, did you ever happen to hear of young Loch-invar? And have you ever thought what motor-cars are really for? And what about special marriage licenses?"

He cooled uncommonly quickly, drank off his glass of champagne, and said softly: "By jove!"

"Now, we know that motor-cars are always appearing in the Divorce Court, but no one ever uses them *pour le bon motif*—when their intentions are

honorable. Is it fair on the motor-car, I ask you?" said I.

"Fire away," said Freddy.

I told him of my plan for rescuing Herbert, and he was quick tumbling to it.

When I had told him all the details, he said: "The awkward thing is, I can't drive a car."

"You politicians!" said I. "But I'm not going to do the thing by half. Herbert must be rescued. I'll drive the car myself."

"By jove, if you would!" he said. "But are you sure you can stick it out? There'll be an awful fuss. You won't soften?"

"Not a soften," said I.

He had grown quite cheerful by the time we had worked out all the arrangements; and when he went away I had almost to throw him out of the house to stop his thanks.

Two days later I picked up Miss Maynard and Freddy at her mother's flat in West Kensington. She was looking delightfully pretty; there was not a shadow of a cloud on her face; and I saw that she had made up her mind to enjoy the afternoon. I rather envied Freddy.

She proposed politely to sit by me, but I put them

into the tonneau. It was a glorious day, and once out of London, I enjoyed the drive. I felt that I was performing a noble action. Most of the time I drove slowly; but once when a road-hog came scorching along, I gave him my dust for eight miles. All the while I heard a gentle murmur of talk from the tonneau, and sometimes a soft laugh. They were not talking about Herbert.

We had tea at the "White Hart" at Lewes. We talked for some time after it. I left them to get the car, and I was some time over that. It was past six when I brought it round to the front door of the hotel.

As she got into the car, Kitty Maynard said anxiously: "I'm afraid we shall have to hurry back, Lord Garthoyle. Mr. Polkington is calling for me at half past nine to take me to a dance at the Cheshams. Do you think we shall do it?"

"The car can do it," I said.

It could.

I ran up to Three Bridges and down to Horsham. It is at the top of the triangle of which a line drawn between Guildford and Dorking would be the base. Garth Royal, my country house, lies in the middle of it. I set out to drive round that triangle.

The talk in the tonneau was rather fitful. There were long silences. Once I heard Kitty Maynard say:

“No, no, no, Freddy. It’s too late.”

By eight o’clock I had driven round the triangle and was back at Horsham. Freddy seemed to see the danger, for I heard the talk brisk up.

I thought I was going to get safely through the town, when Kitty Maynard gave a little cry and said:

“Why—why—we were here hours ago! We must have lost our way! We shall be ever so late getting to London. Herbert will be perfectly horrible.”

“But we’re not going back to London,” answered Freddy.

I let the car go. The middle of a town of nine thousand inhabitants is not the place for delicate explanation. Besides, I did not want to overhear the discussion; I thought that they would prefer it private. As it was, I caught scraps of it, of Kitty Maynard’s side of it. She was plainly enough in a royal rage.

I had got about eight miles beyond Horsham when Freddy called to me to stop. We were in a nice

empty part of the country, a long way from anywhere—as far as walking went. So I stopped.

Kitty leaned over the front of the tonneau and said:

“Please drive me back to London at once, Lord Garthoyle.”

She was still in a rage; her cheeks were white and her eyes were just flaming.

“It can’t be done. I’m a brutal bad brigand at five stone seven to-night. It’s my first attempt at a kidnaping job, and I’m going through with it like a man,” I said cheerfully.

“It’s hateful. . . . It’s disgraceful . . . it’s incredible! You can’t really suppose that you can force me to do this ridiculous thing!” she cried.

“I don’t see anything ridiculous in it. I should think you’d find it rather nice,” I said.

“You won’t?” she cried, and turned to Freddy. “Make him, Freddy! Make him at once! . . . Oh, I’ll never—never—forgive you!”

“I can’t make him . . . hulking brute; and I wouldn’t if I could,” said Freddy cheerfully. And I gathered that he was hopeful.

“But—but what will people say? I shall be compromised—hopelessly compromised!” she cried.

"Not if you marry me," said Freddy.

"I won't marry you!"

"We're keeping that parson waiting," said Freddy.

"I'll never marry you!" she cried, and jumped out of the car.

She set out walking quickly to Horsham.

"It's all right," said Freddy calmly. "She'll be better presently—like a lamb. There's always a reaction after these rages. It's only a matter of keeping one's temper with her."

He set out after her, caught her up and walked beside her. I could see that he was talking hard. I let them get a couple of hundred yards down the road before I set the car crawling after them. I wondered how far she would walk before she gave in. Two or three times Freddy put his arm round her, and she shook herself out of it. Then at the end of a mile they stopped. I stopped, too, for I thought that they were at the final row that would clear things up.

Then Freddy beckoned to me, and I ran up to them.

"Now, on your honor, Lord Garthoyle, what time

does the last train leave Horsham?" she said. And I saw that she looked pale and uncertain.

"On my honor it leaves at nine-eighteen," I said.

"Then it *is* hopeless; and I'll never forgive Freddy—never."

"That's all right. I've treated you shamefully, and we'll let it go at that," said Freddy cheerfully. "Now we'll go and be married."

He half lifted her into the car; and I let it rip. I did not hear any talk from the tonneau. I took it that they were whispering.

It was ten minutes past nine when I stopped at the door of Garth Royal Rectory. I had fixed the time within ten minutes. The rector stood on the steps looking out for us.

Kitty and Freddy got out of the car, looking as if they did not know whether they were standing on their heads or their heels. She was not at all pale, she was blushing; and her eyes were shining in quite a different way.

I had made all the arrangements with the rector. He had only to look at the special license and see that it was all right. Then he married them in his own drawing-room, his wife and daughters stand-

ing by Kitty and making the required fuss. Kitty looked quite resigned.

Then Kitty wrote a short letter for me to take to her mother. Then I gave her my peace-offering in the shape of a rope of pearls.

They thanked the rector and came back to the car; and I drove them to the Dower House. I could not lend them Garth Royal itself, for I had let it to a Hamburg money-lender. But the Dower House was lighted up and looked very nice and comfortable; and I knew that their wedding supper was all right, for I had arranged it with Harrod's myself, and sent down Richards to see to it.

They got out of the car, and the door opened and Richards came out to receive them. In the blaze of light I saw that Kitty was looking very pretty.

They turned, but I did not give them time to start thanking me. I called out good night and good luck and bucketed off. I did bucket. It was only half past eleven when I sneaked softly up the stairs, slipped Kitty's note into the letter-box of her mother's flat and bolted down to the car.

I was in the middle of my supper when Herbert rushed into my dining-room. I have never seen him such a rich purple since.

"The little jade has jilted me! She's married Freddy Gage!" he roared.

I jumped up and caught his hand, gave it the heartiest grip I could get out of my muscles, and shouted, "Saved! Saved!"

"You silly idiot," howled Herbert. And he danced out of the room, waggling his crushed fingers.

From Herbert's point of view I dare say that there was something in what he said. All the same I *had* rescued him.

CHAPTER VII

THE GARDEN ANGEL

THERE was no doubt that since I was running them, it was my duty to keep an eye on the Gardens all the time. That is what a complete house-agent has to do. There was no doubt, too, that the central garden was the best place to keep an eye on them from; and I took to spending a good deal of my time in it. I could not help the fact that Alice Devine spent a good deal of her time in it, too; so that I was always meeting her there. And when I met her, I had to talk to her. It would not have been polite not to.

I soon began to enjoy that garden. I found it quite a little world—a world of children and nursemaids, with cliques and jealousies and dislikes and squabbles, just like the world we live in. I learned about them quicker than I should have done, for Alice knew the ropes and told me. She enjoyed

that little world thoroughly; and she made me see how amusing it was, while I kept pointing out to her how very like its squabbles were to the squabbles going on between the parents of the children. She was very popular in it, not only with the children, which was only natural, but also with the nursemaids, which was much more difficult. She had the sympathetic nature. Certainly I found her as sympathetic as could be; and I fell into the way of telling her my difficulties with my tenants. Often she made the most useful suggestions; and sometimes they were quite brilliant.

I was a good deal interested in a friend of hers whom I often saw in the garden: Miss Mary Eglantine Pontifex D'Eresby. And I was chiefly interested in her because she looked exactly like a small but wingless angel. She had the golden hair and deep blue eyes that angels always have at the Academy and on Christmas-cards. She had the angel full-face, the angel side-face, the angel mouth, the angel nose; and she was about twelve years old.

When I first noticed her angelic appearance, she seemed to be having a lonely and desolate time of it.

I asked Alice who she was, and when she told me, I said: "Why isn't she playing with the others?"

I've been watching her; and she doesn't go near them. Is she sulking?"

"The angel-child kicked little Lord Pomeroy's shins; and the other children have sent her to Coventry," said Alice, smiling.

Little Lord Pomeroy is a pink boy with tow-colored curls. I never see him without wanting to crop him on the spot.

"Do him good," I said.

"Oh, he's such a sweet little boy!" cried Alice.

"Yes, sticky," I said. "Why did the angel-child kick him?"

"I'm afraid he pulled Molly Boisragon's hair," said Alice.

"I expected it was something of that kind—little sweep! And I suppose all the other little girls love him dearly; and so they sent this angel-child to Coventry?"

"Yes," said Alice.

"Well, do you think you could introduce me to her?" I said.

Alice called to her, but Miss D'Eresby only gave her a cool nod and went down the path with a great deal of dignity.

"Never mind; some other day, when she isn't feeling so haughty," I said.

"She isn't often haughty. I expect she's feeling the injustice," said Alice.

As it chanced Alice did not present me to the lady. The very next day I presented myself to her. After lunch I was sitting on a bench in the garden, smoking a cigar, when that angel-child came in view tearing down the path as hard as she could lick; and after her came lumbering heavily one of the under-gardeners, a young man of the name of Frederick. The chase was certainly no business of mine; the gardeners are in charge of the garden; and it is silly to do your own barking when you keep a dog. It was just the sporting instinct that made me jump for it, and snatch her up as she reached me.

"You pig!" shrieked the angel-child; and she kicked my shins with uncommon vigor.

I sat down with her on my knee, and it was like holding a little wildcat. She seemed to have a good deal more muscle than an Academy angel. In her hand was a bunch of yellow carnations.

Frederick came lumbering up and said rather breathlessly: "I've bin tryin' and tryin' to find out

who was a-stealing of them carnations; an' to-day I thought I'd just take my dinner in the shrubbery ag'in' the big bed; an' I caught 'er in the act!"

"You never caught me," said the angel-child scornfully. "If you'd caught me, I should just have bitten you, and got away easily, old pig Frederick."

"'Ark at 'er, your Lordship! 'ark at 'er; She's a terror that child—a fair terror," said Frederick.

"It's a depraved taste—biting under-gardeners," I said.

"I *will* bite the pig, if he touches me," said the angel-child firmly.

"But why did you steal the carnations, Miss D'Eresby?" I said.

"I didn't steal them. I just took them to give to the little boy who's been ill, to punish Frederick for not letting him come into the garden," said the angel-child.

"As if I should let the likes of them into the garden, your Lordship! An' the sick one not even in a proper pram—just in a box—a box on wheels—'ome-made," cried Frederick with great indignation.

I do not like Frederick, a slack-jawed, loose-lipped loafer, always gossiping with nursemaids instead of

doing his work. This jack-in-office turning a sick child out of the garden was exactly the kind of thing he would do with all his heart.

"I don't suppose they would have done any harm," I said.

"That's what I said. They won't eat your beastly old flowers," said Miss D'Eresby.

"It warn't the flowers, your Lordship. But this 'ere is a garden for gentlefolk; and we don't want none of them paupers in it. I did me dooty, your Lordship," said Frederick with a virtuous air.

"Well, you can go back to your work," I said.

"And I'll pay you out for interfering, old pig Frederick," said the angel-child.

"'Ark at 'er langwidge! 'An' she belonging to one of the best families in Englan," said Frederick; and he slouched off down the path.

"I'll teach him," said Miss D'Eresby firmly.

She was now looking perfectly unruffled and composed, in spite of her flight from Frederick and her struggle with me.

"He only did his duty," I said.

"If he did his work ever, it wouldn't matter so much," said Miss D'Eresby coldly. "But he does

nothing but idle and interfere. I'll teach him and Gwendolen Binns, too," she added with even greater firmness.

"Who is Gwendolen Binns?" I said.

"She's the Cantelune baby's nurse," said the angel-child.

"And what has she been doing to you?"

"She hasn't been doing anything to me; but she's always neglecting that baby shamefully. Three times I've found him screaming, and she's been ever so far off, talking to Frederick. I'll teach both of them."

From her tone I believed she would; and I thought that Frederick and his Gwendolen had better look out.

"You seem a general redresser of wrongs," I said.

"I don't know what that means; but they'd better look out," she said.

"About those carnations?" I said.

"Oh, I was forgetting," she said, slipping off my knee. "Henry and George are resting on the pavement in the shade just outside the gate. I'll take Henry the carnations. You don't mind my giving them to him, do you?" she said a little anxiously.

"I'll come with you and take a look at Henry and George," I said; and I got up, and we went out of the garden.

We found Henry and George in the shade of the trees on the edge of the garden. Henry, very white-faced, a boy of about nine, was lying in the shallow wooden box on wheels which was his invalid's chair. George was sitting on the pavement by the side of it, waiting for the angel-child. At the sight of me he jumped up and pretended to be pushing Henry along. I could quite understand that he was used to being chivied along about Mayfair. It is not the place for a sick child in a wooden box. The angel-child stopped them and gave Henry the carnations. He seemed to like them a good deal, and grinned at her feebly.

I asked George what was the matter with Henry, and he told me that he had been knocked down by a motor-car and had lately come out of the hospital. The accident was a severe family trouble; for the gentleman who was driving the car had dashed on, leaving the smashed Henry lying where he had knocked him, and so escaped paying the money which would have brought him better food during his convalescence.

It seemed to me that Henry might as well have any good he could get out of the garden; and I wheeled him into it and found a nice shady corner for him. Then I went to my house and told Richards to get from the cook a basket of invalid's food, pâté de foies gras and jelly, and chicken and cake, and a jug of milk. I carried it to the boys; and they were pleased, and so was the angel-child. She quite mothered Henry as he ate. When I came away from them, I told George that he was to call at my house every day for more invalid food.

Miss D'Eresby followed me.

"I say—I—I'm so sorry I kicked you. I didn't know that you were such a brick," she said. "I hope I didn't hurt you very badly."

"Oh, no; but I would rather you didn't kick me when you have thick boots on," I said.

"Oh, I shall never kick you again—never," she said; and she went dancing back to her protégés. She seemed to have forgotten about being in Coventry.

I happened to go into the garden after dinner that evening, and I was sorry to learn from Alice that the angel-child had got into more trouble later in the afternoon. Little Lord Pomeroy had come and

thrown stones at her and the invalid Henry, and she came away from the contest that followed with a nice sample of his tow-colored curls.

After this introduction she and I grew very friendly, and I learned more about the garden-world from her. I gathered that she acted as a kind of guardian of it. She looked after Henry and George, who came to their shady corner every fine afternoon; she kept an eye on the smaller children, and saw that the big ones did not tease them; she was always checking the interfering Frederick, and she did her best to keep Gwendolen Binns, a high-colored noisy wench, up to her work of looking after Lord Cantelune. He did not seem to me to look neglected; he was a chubby baby. She gave me a good deal of her society, in spite of her numerous occupations, declaring that she preferred being with grown-ups to being with children.

Several times I asked her when she was going to make a man—a working man of Frederick. She always shook her head, and said darkly that Frederick had better look out, that she would catch him one of these days.

I saw her catch him.

I came into the garden about three o'clock one

afternoon, and was walking toward Henry's shady corner to see how he was getting on, when the angel-child came tearing round a bend in the side path that led to it; and after her lumbered the inevitable Frederick. In the middle of her course she jumped something—I could not see what—Frederick did not jump, but he came a thundering cropper over a piece of string, about a foot from the ground, tied to a shrub on either side of the path.

The angel-child pulled up short at my side and turned. At the sight of Frederick's cropper she shrieked with joy and held on to my arm that she might indulge in violent merriment without falling to the ground.

Frederick picked himself up slowly and stood staring about in a dazed way, as if he were trying to think what he had been doing and could not quite remember.

"Whenever I come into the garden, I find you playing with little girls, Frederick. Haven't you any work to do?" I said severely.

Frederick seemed to remember what had happened.

"Playin'!" he howled. "Playin'!"

"Playing," I said. "Playing catch as catch can."

"That young limb took my trowel! 'Ow can I work without a trowel?" howled Frederick.

"I took it to make him go on with his work and not keep Binns from minding the Cantelune baby," said the angel-child with a most virtuous air.

To take away a man's tools seemed an odd way of making him go on with his work; but I took it that Miss D'Eresby knew Frederick better than I did.

"I'll comply to yer ma!" he roared. "I'll have damages. That's what I'll do; and damages I'll get! I'm not goin' to be knocked about for nothink—not me! I'll have the lor of yer! S'welp me I will!"

"Sneaking pig!" said the angel-child contemptuously.

"I'm off to yer ma—now—this very minute," cried Frederick. "His Lordship'll bear witness 'ow you've bin knockin' me about. He seed yer do it."

He turned and went.

"You've forgotten your trowel," cried the angel-child, and she threw it after him.

The point of it struck Frederick's elbow and he jumped and squealed.

"Oh, wasn't that a lucky shot! It must have

caught him on the funny-bone," cried the angel-child; and she danced lightly in a rapturous joy.

Frederick picked up the trowel and bounded round the bend in the path as if he were anxious to get out of range.

"I'm afraid you are going to get into trouble this time," I said. "He'll certainly tell your mother."

"Oh, it's all right if he only tells mother. She won't mind. She knows all about Frederick. I've told her lots of times. There would be trouble if he told father, though. Father never does understand things."

"Then let's hope he doesn't get at your father."

"If he does, I *will* teach him to complain!" said the angel-child; and she set about untying the string across the path.

I strolled on and met Frederick pulling on his coat with an air of resolution as he strode toward the gate.

"Here, where are you going to?" I said sharply.

"I'm horf to the Honorable Mrs. D'Eresby to compline strite, your Lordship," said Frederick.

"You can get to your work, and be sharp about it. I don't pay you wages to spend all your time gossiping and gadding about to make frivolous com-

plaints. You can do that in your own time—when you've done your work," I said with some ferocity.

"B-b-but, your Lordship—you—you seed 'ow that young limb treated me," Frederick stammered.

"You get back to your work, and be smart about it!" I snapped.

I thought Frederick would burst into tears, but he turned and went.

It seemed as well that Miss D'Eresby should have the opportunity of telling her version of the story first. As for Frederick, I had no pity for him; I wondered, indeed, why the head gardener had not discharged him long ago.

I had not learned whether he had made his complaint to the angel-child's mother, or her father, or whether he had made it at all; but as I strolled through the garden the next afternoon, she rushed out of a shrubbery and said in an excited whisper: "You're just in time!"

With that she caught hold of my hand and led me into a shrubbery, whispering to me to be very quiet. Her eyes were sparkling and her face was flushed. She was radiant. As I came through the shrubbery I heard the sound of tremendous snoring; and on the retired lawn on the other side of the

shrubbery I saw Frederick. He was lying sprawled on his back, his head pillowed on his coat, and from his gaping mouth came tremendous snore after tremendous snore. As an employer of labor—his labor—my blood boiled at the sight of this sloth. Then I saw that a garden-hose ran across the lawn, and the nozzle of it rested on Frederick's bosom.

"Wasn't I lucky to find him like this?" whispered the angel-child. "You watch!"

Three feet from us was the stand-pipe with which the hose was connected. She turned the tap on full.

A bubbling gush of water deluged the front of Frederick and inflated his shirt; a long-drawn snore ended abruptly in a terrific snort, and I have never seen anything so funny as his face when he woke and tried to think what was happening to him. Then he let out an astonished howl and jumped up, streaming like a walking waterfall. He dashed out of the lawn, and it was well for us that we had a clear field. I should have choked if I had had to restrain my laughter; and the angel-child was fairly shrieking with joy. She had a wonderful sense of farce for one so young. We found it better to hold on to each other; that way we could laugh more comfortably.

When we had got over the worst of our laughing we came out of the shrubbery, and we heard the clump, clump of Frederick's boots coming our way. At the sound we looked as solemn as two judges; and Frederick came round the corner bounding like an infuriated tiger, dripping as he ran. At the sight of us he pulled up and glared at the angel-child.

I stopped, too, and said in a severe tone:

"Whenever I see you, Frederick, you're running. I'm not going to have you train for Marathon races in this garden. It won't make the flowers grow."

"I warn't training for no Marathon ryce, your Lordship," panted Frederick indignantly; and he glowered at the angel-child with suspicious fury.

"Oh, he's been in the fountain with his clothes on! Look how wet he is," said the angel-child.

"Really you have extraordinary habits, Frederick," I said, even more severely.

"It's not a nabit, it's a trick," said Frederick thickly.

"Well, don't play it again," I said.

"Plye it! Plye it! I never did! It was a trick as was played on me!" said Frederick in a louder tone.

"You've been drinking," I said. "No one could

put a big lump like you into the fountain, if you were sober."

"It warn't the fountain, it were the 'ose. Some one wetted me with the 'ose," shouted Frederick.

"The garden isn't the place for shower-baths. You have no right to get people to wash you in the garden," I said.

Frederick opened his mouth, then he shut it. He looked round the garden rather wildly; then he looked at the sky. His eyes rolled.

I saw his difficulty; he did not wish to explain that advantage had been taken of him in his sleep.

"It were a naccident, your Lordship," he whined.

"Then don't let it happen again," I said.

Frederick shuffled away hastily, muttering that he must get his wet clothes off, or he would catch his death of cold.

"He won't go to sleep when he ought to be working again, in a hurry," said Miss D'Eresby in a virtuous tone.

"I don't think he will; and I'm very much obliged to you for keeping him up to his work," I said.

"Oh, I like doing it—like that," she said quickly. "Wasn't his face funny when the water woke him up?" And she laughed again heartily.

CHAPTER VIII

LOST LORD CANTELUNE

FOR some days after that the chastened Frederick seemed to be doing his work better and gossiping less. That, at least, was the report of Miss D'Eresby. Then he had a relapse; for one afternoon I happened to be strolling in the garden with Alice, when she came to us with a very anxious face.

"Frederick's really dreadful," she said. "*I don't know what to do with him. He's been talking and talking to that Gwendolen Binns, and she's neglecting the Cantelune baby worse than ever.*"

"Things are getting serious," I said.

"They are," said the angel-child.

"Well, I leave it in your hands. I think you'll find a way of stopping it before you've done," I said.

"I expect I shall," she said; and she went off with a more hopeful face.

"She's a wonder, that child," I said. "She'll soon relieve me of all responsibility about this garden."

"She does look after things," said Alice.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that we found her looking after things again. We heard howls and outcries in a corner of the garden, and hurried up to find out what was happening. In the middle of a ring of shrieking children I saw the angel-child. She had one hand clenched in the tow-colored curls of little Lord Pomeroy and was smacking his face with the other. His were the howls we had heard.

I dashed for them and got hold of them. They came apart more easily than I had expected; and little Lord Pomeroy ran off howling.

"That'll teach him to stick pins into babies," said the angel-child triumphantly.

I did not think that it would.

Little Lord Pomeroy's nurse came up and began to scold her; Alice scolded her, too. I think it was those tow-colored curls that made little Lord Pomeroy such a pet. Miss D'Eresby defended herself with a firm gallantry. It seemed that Gwendolen Binns had slipped away to gossip with Frederick, leaving Lord Cantelune sleeping in his perambulator.

Little Lord Pomeroy had thought the chance too good to be missed and prodded Lord Cantelune with a pin. It had not been so good a chance as little Lord Pomeroy had supposed; for the angel-child had come upon him unawares in the very act and secured the requisite grip on his curls before he knew that she was there.

I defended the angel-child and praised her handling of the situation; and Alice scolded me for encouraging her in her violent administration of justice. It took us the rest of the afternoon to argue it out.

The angel-child went away early in the afternoon, saying that she expected that the little beast's (she was referring to little Lord Pomeroy) mother would come out and make a fuss.

When I saw her the next day she was frowning as if she were trying to think hard and found it a strain.

I asked her what was the matter, and she said: "It's Frederick and Gwendolen Binns. I don't know what to do with them. I want to give them a real lesson."

"But you're always giving Frederick real lessons," I said.

"I want to give him one he'll really remember, and Gwendolen Binns, too."

"I expect you'll think of one, if you go on trying," I said in a cheering tone.

"I thought perhaps you could help me," she said.

I sat down on a bench and gave my mind to it; but I could not hit on a lesson. At last I told her that it was more in her line than in mine, and left it at that.

Three days later I came back home about four o'clock after motoring to Wembley and back for a little polo practise. As I stopped before my house, I saw a crowd in the garden near one of the gates, and went to see what was the matter.

The crowd was composed of nursemaids and children, and in the middle of it were Police-Constable Brookes and another policeman. I pushed through it and asked Brookes what was the matter.

"There's a baby missin', m'Lord," said Brookes. "Lord Cantelune's 'is name."

He went on questioning Gwendolen Binns.

She declared again and again that she had only just turned her back on the child; and when she looked round he had gone. One of the older nurses volunteered the information that Gwendolen had

been talking to Frederick for at least ten minutes; and Gwendolen said with some heat that she would not demean herself to answer no such lies.

There was something of an altercation; and I gathered that she had left Lord Cantelune sleeping in his perambulator, and when she returned to it, the perambulator was empty.

Now Lord Cantelune could not have got out of his perambulator by himself. He was not old enough. Moreover, Gwendolen Binns asserted that he had been strapped into it securely. If he had got out of it he could not have crawled any distance from it, for he had only just reached the crawling stage, and would be seriously hampered by his outdoor clothes. It was quite plain somebody had taken him.

Here Alice intervened with the information that she had seen two tramps loafing along outside the garden; and little Daisy Sartorius had seen them, too.

This put a serious complexion on the business; and I took charge of it. I divided up the children and the nursemaids into gangs and set them to search the shrubberies thoroughly. I sent off one of the policemen to the station to inform the inspector in charge, and have the news telephoned to the neigh-

boring police-stations. Before the children and nursemaids were half-way through their search, the inspector himself, accompanied by three more policemen, came in haste from the station. I suggested that each policeman should take with him a nursemaid who knew Lord Cantelune (there are plenty of spare nursemaids in the garden, since there are at least two to each family), and make inquiries in the neighboring streets to find which way the men had gone. The inspector fell in with the suggestion; neither the nursemaids nor the policemen made any objection; and after we had mapped out the area to be searched by each couple, off they went cheerfully. Then I suggested to Alice that she and I should go hunting eastward. She agreed; and we started. Just as we were leaving the garden the first newspaper reporter arrived and fell eagerly on Gwendolen Binns.

Alice was distressed, and disposed to think that Lord Cantelune would never be found. I was not. We had been too quick discovering his loss and setting out to hunt down the kidnapers. Long before they could reach their lair the newspapers would have set half London on their track, unless they chanced to be living close by in one of the Mayfair

slums. And then those slums are not so large as they are dirty; and the police could ransack them thoroughly without any great difficulty. It is not easy for a tramp to get any distance with a clean baby without attracting notice.

I had chosen the most likely direction for our own search; and we went quickly along, making inquiries as we went. We asked every likely person, policemen, commissionaires, postmen, and all persons who looked to have been standing about idling at street corners, or against the walls of public-houses, if they had seen a tramp or tramps with the lost Lord Cantelune. No one had. It was somewhat embarrassing that so many of them leapt to the conclusion that it was our own lost baby we were looking for; they were very sympathetic, begging Alice not "to take on." Many of them, too, had stories of lost children to tell, stories they had heard from friends or acquaintances, mostly of children who had been lost and never found. They were not cheering; but they went along with us to tell them.

By the time we reached Bond Street we had gathered round us an enthusiastic little band of rather more than a hundred helpers, who took part in all our inquiries in a thoroughly confusing way. Sev-

eral of the women who had joined us kept proffering scriptural consolation to Alice; but I fancied that they always quoted wrong.

We plunged into the region beyond Bond Street; but there again we found no traces of lost Lord Cantelune. Our search party was now two hundred strong; and I found it so much more embarrassing than useful that I suggested to Alice that we should allow it to go on searching by itself. Alice said that it would be best; and suddenly we slipped into a tea-shop. Only eleven of them saw our move and followed us in. Five of these, not persons of the kind who generally use tea-shops, at once proposed that I should pay for their tea. When I refused, they went outside, leaving only six. These six seemed bent on having a substantial meal; Alice and I drank our tea and left them at it. When we came out we found the five waiting patiently to take up the search with us again; but a taxicab was passing, we jumped into it and drove back to Garthoyle Gardens. Alice was disposed to be dispirited and gloomy; but I cheered her up by assuring her that, though we had failed, some one else would be sure to have succeeded, and that by now Lord Cantelune had been restored to Gwendolen.

As we drove along there stared at us from the posters the words:

LORD CANTELUNE STOLEN.

When we came to the garden, we found it fuller than ever. Most of my tenants and many of their servants had come into it to discuss the kidnaping, and get the earliest news of what was happening. So far the police had no news of the missing baby; none of the nursemaids had returned with her accompanying policeman; they were hunting still; and in view of the hour, I fancied that each nursemaid and her policeman were at the moment hunting in a tea-shop at the nursemaid's expense.

Gwendolen Binns was in great form, holding forth to a dozen panting newspaper reporters about how she had been dogged by suspicious-looking people for several days, and having her portrait taken in the part of lost Lord Cantelune's devoted and sorrow-stricken nurse for all the illustrated weeklies. Frederick clung to her side, sharing her glory. In the middle of it the Marquis of Alperton, Lord Cantelune's father, arrived on the scene, promptly discharged her from his service, and bade her at

once pack her boxes and clear out of his house. She went, protesting in shrill howls.

Then came the news that the *Evening Herald* had offered one hundred pounds reward to any one giving information that should lead to the capture of the kidnapers; and one of its chief editors rushed up to me and asked permission to establish a temporary office of inquiry in the garden.

I had just refused to allow anything of the kind when the Honorable Byngo D'Eresby, the father of the angel-child, came up to me. We always call him the Honorable Byngo because he looks so like it. The angel-child must have got her beauty from her mother.

"I say, Garthoyle; have you seen that little devil of mine anywhere?" he said in his drawling way.

"No; what is it—a fox-terrier—dachshund—collie? Dogs aren't admitted in this garden, don't you know," I said.

"Dogs! It's not a dog! It's my little girl, I mean—Polly. No one's seen her for hours; and I've come out to look for her. Her nurse has gone off with a policeman to hunt for that Cantelune baby."

"Perhaps she went with them," I said, though I

could not remember having seen her go, or indeed having seen her at all.

"No, she didn't. I've found that out," said the Honorable Byngo.

"I hope to goodness she hasn't been stolen, too," I cried.

"No fear! I should be sorry for any one who stole Polly. But don't let out that she's missing, or she'll get into the papers, too. She'll turn up all right—I know Polly. It's only that her mother's nervous."

The Honorable Byngo spoke as if he did not realize his privilege in having such a daughter; and Polly did seem to me to be a poor name for an angel-child.

"I tell you what. She's gone off hunting for this lost baby on her own," I said.

"That's it. I'll go and tell her mother," said the Honorable Byngo; and off he went.

About six pairs of nurses and policemen trickled slowly in. Not one of them had found any trace of the missing baby. No news had come from any of the outlying police-stations. The affair was beginning to look very serious indeed. By a quarter to seven all the nurses and policemen had come in.

There was nothing that I could do; and there was nothing to be gained by staying in the garden. I asked the inspector to let me know the moment anything fresh turned up and went to my house.

Richards met me in the hall and said: "If you please, m'Lord, little Miss D'Eresby has brought a baby for you to see; and they've been waiting for you most of the afternoon."

"The—the deuce she has!" I said; and I sat down on a chair.

"Yes, m'Lord; and I gave them some tea; and Martha helped Miss D'Eresby feed the baby. He's a sturdy little chap, m'Lord."

"Sturdy little—— Why you—— All London is hunting for that baby! Where is it?" I howled.

"It is up-stairs in the library, m'Lord. M-M-Miss D'Eresby preferred the library, b-b-because of the view over the garden, m'Lord," stammered Richards.

I rushed up-stairs and dashed into the library. The angel-child had her elbows on the window-sill and was watching the crowd in the garden.

"Hang it all. . . ."

"Hush, you'll wake the baby," she interrupted, and I saw the lost Lord Cantelune reposing peacefully in an armchair by her side.

“WHAT on earth . . .”

“I thought you were never coming,” she interrupted. “Binns won’t neglect this child again in a hurry. It *has* been fun watching all the excitement in the garden.”

It was no use, I had to laugh—to think of all the police and press of London in a whirl of furious energy, and the lost Lord Cantelune crawling peacefully about my library all the while.

“I thought you’d enjoy it,” said Miss D’Eresby; and she laughed pleasantly herself.

Then I put on a serious face, and reproached her for all the trouble she had given us. She was quite unmoved; she only said: “Well, something had to be done, you know.”

It was no use trying to make her see the other side of the matter; and I began to consider what I had better do. Here was the lost Lord Cantelune in my house; and I did not want a disappointed public to break the windows, and every paper in London to make poor jokes about my being a receiver of stolen babies. I thought it best to restore it to its home quietly.

I rang for Richards and told him to tell Martha to put on her hat. As soon as she came I sent the

angel-child home, telling her to say nothing about her exploit.

"As if I should!" she cried. "Papa never does understand things!"

When she had gone I sallied out of the back door with Martha carrying Lord Cantelune about ten yards behind me. Fortunately he was still asleep; and she could keep his face covered. We got to the Alpertons' undetected. The door opened at once to my knock; and she slipped up the steps and into the house in a jiffy. I slammed the door.

At first there were great rejoicings over the recovery of Lord Cantelune. Then the Alpertons began to ask questions; and when they heard what had happened, they were furious with the angel-child. But I put forward the other side of the matter firmly and several times, that it was their business to know that their baby was being neglected; and that they ought to be deucedly obliged to the angel-child for bringing it to their notice. I got them calm at last; and then I came away.

I went into the garden and told the inspector that the lost baby had been recovered. There was a wild dash of reporters to the Alpertons' house, but the door did not open. They came dashing back

to me; and I told them that a young lady had seen Lord Cantelune trying to escape from his perambulator, and thinking it dangerous, had carried him to the house of a friend where he had spent the afternoon. I did not disclose the name of the young lady; and I did not tell them that I was the friend.

CHAPTER IX

THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE angel-child kept her own counsel about the loss of Lord Cantelune in the noblest way; and I met all the questions of the interested mothers among my tenants with a point-blank refusal to tell them anything about his recovery. I did not feel that people would think that either the police or I had displayed any great intelligence in the matter; and so the less said about it the better. There was a good deal of talk about it for a day or two in the Gardens; and then people found something else to occupy their attention.

I was beginning to make an odd discovery; my Uncle Algernon had been right in expecting me to grow keen about the Gardens. The more I worked at running them the keener I grew about them. I was now particularly keen on their being spicker and spanner than any other square or street, or crescent or place, in Mayfair. Jack Thurman said

that I was growing quite touchy about them; and sometimes when I had finished saying what I thought about somebody's untidy window-boxes or balcony awning, I caught Miss Wishart smiling as if I were really amusing her. Then I had the happy idea of offering a prize of fifty pounds to the butler whose house was kept the spickest and spannest throughout the year. If the butlers made up their minds to have the house spick and span the tenants would be made to find the money.

I soon found that it was working all right, because Tubby Delamare came up to me at the Palladium one afternoon and said:

"I say, Garthoyle, it's a bit thick you offering this prize for the best-looking house in the Gardens. I never get a bit of peace now for my butler's worrying me to do something or other to the front of the house. As soon as I had it painted, he was at me for new window-boxes, and now it's fresh blinds all over the front of the house."

"And very nice they'll look," I said.

"But I put in fresh blinds two years ago; and they'd have gone another two years quite well," he grumbled.

"You can't have too much of a good thing; and

you can't have it too often," I said; and it sounded to me like a philosopher.

"That's all very well, but I'm spending money to improve your property, and then you'll raise the rent on me," he said.

"I can't raise the rent on you till your lease expires," I said.

"I knew that was the game. You're growing a regular Shylock," growled Tubby, and he rolled away.

It was no wonder that Number 16 was beginning to get on my nerves. Its tenant seemed to have shut it up and gone away for a long holiday at the very moment at which it wanted painting badly. Some of the flowers, too, in the window-boxes had died, and the rest were straggling all over the place in a disgustingly untidy way. With its grimy windows and blistering paint, and little primeval forests under each window on the ground floor and the first floor, it was a perfect eyesore, spoiling the look of the whole of the side of the triangle in which it stood.

Perhaps I should not have minded it much if it had not been next door but one to my own house. As it was I could not go out or in without being

annoyed, or, to be exact, infuriated by the sight of it.

I found that three years before my uncle had let it to Señor Pedro Vicenti, a South American merchant, on a lease of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. Plainly I had this infernal foreigner, with his dirty house, spoiling the look of the Gardens, for at any rate the next four years. Then I'd clear him out, if money or law could do it. Till then I had to stick it out. I could not conceive what had induced my uncle to let the house to a foreigner.

I wrote letter after letter to Vicenti, some to his bankers, some to Number 16, on the chance of their being forwarded to him by the post-office, asking him to clean and paint his house and have the window-boxes refilled. The first letters were firm, the later ones were firmer. I got no answer to any of them. It looked as if Vicenti had buried himself for the time being in some out-of-the-way part of South America where there were no post-offices and nothing could be done till he came out of it and struck civilization again. Number 16 would remain an eyesore until his return. It would have aggravated the ordinary house-agent beyond

endurance, but I was landlord as well. It was infuriating.

One afternoon I came out into the central garden to smoke a cigar and talk to the children. There I found Alice Devine and the angel-child. The angel-child was in great feather because she was finding Lord Cantelune's new nurse quite satisfactory. I did not join her in her satisfaction, for as I came into the garden I had unfortunately looked back, and had had a full view of the disgusting appearance of Number 16.

Presently Alice said: "What's the matter? You seem quite depressed."

"I think he's very disagreeable—quite piggish," said the angel-child frankly.

"It's that beastly house—Number 16—it makes me positively sick. I'm expecting to see a rich crop of thistles in those window-boxes before long," I said grumpily.

"Why don't you have them cut?" said Alice.

"I've no right to interfere with my tenants' window-boxes," I said.

"If I only did the things I had a right to do, I *should* find it dull," said the angel-child.

"I don't suppose your tenant would ever know;

and if he did, he would probably be much obliged to you," said Alice. "After all he's in South America."

"By jove! That's an idea," I said.

It was an idea that did not want any thinking about. The thing to do was to act.

"Come along, let's find a gardener and have it done at once," I said.

They came along briskly; the mere fact that I was going to do a forbidden thing seemed to make it quite attractive to the angel-child.

Of course the first gardener we found was Frederick. I told him to get a ladder and come and trim the window-boxes at Number 16. I was impatient to see it done and I went with him. He seemed to think he had got three days' quiet work before him. I did not see it in that way, and I hustled him along hard—in fact I got a hustle on him, as they used to say in the States when I was there. In ten minutes I had him clipping away at the boxes on the first floor. I stood on the steps of the house, directing his labors; and Alice and the angel-child stood by my side. The angel-child made suggestions. Frederick did not seem to be able to do anything quite to her liking.

Frederick had clipped the boxes in the two side windows of the drawing-room, when of a sudden he gave an awful yell, came tumbling down the ladder and hit his head a thundering crack on the pavement.

The angel-child laughed, and Alice and I ran to him. He seemed stunned. I propped him up against the steps, ran to my own house and fetched Richards. We carried Frederick into my office and set him very gently on a sofa. Alice and Miss Wishart bustled about and wrapped wet cloths round his head, and a footman ran for a doctor. Frederick began to groan; and there was a bump as big as a hen's egg on the top of his head. We waited anxiously for the doctor, and I saw that the angel-child was beginning to look really frightened.

Then Frederick came to himself and said: "Workman's Compensation Act."

I was relieved, though Frederick groaned louder than ever. Then the doctor came and examined him.

When he had done the doctor said: "You're all right, my man—only a bump on the head."

Frederick only uttered a deep groan. The doc-

tor ordered the wet cloth to be kept round his head, and to be changed again when it got warm.

I went with him to the door, and he said: "Your gardener's got a good thick skull, Lord Garthoyle. It's a good job he fell on it. He might have broken something."

I went back to Frederick and found him groaning loudly.

"What the poor fellow wants is a stiff brandy-and-soda," I said to Richards.

There was a break in Frederick's groaning, then he went on again louder than ever.

Richards brought the brandy-and-soda, mixed it, propped Frederick against the back of the sofa and held the glass to his lips.

Frederick emptied it and said feebly: "More."

"Give the poor fellow another," I said; and Richards gave him another.

Frederick swallowed it firmly, then he moaned: "I shan't be able to work fer weeks an' weeks."

"How came you to fall off the ladder?" I said.

"It was the fyce—the 'orrible fyce wiv eyes like a devil. It give me a start," said Frederick.

"Well, that was a silly fancy to bump your head for," I said.

"It warn't no fancy; I seed it plyne. It 'ad pulled the blind on one side an' was a-starin' at me," said Frederick in a firm voice.

"Rubbish. The house is empty," I said.

With two brandies-and-sodas in him, Frederick proved of a very argumentative disposition. He sat up to discuss the matter. He would have it that it was no fancy. He had looked up from his work to see a horrible face staring at him round the corner of the blind. It was such a devilish face that the sight of it had given him such a start that he had lost his balance and fallen off the ladder. He grew more and more excited about it the more firmly I expressed my disbelief in it. He forgot all about the Workman's Compensation Act and his weeks and weeks of holiday; and at last, arguing furiously, he walked to Number 16 with me. I climbed the ladder myself; there was no face there. I rapped the window; no face peered at me round the corner of the blind. The blind never stirred.

I gave Frederick half-a-sovereign to soothe the pain of the bump on his head, and fetched another gardener, had the rest of the window-boxes

trimmed and thought very little more of Frederick's silly fancy.

But a night or two later, coming back from playing baccarat and talking to Alice at Scruton's, I came upon Brookes, the most intelligent of the policemen who protect the Gardens, in front of Number 16. I remembered Frederick's story and stopped and told him about it.

Brookes knows Frederick, and he said: "Lor', m'Lord, there's nothin' in what 'e sees or don't see. If 'e seed a purply-green fyce, it wouldn't have surprised me, seein' the amount of booze 'e gets outside of in a day."

"That's what I thought," I said.

"All the syme, as it 'appens, I'm keepin' my eye on this 'ere 'ouse myself. Though it is empty, there's people 'angs about it, m'Lord."

"I wish they'd clean these filthy windows, then. They're a disgrace to the Gardens," I said.

"You may well say so, m'Lord," said Brookes in a very sympathetic way.

He went on to tell me that he had seen men—several men—foreigners—hanging about the house at night, for the last fortnight, two or three of them

at a time. They were not the foreign refuse with which London is getting choked, but well-dressed men, sometimes even in evening dress. One night he had seen two of them come out of the porch and asked them what they were doing in it. They said that they were friends of Señor Vicenti and had knocked to see if he were at home. I agreed with Brookes that it was idiotic to leave a house like that without a caretaker in it.

But these men seemed to me suspicious; and I wondered if there were anything wrong with the house. But I thought it would be safe enough if Brookes were keeping an eye on it; for he is an uncommonly intelligent policeman, and well on his way to be promoted to the rank of sergeant. I made a point of looking at the house myself when I came home at night and of trying the door of it as I passed.

About a week later I came home about half past eleven, and before going to bed I went out on the balcony. There was a bright moon; and I saw a policeman, probably Brookes—going up the left side of the triangle. Then a woman in black passed quickly along the pavement beneath me and slipped up the steps into the porch of Number 16.

I lost no time. I ran down-stairs, let myself out of the house and walked past Number 16. I saw a dark figure against its door and caught a glimpse of a white cheek and a glimmering eye as the woman turned her face to see who passed. I walked on to the corner, keeping my head over my shoulder to see if she came out of the porch. She did not. I waited three minutes, walked quietly back, and saw the dark figure still in the porch, close to the door. I walked up the steps and said sharply: "What are you doing here?"

She gave a startled little cry. Then she said in a spirited tone: "Eet ees no business of yours."

It was a pleasant voice—the voice of a lady.

"Pardon me," I said. "It is very much my business. This house is mine; my tenant is away and in his absence I keep an eye on it."

"Oh, ees eet zo?" she said coolly; and I fancied that she slipped something into her pocket.

"Yes, it is; and I should like an explanation," I said.

"Eet ees veree simple," she said slowly. "Señor Vicenti ees my oncle. I am zeeing if he ees at ze house. I am coom to London lately; and I find heem gone from eet."

It was a simple, natural explanation; and it came straight off her tongue, but I did not believe it.

"It's very late," I said.

"Not to zeek an oncle," she said with a soft laugh. "I weesh to zee heem verree mooch. I do not know when he cooms back to his house."

"Well, if there were any one in the house, they would have come to the door long before now," I said.

"Zat ees true," she said with a little sigh. "But once more I weel try."

And with that she beat a thundering tattoo on the door with the knocker. As the knocks went ringing out on the quiet Gardens, I realized that she had not knocked before. Of course she might have been ringing.

"If there ees any one in ze house, zey weel hear that," she said; and she laughed a queer soft laugh, with a kind of threat in it, uncomfortable to hear.

And then she came down the steps without waiting a moment to hear if her knocking had roused any one. It was an odd thing to do.

In the full light of the moon I saw that she was

a very pretty girl, with very red lips in a pale face, and large velvety eyes. I fancied that they looked at me in a rather mocking way.

We walked along to the corner and I turned down Carisbrooke Street with her.

Then she stopped and said: "Zere ees no need for you to coom with me."

"I don't think that your uncle would like you to be walking about alone at this hour; and since he is my tenant, he would think it only proper that I should see you home, or at any rate put you into a cab," I said.

I meant to hear the address she gave the cabman.

She looked at my face and she saw that I meant to come. Perhaps I was looking obstinate. I was certainly feeling obstinate.

"Veree well," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "But zere ees no need. My motor-car ees waiting for me at ze end of ze street."

We went on; and half-way down the street I said: "You're expecting your uncle to return soon?"

"I do not know," she said.

"Well, I hope he'll wash his windows when he does come," I said.

"Wash—hees—windows?" she said; and she stared at me with her eyes wide open.

"Yes; the windows of his house. They're a disgrace to the Gardens. Do you think that you could have them washed?"

"Deesgraceful?—Me?—Oh, but you Eengleesh—you are fonny," she said, and laughed.

It was a charming laugh; but I could not see anything funny about the windows of the eyesore. They were disgusting.

Sure enough, at the bottom of the street, a big motor-car was standing against the curb. I opened the door of it for her and she stepped into it.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night," said I; and the car started off at a smart pace.

Of course there was no taxi in sight. If there had been, I should certainly have taken the liberty of seeing where the car went.

The car went round the corner and I turned back. I wished I had asked her to inform me immediately of her uncle's return, that I might have started on him at once about the disgraceful appearance of the outside of his house.

I came home wondering about her. Certainly

she did not seem the kind of person to feel anxious about. She was not one of the criminal class, of that I was quite sure. I looked about for her for a day or two; but I saw nothing of her. She did not come again to seek her uncle at any time when I was in the Gardens. Neither did Señor Vicenti return, nor were any preparations made for his return, nor were the windows washed.

It was four or five days later that coming home one night I met Brookes at the corner of Carisbrooke Street. I stopped and asked him if he had seen any more suspicious characters lingering about Number 16.

"Well, not lingering, m'Lord. But last night I seed, or anyways I thought I seed, two men and a woman come down the steps of it. But I couldn't be sure. I was right the other side of the Gardens; and they hooked it off down Carisbrooke Street an' was out of sight long before I could get round."

"It's all very odd," I said. "And then again, it mayn't be anything at all. Just friends or business people anxious to see Señor Vicenti."

I wished him good night and went on home. I just had time to mix myself a lemon-squash, and was drinking it, up in the library, where drinks

and biscuits are always set for me, in case I come home late and am hungry or thirsty, when I heard a loud knocking at one of the front doors near. I went out on the balcony and found that it came from Number 16. I ran down-stairs and along to it, expecting to find the pretty niece of Señor Vicenti again seeking her uncle. Instead of her I found Brookes in its porch. The door was ajar, and as I ran up the steps, he rang and knocked again.

“This is a rum start, m’Lord,” he said. “I comes up the steps to take a look at this door; I gives it a shove and open it goes. I don’t like the looks of it at all. The lock ’as bin tampered with an’ not to-night. I’ve ’ad me eyes on this ’ere ’ouse all the evening. I think I’d better find Barnett an’ take a look round it.”

“There’s no need to fetch Barnett, I’ll go round it with you,” said I.

Brookes hesitated a moment; then he said: “Very well, m’Lord,” and he opened the door wider and went in.

I followed him. The light of his lantern cut but a small wedge in the darkness of the big empty hall. He drew the door to behind us. I noticed

an odd unpleasant smell—not exactly musty—but rather like it. I could not place it, though I was sure that I had smelt it before. Then I stumbled over a basket standing a yard or so inside the hall.

Brookes turned the light of his lantern on it; and we saw that it was about two feet square and the lid was shut. In the lid was an odd little trap-door about four inches square, and that was open.

“It’s a rummy-lookin’ basket. I’ve never seed one with an extra lid like that,” said Brookes; and then he added: “It do smell—like as if it ’ad ’ad an hanimal in it.”

“Yes: but what animal?” I said.

“I can’t rightly call it to mind,” said Brookes. As he spoke I took a step forward and tripped over a wire stretched across the hall, about six inches from the floor; and on the instant a shrill bell started ringing quickly, high up in the house.

“Electric burglar alarm,” said Brookes.

He stepped forward to take a look at the wire my foot had struck, his own foot struck another wire running parallel to it and set another shrill bell ringing.

We stood quite still. I was waiting for some one

to call to us from the top of the house. I was sure that some one would call. But no one did, nor was there any stir. Only the shrill bells rang.

Brookes swept the light of his lantern over the floor of the hall. It was mapped out into squares by a network of wires.

"If there ain't a few," he said.

"Rather silly to have the house full of burglar alarms and nobody in it to hear them," I said.

"That's just it," said Brookes; and I noticed that we were both talking in whispers.

Then he shouted: "Is there any one up-stairs? It's the pleece!"

There was no answer. One of the bells stopped ringing; the other rang on.

"Well, we'd better look into it," I said.

Stepping over the wires, we went round the hall trying the doors. All of them were locked and there were no keys in them. Then Brookes' foot struck another wire and set another bell ringing.

Then we came to the stairs. At the foot of them we were brought up short by a barricade of barbed wire.

"Why, hang it all! The house is fortified against an assault! This isn't burglars!" I cried.

"It's a rum start," said Brookes.

"And nobody would fortify an empty house," I exclaimed.

"Hush, I thought I 'eard somebody movin'," said Brookes; and then he shouted: "Hi! You there up-stairs! It's the pleece. Your front door wants locking."

His voice went echoing away up the stairs, about the landings and died away at the top of the house. There was no answer. Then the last alarm stopped ringing; and all was very still. It was oddly creepy too. The shaft of light from the lantern left a lot of darkness about us; and there was the odd smell.

"We must try up-stairs," I said.

Brookes turned his light on the barricade; and I saw that it was a set of barbed wire screens, about five feet high, half of them hinged to the banisters, half to the wall. They were overlapping one another. By drawing the nearest toward one and pushing back to the next to it, a passage was opened through the barricade. It was not very difficult to make one's way along. But it was slow going, and it only let one man through at a time. It was practically impassable for a woman, if she

were wearing a skirt. Moreover, one was helpless inside it, since one had to keep one's arms to one's sides, or up above one's head. A man on the flight of stairs above could have shot down any number of men, through the banisters, before the barricade could be forced. He would have been out of sight to any one standing in the hall. It was plainly enough meant to stop an assault in force; and it was an odd find in Garthoyle Gardens.

I started to get past it and worked my way gingerly through the screens; it was not very difficult and I did not tear my coat. Then I held the lantern to light Brookes through it. He caught his thicker coat once in one of the barbs; but he disentangled it without tearing the cloth.

We had just come through, when I heard a faint rustle higher up the stairs. I turned the light of the lantern on them, and ten steps up it fell on a snake—a snake with a big head reared above its coils. It was so unexpected, and everything was so odd, that it looked to me as big as a ship's hawser.

I gasped, and I heard Brookes gasp.

"Over the banisters," I cried.

Brookes was over them in a jiffy. I threw the

lantern at the snake, slipped over them myself, and landed on top of Brookes.

We did not say anything. We started for the front door, tripping and stumbling over the wire, setting off alarum after alarum, till the whole of the top of the house was one shrill jangling ringing.

Out in the porch we drew the door to and looked at each other, and wiped our faces with our handkerchiefs.

"Well, that was nice. Snakes in the dark are a trifle thick," I said.

"They are, m'Lord. It's a daylight job, this is," said Brookes.

"So that was what the hall and the basket smelt of—that snake," I said.

"That's what it was. It must live in that basket—like as if it were a kennel. It's the queerest watch-dog I ever see—likewise the nastiest to tackle," said Brookes.

I thought for a minute or two, then I said: "I don't believe it is a watch-dog. It would be too difficult to handle. No. It doesn't belong to the house. It's been brought here. I believe it was brought last night—in that basket."

"But who'd bring a snake in a basket?" said Brookes.

"Probably the people you saw come away from the house last night."

"But what would they bring it for, m'Lord? It ain't a thing to joke with. It looked to me a regular boar-constrictor, like you sees at the Zoo," said Brookes.

"Burglar alarums and barbed wire are no good against a snake. It can crawl anywhere. It's not a watch-dog. It's just the other thing—a what-d'you-call-it?—an instrument of destruction," I said.

"That's a rummy idea," said Brookes.

"I've seen it in a story called—what was it called? *The Black Man's Servant*. A snake was used to commit a murder in it. Somebody else has been reading that story," I said.

"I always says as them detective stories does a lot of 'arm—especially to growing boys," said Brookes. "You think as 'ow it's meant for Mr. Vicenti when 'e comes 'ome—a kind of unpleasant welcome like?"

"I don't see any reason to suppose that he has gone away. You don't fortify a house like that and

then clear out of it. He may be kept a prisoner in some room by the fear of that snake," I said.

"Then he'd 'ave called out to us when I called to 'im," said Brookes.

"It does look bad," I said.

"This job's too big for you an' me to 'andle, m'Lord," said Brookes. "An' the sooner I lets the inspector know about it the better."

"All right," I said. "I'll go round to the police-station and tell him about it, while you keep watch on the house."

"Thank you, m'Lord; that will save time," said Brookes.

I went briskly round to the police-station and told the inspector what we had found at Number 16. He did not seem greatly astonished, though he said that it was a rum start. Of course, since his work lies in Mayfair, he is used to queer things.

He put a sergeant in charge of the station and came back with me at once. Brookes had heard no sound in the house while I had been gone. The inspector opened the door a little way and swept the light of his lantern round the hall. We could not see the snake; it had not come down the stairs. Perhaps my throwing the lantern at it had fright-

ened it up them. After a short conference with Brookes, the inspector also decided that to explore the house in the face of a snake behind the wire entanglements was not a night job. He would wait for the daylight. I offered to help, to bring a gun and shoot the snake for them; and the inspector accepted my offer at once. He decided that four o'clock would be soon enough to start the examination of the house.

I went back to my house, awoke Mowart, and told him to wake me at half past three and have some coffee ready for me. Then I went to bed. Mowart called me at half past three; and while I had my bath and dressed, took some coffee and biscuits out to the inspector and his men. Then I had some coffee and biscuits myself. I put on a pair of shooting-boots and thick leather gaiters, took a gun, and went round to Number 16.

I found the inspector, Brookes and two other men ready at the door. I led the way in, with my gun ready. The hall was very dim, but Brookes drew up the blinds; and the light streamed in. It looked in the daylight a very ordinary hall indeed, but for the network of wires that covered the floor. All the creepiness had gone with the dark-

ness, but not the smell. There was no snake in it. The inspector examined the basket; and we found that it was not a special make, but just an ordinary basket with a piece cut, rather roughly, out of its lid, and fastened to it with hinges of string to make a little trap-door.

“I don't think we're going to get anything out of this—amateur work,” said the inspector; and he set the basket down.

The doors of the rooms opening into the hall were locked, and there were no keys in them. The door leading into the back of the house was also locked; and there was no key in it.

We went to the staircase, which was in a good light from the hall window. The snake was not on the bottom flight of stairs. I wormed my way through the barricade; and I was a bit uncomfortable while I was doing it and glad to get to the other side. If the snake had come at me while I was in the middle of it, I should have been helpless. I could not possibly have used my gun. I walked up to the landing and drew up the blind. There was no snake on the second flight.

The inspector and the policemen came through the barricade; and we went up to the second floor.

I stood on the top of the stairs, looking about me, when Brookes, who stood just behind me, cried: "There he goes, m'Lord! At the end of the passage!"

In the dimly-lighted corridor facing me something was moving along the wainscoting. I threw up my gun and put a charge of shot into it. The report of the gun fairly bellowed about the house; and we all stood still for a minute, listening. There wasn't a sound; yet that bang had been loud enough to wake the dead.

"There ain't nobody in this 'ouse—except us," said one of the policemen.

"Nobody alive," said I.

We went along the corridor; and Brookes pulled up the blind of the window at the end of it. The snake was quite dead, fairly riddled with shot. I picked it up and looked at it.

"I say, this isn't the snake that bolted us last night. It's much smaller, and it hasn't such a big head," I said.

"It's a lot smaller, m'Lord," said Brookes.

"Ah, you saw it in a bad light; and you were startled," said the inspector.

"No; it *is* smaller. I'm sure of it," I said; and

I thought for a minute. "And after all, why should there be only one snake? That basket would hold a dozen," I added.

It was not a pleasant thought, and we looked at one another uncomfortably. I slipped another cartridge into my gun. Fortunately, I had, without thinking, put a handful into my pocket.

We moved cautiously on, and I led the way. The doors of some of the rooms on the first floor were open, and I went into each of them first, with my gun ready. The first two rooms—a library and a smoking-room—were empty. The third room was a drawing-room, and as I went into it I heard a rustle. The blinds were down and the room was dim.

"Keep out!" I cried, went to one of the windows and jerked up the blind.

Ten feet from me, in an easy chair, a big-headed snake was rearing itself up. I blew its head off. At the bang of the gun two smaller snakes came darting out of hiding.

I shouted, "Shut the door!" and jumped on a chair.

The door banged to and the snakes darted quickly backward and forward along and across

the room. I cut one clean in two with the other barrel. Then I reloaded, and when the smoke had cleared a little, I shot the other. Then I waited a while to see if any more came out, but none did. I called out that it was all right and the policemen came in. I *had* made a mess of the room; I had cut the back of the easy chair to ribbons and spoiled the carpet.

We examined the dead snakes, and Brookes and I both agreed that the big-headed snake, which I had shot in the easy chair, was the one we had seen on the stairs. Then I went to the middle window, in which was the window-box Frederick had been clipping when he fell, and examined the blind. It was very dusty, and on one side near its edge were finger-prints. Frederick had been right: some one had drawn the blind on one side and looked at him round the edge of it. The house had not been empty.

There were no more snakes in any of the other rooms on the first floor. When we had made sure of it we went to the staircase of the second floor. There was a barricade at the bottom of it—a large mass of barbed wire—but it was drawn up close to the ceiling, and could be let down with a rope

to fill the whole width of the staircase to a height of six feet. It was a very clever idea. I led the way up the stairs, and was a few steps up the second flight when a big snake came quickly over the top stair right down at me. I fired from the hip; it gave a jump, pitched down the stairs, hitting my leg as it passed, and fell a squirming, hissing heap on the landing. I fired the other barrel into it as the policemen fell tumbling over one another down the lower flight.

I was beginning to enjoy it; but then I had a gun. The policemen looked uncommonly nervous and shaky. The snake was the biggest one we had come across yet.

I gave the policemen a little time to pull themselves together and then we went up to the second floor. The doors of all the rooms were closed, and it did not seem likely that there were any snakes in them. However, we looked through them all—they were bedrooms—and made sure that there were no snakes in them. Then I led the way, under another barbed wire barricade, hung to the ceiling, up the narrow staircase to the third floor. In all the houses in the Gardens the third floor is arranged as servants' quarters, and the rooms are

small. The doors of all but one of them were open.

"Here's the end of the search," I said, tapping the closed door; and the inspector opened it.

The blind was down, but the room was brightly lighted by the burning gas. On the bed lay the body of a swarthy, hook-nosed, black-haired man of about fifty-five. He was dressed in pajamas and a dressing-gown. I saw at the first glance that he was dead. The inspector pointed to his swollen left ankle, in which there were two deep wounds. Plainly he had cut away the flesh round the punctures from the snake's fangs; but it had been no use. A half-smoked cigar had fallen from the fingers of his right hand and burned a hole in the blanket. On the table by the bed was an empty champagne-bottle, and a glass half-full of the wine stood beside it.

"A cool hand, and tough," said the inspector. "Found that it was all up with him, and died enjoying himself—not been dead long, either."

"Well, if the snakes were brought here the night before last by the people Brookes saw, they've only been in the house thirty hours," I said. "I

expect he was going about in the dark in his pajamas and trod on one of them."

"That's it," said the inspector. "But I wonder that he didn't bolt out to a doctor."

"He was probably afraid that the people who had brought the snakes were waiting for him, or perhaps he knew the snake, and that it was no use bothering about a doctor. He looks as if he had been well baked in the tropics."

"Perhaps that's it, m'Lord," said the inspector.

Hanging on the wall were a magazine rifle and two shotguns with their barrels cut short to spread buck-shot. All along one side of the room were the burglar alarms which the wires in the hall set ringing.

We came out and explored the other rooms. One was a kitchen with a gas-stove in it, kept very clean; another was a library with shelves and shelves full of French and Spanish novels; another was a bathroom. The room beyond the bathroom was a storeroom full of tinned meats, soups, vegetables and milks enough to have fed an expedition to the South Pole. The next room was a larder full of hams, sides of bacon, cheeses, dried tongues

and salt butter. The last room was a cellar full of champagne, burgundy, port and old brandy.

On the floor of the cellar lay a smashed bottle of burgundy with a little wine still in the bottom of it. It looked to me as if my tenant might have dropped that bottle when the snake bit him. I took one of the long laths on which the rows of bottles lay, from one of the bins, and poked under the bottles, and rapped here and there. Presently I heard a rustle. I stepped back and dropped on one knee. That was no use, and I lay down flat on the floor. The bottom row of bottles was not above six inches from the floor, and it was dark under it. I peered about; presently I fancied I saw something move, and fired at a venture and sprang to my feet. There was a noise of thrashing and a snake came squirming out. I fired the other barrel into it and cut it into strips. I have no doubt that it was the snake which had bitten Vicenti.

There was nothing more I could do and I went home to bed, leaving Number 16 in the hands of the police. I was some time getting to sleep, for I could not help trying to puzzle out the explanation of Vicenti's barricading himself in his house.

There was no doubt that with all these provisions he could have stood a two or three years' siege. With those barricades the house could not be carried by assault—not by fifty men. He could probably have shot as many as that before they got through the first barricade. I wondered and wondered who his enemies were. I wondered how they had found out that the house was not empty; I wondered what part the pretty girl with the brown velvety eyes had played in the business. I did not think that it was a small one.

The papers were quiet till the inquest; then they were noisy enough. They found plenty of answers to the questions the case raised. They found too many. Some said that Vicenti had fallen a victim to the vengeance of the Camorra; others of the Mafia; others of the Black Hand; others of the Russian Revolutionaries. Others again suggested that he had had some valuable jewels in the house, and that as soon as his enemies were sure that the snakes had done their work, they would have come in the daytime, killed the snakes, searched the house at their leisure and carried off the jewels. They could not all be right; though they could all be wrong; and all of them were quite sure that a

mystery that must be known to so many people would soon be solved. It was not.

The inquest was adjourned, and presently the newspapers let the matter drop and I was no longer pestered by reporters wanting to interview me about how I felt during what the placards called "PEER'S HEROIC SNAKE-HUNT." For weeks my friends called me "Heroic Snake-Hunter."

The police, however, did not let the matter drop; they were hunting among the snake-dealers, Jamrach and the rest, for the man who had bought the snakes. They got on his track easily enough. He was plainly the young Spanish collector who had bought them for his collection, as he put it. But the police did not find the young Spanish collector. The other chance of getting to the bottom of the business was to find the pretty girl who had told me that she was Vicenti's niece. I grew very tired of detectives calling to see me with photographs of all the female scum of Europe and the Americas, on the chance that I might recognize one of them as her.

It was not the slightest use my telling them that she was quite all right—a lady, and not an adventuress at all. The other odd thing was, that

though Vicenti was worth nearly a million, no heirs turned up to claim the money. The police could not discover anything about him, neither who he was nor what his business had been.

Then I met the pretty girl—on the Lawn at Ascot.

She was wearing a charming frock—what they call a confection—evidently from Paris; and there wasn't a doubt that she was one of the prettiest women at the meeting. She was talking to a tall, sallow, black-bearded man when my eyes fell on her. I stared at her, very naturally, trying to make up my mind what to do; then she saw me. She looked at me quietly enough and said something to the tall man; he turned and looked at me too. Then she left him, came across the Lawn to me, and held out her hand.

“How do you do, Lord Garthoyle?” she said, with a charming smile. “I knew that we should meet zooner or later.”

“How do you do?” I said, shaking her hand. “I have been hoping we should meet ever since the evening you called on your uncle in Garthoyle Gardens.”

“Zo have the poleece, I believe,” she said, with

another charming smile, and she led the way out of the crowd to a couple of chairs beside a little table.

We looked at each other, and she said: "I moost introduce myself. I am the Señora Carvalho. My husband ees ze Colombian Ambassador. Was eet not strange about my oncle—your tenant of Number 16? He was not my oncle truly. Oh, no. He was El Caballo."

"Was he?" said I, though I had never heard of El Caballo in my life.

"Yes; sometime een Colombia zey call heem ze 'Black President'; sometime ze 'Red President.' He was president for four monz. And what a horror! He was a murderer and brigand at first; and when he was president he was vorse—oh, mooch vorse. He robbed and murdered and tortured not only hees enemies, but also hees own party." She paused; she was not smiling now; then she added slowly: "He shot my fazer and my brozer—a leetle boy of twelve."

"The hound!" I said.

"My mozer was zere and I. I was nine years old. My mozer died verree soon. At the end of

four monz, he disappeared, ze president—suddenly. We zought zat he had been killed quietly and buried, zough eet was strange zat nobody could find ze money he had stolen. People talked about heem for years when I was a child. Zen zey forgot heem. Eight monz ago I recognized heem in Piccadilly. He was verree different—oh, yes, verree different. But I knew heem—right zere. He did not know me; and I followed heem to hees house een Garthoyle Gardens.”

“I see,” I said.

“Zome of my friends came from Colombia—zons of murdered fazers. Zey coom quickly. But zomehow he learned zat zey had coom. We do not know how he learnt eet, but he knew why zey had coom. He shut up hees house; and we zought zat he had gone away. We could not find out where he had gone; but we waited. Always one or ze ozer watch ze house. But he nevaire came. Zen one of my coosins een ze beeg garden een ze meedle, on a hot day, saw a—what would you call eet?—he saw ze heat twinkle above a chimney. Zo we know zat he was zere. Zen another coosin got into ze house from ze back, and found ze barricade. He

tooched a wire een ze hall; and ze bell rang. El Caballo fired at heem, and heet heem in ze shoulder, but my coosin got out of ze house. We did not know what to do. Zen I planned ze snakes. I saw zem een a book, an Eengleesh book called *Ze Skipper's Wooing*, but only one snake was een ze book. We got more snakes, to make sure. My coosin bought zem and went quickly out of England. Zen we poot zem in ze house."

"I'm jolly glad you got him—the hound wanted killing off," I said.

"Ah, you onderstand," she said, with a little sigh of relief. "And my friends have gone back to Colombia, and my husband he does not know. An Ambassador should not know zese zings."

I nodded.

"But eet ees strange zat ze police know nozing—nozing at all?" she said anxiously.

"They will never know anything about it, or about any one connected with it. I'm quite sure of that. The brute wanted killing off," I said firmly.

"Zank you," she said, and she smiled. "I knew zat a gentleman would onderstand."

I thought for a moment and then I said: "He

must have turned pretty cold when you hammered at the door that night."

"I zought of zat," she said. And she laughed—the soft, queer, uncomfortable little laugh. "But coom, let me introduce you to my husband."

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT CLIPP SCANDAL

WE soon found Señor Carvalho; and she introduced me to him. He seemed rather grave and solemn—I thought too grave and solemn for her. We had tea together and talked about the racing and the theaters. I came away from the meeting very pleased to have learned the solution of the snake mystery. But I could not expect to let Number 16 for some time, not while the murder was fresh in people's minds. They would always be expecting that if they took it, Vicenti's ghost would walk. However, I had the house painted and the windows cleaned, so that it ceased to be an eyesore; and that was very satisfactory.

But things always come in battalions, as I believe Shakespeare pointed out; and presently I had Clipp on my hands. I do not know whether it is part

of the duty of the ordinary house-agent to look after the respectability of the houses he lets; but every one seems to expect me to look after the respectability of the Gardens. Indeed, the way my tenants worry me with fussy letters generally, makes me inclined to agree with those Socialist beggars who say that everybody ought to work. I wish my tenants worked—I should like to give some of them hard labor, and their wives too. Then they would have something else to do but worry me.

After the way I had dealt with the hieroglyphics in his porch, Sir Marmaduke Ponderbury had stopped his everlasting letters. I think he had grown a bit timid of me. But with tenants it seems to me that when one is down, another comes up. And Sir Nugent Clipp began to make a bigger nuisance of himself than old Ponderbury had ever done. We call him Nugget Clipp, because he is the meanest man in London.

Most of my tenants kick at spending money on their houses, though they rent them on repairing leases; but it seemed to be Nugget's idea not to spend a single penny on his, but to get me to do all the spending for him. I was always getting letters from him—his butler brought them round to

save the postage—calling on me to make some repair that was entirely his business. When I refused, he would write again and again, repeating the demand. That was annoying enough; but he did not stop at letters. When he saw that it was no use writing he would get the work done and tell the man who did it to send the bill in to me. Then there was a correspondence with the tradesman. I said again and again (Jack Thurman and Miss Wishart must have grown tired of hearing me say it) that what Nugget wanted was his neck wringing. Accounts are nuisance enough in all conscience without their being muddled up by tricks like Clipp's.

Besides, thanks to his stinginess, his house was the worst kept and the dingiest in the Gardens. After I had painted Number 16 I took good care to point this out to him in letter after letter, requesting him to have it painted, or to have the paint washed, or to have his window-boxes trimmed, or his awnings cleaned.

One way and another I was not on good terms with him, though I carried on all my correspondence with him through Garth and Thurman; for, in spite of this, he never saw me without trying to get some repair or other out of me. I have seen his

whiskers positively bristle with eagerness to touch me for three-and-sixpence. I was always very short and frequently nasty with him—not that that stopped him having another try next time he came across me. It was a blessing I could spot him a long way off. He is a short, dapper, whiskered little man, with pale blue eyes, which in some lights are yellow like a cat's; and he has a habit of wearing tweed suits, very badly cut, of a large black-and-white check. No one has ever seen him in anything else; and they have a theory at the Palladium that many years ago he bought a thousand yards of that tweed, cheap, off a bankrupt, and has it made up into suits by a village tailor, when once a year he has braced himself up to spending half-a-sovereign on clothes. I have no doubt that that is the fact of the matter; and I am glad of it; often and often, as I bolted round a corner or into a cab, have I blessed his taste in dress, which enabled me to recognize him so far off.

When I heard that he was going abroad for two months to escape his annual attack of hay-fever, I *was* pleased. I was in the office when Jack told me; and I shouted with joy and danced something like the Highland fling, much to the surprise of

Miss Wishart, who, I fancy, still believes that peers go in for calm repose.

I had the good luck to be present at Nugget's departure. He stood on the pavement, having an altercation with the driver of a four-wheeler about the fare to Liverpool Street. It had become an altercation when I came up; and Nugget, who was purple in the face, appealed to me. He said the fare was eighteenpence; the cabman said it was two shillings.

I said it was half-a-crown.

Nugget nearly burst all over the pavement. He called me an extravagant waster, told the cabman he would give him two shillings and jumped into the cab.

I put my head in at the window and said: "Another time you ask me to do you a service, Clipp, I shall simply refuse."

Nugget stuck his purple face into mine and howled: "Service! Service! A fine service! Sixpence is what asking your opinion has cost me. I don't believe you know anything about it!"

He was quite right. I did not know anything about it; but I was hardly going to lose the chance of brightening Nugget's last hours in England for

want of a little expert knowledge. I was pleased to have done it; but I was a great deal more pleased to have seen the last of him for the next two months.

I met Brookes on his beat three nights later; and I was not at all surprised to learn from him that Nugget had simply shut up his house and left no caretaker in charge of it. I could have betted that he had economized in that way. Then, only a week later I was disgusted to see the well-known check which covered him in the porch of Number 3. I hoped that it had been a hallucination; but next morning some of the blinds were drawn, and there was no doubt that he had returned to his house and his hay-fever.

That evening I was strolling past his house when he came down the steps with a kit-bag in his hand.

"Evening, Nugget—sorry to see that your travels have come to an end so soon," I said.

Nugget sneezed three times and said in a spluttering croak: "Who said they had come to an end? Ah-tish-oo! Ah-tish-oo! Ah-tish-oo!"

"Well, it's a pity that they have been interrupted—for I can see that the hay-fever has got hold of you," said I.

“Yes; it has—confound it!” croaked Nugget; and he sneezed again. “Bud I’b off agaid next week—ged rid of id in Idaly.”

“Well, I hope you’ll arrange to have your window-boxes kept clean while you’re away.”

“Sha’d spent a penny on them—nod a penny,” said Nugget.

“Well, I’ll have them kept tidy for you, send you in the bill and sue you for it. Good night,” I said cheerfully; and I strolled on, leaving him spluttering and sneezing.

It seemed likely that a man with such a stiff dose of hay-fever on him would not write any more letters than he was obliged; and Nugget did not. I saw him twice during the next three days, in the evening; and every time he was dragging that kit-bag with him. I wondered if he kept it with him in case he might be able to dash off at a moment’s notice to Italy. Hay-fever like that would make any one be prepared to bucket off instantly, if he got the chance, without waiting to go home and pack.

Then to my intense surprise I found him at one of Scruton’s baccarat parties, playing hard. I was

not the only surprised one there; two men told me that they had never known Nugget would stake a penny on a game of any kind; and one of them suggested that the hay-fever had flown to his brain. We kept on stopping our play to watch him. He was playing very cautiously; and he sniffed and sneezed steadily without a break; and when he lost he spluttered.

I played for a good while because the piebald duke, Sir Theobald Walsh, and Le Quesne were sitting around Alice Devine talking to her; and general conversation was not what I wanted. But when they came to the table, I left it and went to her.

"You seem to have been having a regular conference," I said, as I sat down.

"We've been talking about my uncle's new guest, Sir Nugent Clipp," she said.

"I'll bet anything they weren't lavishing compliments on him," I said.

"Oh, no; they all said he was the meanest man in London; and they were telling me mean things he had done. Some of them were very funny," said Alice, smiling.

"We all love Clipp," I said.

"Then I'm sure he doesn't deserve it," she said.

"But why does he make up?"

"Make up?" said I. "Nugget isn't made up."

"Oh, yes, he is," she said firmly.

"Then Nugget must be going in for a beauty-show; anything to turn an honest penny. Nugget loves it."

"I don't know about that," said Alice. "But his face is certainly painted—the wrinkles round his eyes would be ever so much deeper if he hadn't partly painted them out."

"Oh, I must look into this," I said. "Nugget's one of my tenants. I can't have my tenants improving nature, though there is a lot of room for it in Nugget's case. Come along, let's go and take a look at him from close to." We rose and went to the table, and pretending to watch the game, sidled up behind Nugget. I looked and looked, but I could not see any make-up. His wrinkles looked real enough to me. We came back to our chairs and sat down.

"Well?" said Alice.

"I can't see it," I said. "His wrinkles look natural enough to me. There's no paint."

"But there is," said Alice.

"I tell you what, the wrinkles may look painted because the dear old Nugget has been economizing in the matter of soap," I said.

"Men do say horrid things about one another," said Alice.

"Yes; it's jealousy—Nugget's pretty whiskers," I said.

"But it *is* paint," said Alice obstinately.

We argued the matter for some time, discussing who had the better eyesight. Then we stopped talking about Nugget and talked of pleasanter things. Then she slipped away to bed. I went back to the card-table and played steadily.

When the party broke up, Nugget was almost in tears—not hay-fever tears, but the other kind—tears from the heart. He whined and spluttered, and spluttered and whined, because he had lost eighteen pounds. No one seemed the slightest bit sorry for him.

The next night I was motoring off to a dance at about ten o'clock, when I passed Nugget in a four-wheeler with a big portmanteau on the top of it; and I thought that losing eighteen pounds had been too much for him and driven him off again on

his travels. But next morning I was again disappointed, for I saw that Number 3 was still inhabited.

That evening I was strolling round the Gardens, smoking a cigar after dinner, when I came upon Brookes and stopped to talk to him. He takes a great interest in the affairs of the inhabitants of the Gardens; and since he is a great favorite with the maids on his beat, he knows a great deal about them. Of course one should not talk to a policeman about one's tenants, but then they were Brookes's only topic of conversation; and I generally pulled him up when his gossip grew scandalous.

In the middle of our talk he said: "I hear as Sir Nugent Clipp is goin' orf again. An' las' night I seed him drive off, with his portmanteau, in a four-wheeler—a four-wheeler always seems to be 'is fancy. I thought 'e'd gorn; but 'e was back there this mornin'."

"He's a long time getting started," said I.

"I do wish, m'Lord, as you'd tell 'im 'e ought ter leave a caretaker in that 'ouse. These big 'ouses can't be properly watched from the outside. There's so many ways of gettin' into 'em," said Brookes rather anxiously.

"If I come across him again before he starts, I will. But I don't think it's much use, because he hates spending money," I said.

"'E's an economical gentleman," said Brookes.

I bade him good night and strolled on.

It was two days later that the first Clipp scandal, not the great one, occurred; and it was at Scruton's. Clipp was there again, playing away; and I took it that he had come after his eighteen pounds. I hoped he would not recover them.

I did not see anything of his play during the earlier part of the evening, though I noticed that his hay-fever made him a perfect nuisance with his sniffing and sneezing to the people near him. I was busy talking to Alice after a little trouble with that hulking brute Sir Theobald Walsh. He tried to monopolize her; and I tried to too—I did it. I think she rather enjoyed having us snap at each other about her; and it was very natural—a pretty girl does. When she went to bed, I went to the card-table, sat down, and punted gently.

Nugget was still sniffing and sneezing away, and presently he croaked that he would take the bank; and he took it. The luck had been against it most of the evening; but now it turned. Nugget began

to win; and he went on winning. Soon, too, most of the men were betting heavily, more heavily than usual; all of them were burning to take it out of Nugget. Nugget made them worse; he had a nasty sneering chuckle when he won that would have aggravated a saint into staking his last farthing. He did not aggravate me; for I could not see myself letting the dear old whiskered chap have my money. I went on punting gently—just enough to give me an interest in the game and no more.

The bank had won about six thousand when Le Quesne, who sat opposite to me, gave me half a wink and shook his head. What Le Quesne doesn't know about cards is not worth knowing. I took it as a notice to stop; and I stopped. Le Quesne got up, went to the side-table and poured himself out a brandy-and-soda. I joined him and did the same.

"I say, Garthoyle, did it ever strike you that Nugget wasn't on the square?" he said in a low voice.

"No—I don't know. I never thought about it. Of course he's desperately mean," I said.

"Yes; that's what I should have said—just mean," said Le Quesne.

"And mean men don't often stay on the square," I said. "But why? What's the matter?"

"I swear that I saw his fingers twinkle—twice. And I'm as quick at seeing fingers twinkle as most men, for I've played in queer company oftener than most. Of course, I may be wrong. Perhaps it's liver."

He walked across the room, looked at the whites of his eyes in a mirror, and came back to me.

"You must be wrong," I said. "It's nonsense to suppose that Nugget has suddenly blossomed into a card-sharper. Why, it takes years of practise."

"It does. But after all, none of us knows how Nugget spends his time. He doesn't hunt; he doesn't shoot; he doesn't even play golf; and he never goes racing. Of course, he collects things—china and so on—but that doesn't take up much of a man's time. He may have been spending two or three hours a day for years, preparing this little treat for us."

"He must spend a deuce of a lot of his time saving money," said I.

"He may have been spending it getting ready to earn a little off us," said Le Quesne. "Come along

and have a look yourself. You may see something, and you may not. It takes a practised eye. Every year for a month I hire a conjurer to do card tricks before me for an hour every day—just to keep my eye bright.”

“Then you ought to be able to see fingers twinkle,” I said; and we went back to the table.

I confined myself to betting an occasional sovereign, and I watched with all my eyes. The bank went on winning; but I saw nothing. When it had won about nine thousand, the seasoned punters seemed to make up their minds at about the same time that they were up against a phenomenal run, and they dropped out—as far, that is, as serious betting went. Two or three of the younger men went on merrily, and, of course, the piebald duke plunged steadily away. Nugget sniffed and sneezed, and sniggered and sneered, and won and won. The duke dropped two thousands running, and then he seemed to have had enough for the evening. He stopped and the game petered out. Nugget had won nearly twelve thousand on one bank.

He was gathering up the last lot of notes, and everybody was talking—cursing their luck chiefly; Nugget had a sneezing fit, and I saw Le Quesne slide

a dozen cards off the table with his left hand and slip them into his trousers pocket. We broke up, discussing the bank's run.

Next morning I was just finishing my breakfast when Richards ushered in Le Quesne. We greeted each other; he sat down, lighted a cigar and took a handful of playing-cards out of his pocket.

"I've found out how the good Nugget rooked us last night," said he.

"It was rooking, was it?" said I.

"Rather! If you come to think of it, a red-eyed man, with hay-fever on him, couldn't be so lucky as that. Take a look at the corner of these cards through this glass—and feel them," he said; and he handed me the cards and a magnifying-glass.

It was small, but it was very powerful. I looked at the corner of the cards through it and saw quite plainly two little dints—I should think they had been made with the point of a pin—in the corner of each eight and nine. I could feel them, too, but not very distinctly.

"Well, this is thick," I said.

"Isn't it? Nugget must have been getting ready for us for years—dear old Nugget," said Le Quesne.

"But Scruton's parties have only been going on for a few months," I said.

"Nugget would have found his chance somewhere else, all right," said Le Quesne. "You can see how it was done; the first time he went to Scruton's, he sneaked a pack of Scruton's cards; last night he inserted his *postiche* and scooped up twelve thousand. And his patter was so good—that sniffing and sneezing would have put any one off the scent."

"He has a nerve," I said. "I should never have dreamt that dear old Nugget had a nerve like that. It was deucedly lucky that you caught him out first time. He might have touched us for sixty or seventy thousand before the rest of us tumbled to it."

"Yes; and what's to be done now?" said Le Quesne.

"Make him disgorge, I suppose," I said.

"I can't see Nugget disgorging sixpence, much less twelve thousand," said Le Quesne. "And we can't show him up; he's related to all of us."

"Not to me, thank goodness!" I said.

"Ah, you were born lucky," said Le Quesne. "But he's related to the rest of us."

"Poor beggars!" said I.

"It seems to me that the only thing to do is to pass

the word round quietly, and he won't get another chance of rooking us, though perhaps you ought to have it out with him," said Le Quesne.

"Me? Why me?" said I.

"Well, he's living in one of your houses. You ought not to allow your tenants to cheat at cards," said Le Quesne.

"Me look after the morals of my tenants—two thousand a year tenants? Not much! It's quite enough to look after their money—their rent. Look here, Le Quesne, you must be drunk—it's too early in the morning to be mad."

"Well, you ought. He lives in one of your houses," Le Quesne said obstinately.

"I'm his landlord—not his pastor. Do I look like his pastor? I ask you—do I?" I said; and I was getting rather hot about it.

"No—perhaps you don't," said Le Quesne, as if he were not so sure about it.

"I'm not, anyway," I said. "No; all we can do is to pass the word round quietly—to one man at a time. We don't want dear old Nugget falling over us with a libel action. You couldn't make him disgorge sixpence—you said so yourself."

Le Quesne shook his head and looked sad.

We sealed up the cards in an envelope, along with a short statement signed by both of us, that they had been taken from the pack with which Nugget had conducted his bank. Dealing with contracts for work in the Gardens had made me quite good at drawing up statements. Then Le Quesne went away, still sad.

During the next day or two I told several of the men who played at Scruton's about Le Quesne's discovery, and they all agreed that we could not have an open row. Of course, I did not tell Scruton himself; he was not related to Nugget—he was a millionaire. He would be sure to make a fuss. Millionaires are not used to being done in the eye like we are.

But though I had told Le Quesne that I was not going to tackle Nugget, it was not quite my idea to lose the chance of getting at him when I had a business like this to hit him with. Two or three days later I met him in the gardens, stopped him, and said to him: "I say, Clipp, the next time you take a bank at baccarat, you should try not to leave your *postiche* behind you."

"I don't know what you mean!" he spluttered.

"Well, don't," I said, and I went on.

He did not come to Scruton's next party, and I took it that he had taken the hint. It was broad enough.

The very next afternoon after that party the great Clipp scandal began. I happened to be talking to Alice Devine in the central garden after lunch, when there came out of Nugget's porch a very odd-looking pair. They looked as if they had got sorted wrong. One of them was a lady in the bluest blue frock I have ever seen; the other was Nugget in the well-known tweed suit. Both of them were bare-headed, and the lady's very golden hair shone in the sunlight like the best brass. Nugget was smoking a cigar with a rich-looking gold band round it; and the lady was smoking a cigarette.

When they came into the garden, I just turned stiff on the seat. It was a good job I was not standing up; if I had been I should have fallen down right there. From some distance I gathered from her voice that the lady was American, and when they passed me, I recognized Cora Cray, the leading lady in *The Buffalo Belle*. And oh, she did look out of place in Garthoyle Gardens!

"What a curious-looking person," said Alice.

"Shines nicely," I said faintly; and I gathered

from her tone how truly Nugget had put the fat in the fire.

"She seems to have a very odd taste in dress," said Alice, and though it was a blazing hot day, the words fell from her lips like icicles.

"And hair," said I.

"Yes; and hair," said Alice.

"She's Cora Cray; and she acts in that American thing, *The Buffalo Belle*."

"Of course, I know now," cried Alice. "She is the 'Buffalo Belle'; and she sings in a voice like breaking coals. But what's she doing here? It's rather funny."

It might be, but I could not see it.

"Nugget's American cousin," I said.

"That's rather funny, too," said Alice.

I couldn't see the fun of that, either; and as the afternoon wore on, I saw it less and less. The Colorado beauty seemed to have a thinning effect on the garden. You can see into it very plainly from the houses; and that more than sky-blue dress caught the eye. Nugget had not the sense to plant the lady in a secluded spot and keep her there. He was rather displaying his prize. As she went about, footmen came hurrying into the garden, and each

of them went out of it conducting a nurse, or two nurses, and a set of children to the unspotted home.

I knew that there would be trouble, and sure enough by the first post of next morning came eleven letters, marked "Private," all of them calling on me to keep Miss Cora Cray out of the central garden and save my tenants' children from contamination. I should say that every single letter was libelous, for there is nothing against Miss Cora Cray except her hair. I wrote in reply to the letters that the matter should receive my attention. I did not think it at all likely that the lady would be lunching with Nugget again for a long time; he would never bring himself to spend money on another meal for her for months. But it chanced that after I had finished my morning's work in connection with the Gardens, I went out on the balcony, and across the garden I saw something blue. I dashed for my glasses and turned them on it. I nearly fell off the balcony—it was Cora Cray. She must be staying at Number 3. She was sitting on its balcony beside the broad-checked Nugget, and both of them were smoking. They sat there all the rest of the morning, shining and smoking. At intervals drinks were brought out to them, and once the bright-blue Cora raised her

voice in song and produced the sound of breaking coals. Two or three times a robust female in black came out on the balcony, talked to them for a while and went in again. My glasses showed me that the robust female was what Cora calls her "Mommer" in the touching Colorado way. I had heard her do it at a supper-party with which she had sat at a table next mine at the Savoy one night.

For about an hour before lunch footmen brought notes to me. My tenants wanted to know how long their delicate eyes were to be offended by the sight of the Colorado beauty. I told Mowart to pack me clothes for a fortnight in Paris, and he was about half-way through it, when Lady Gargery called.

I was in for it. Not to put too fine a point on it, Lady Gargery is the terror, the moral terror, of Garthoyle Gardens. She is the widow of Gargery, Blossom and Company, the great butter company; she is on the committee of all the societies and leagues for minding other people's business that ever were; and she is very important indeed among the Anti-Suffragettes. Besides all that, she is said to have the keenest nose for scandal of any woman in London. My tenants call her "Mouser." It is

only natural that she should make it her business to keep the Gardens straight. I dare say they are awfully obliged to her.

When Richards told me she had come to see me, I realized I ought to have run for my life directly I caught sight of that infernal blue dress, and picked up Mowart and my clothes at the station. But it was too late now; and I went gloomily down to the drawing-room to hear Lady Gargery pour out her righteous indignation.

There is a kind of richness about Lady Gargery. She has a rich ripe figure, broad, square and thick; and her broad square face is a rich crimson. I don't know whether she tries, but she never seems to be able to find a dress to match it. Also she had a deep rich voice, which—so Brookes, who has heard her speak at a demonstration in Hyde Park, told me—carries very well in the open air. In a room it rather booms.

“Good morning, Lord Garthoyle,” she boomed when I came into the drawing-room. “This is a terrible thing—a very terrible thing.”

I had my eye-glass in my eye and my mouth well open defensively, and I drawled: “I suppose you mean Sir Nugent Clipp's little game?”

"Little game? 'Little' game, Lord Garthoyle?" she boomed. "If you call flaunting an abandoned Colorado actress before the eyes of a respectable neighborhood like Garthoyle Gardens a 'little' game, your idea of smallness differs very considerably from mine."

"But Miss Cray isn't abandoned, don't you know? She's a most respectable young woman. I've been told so again and again," I said.

"She is an American. That is quite enough for me," boomed Lady Gargery.

"Oh, but there are quite decent Americans. I've met them," said I.

"With that hair?" she boomed.

"Oh, well, that hair now—it's quite common in Colorado—hair like that," I said.

"So I am given to understand is peroxide of brass. There are mines of it there. It is no use your trying to make excuses for this person. I am not to be imposed upon, Lord Garthoyle," she boomed.

"But what she calls her 'Mommer' is also staying at Sir Nugent Clipp's," I said.

"We know all about that kind of mother—hired, Lord Garthoyle—hired," Lady Gargery boomed.

"They're as like as two pins, barring their hair

and their ages. They look exactly like mother and daughter," I said.

"It's no use your trying to throw dust in my eyes, Lord Garthoyle. I have had too wide an experience. I am here to do my duty—to call on you to do yours," she boomed more richly than ever. "I have come to call upon you to free Garthoyle Gardens from the presence of this person—to remove her at once."

"But hang it ail——"

"There is no need to swear—act!—act!" she interrupted.

"I'm not swearing, but how am I to act? It's not my business to remove her, it's Sir Nugent Clipp's; I've no control over her, or him."

"You're his landlord."

"Yes, but a landlord isn't a spiritual director. I haven't any power over him of any kind," I said.

"It's your house. Turn her out of it," boomed Lady Gargery.

"I can't. I haven't the power," I said sharply; for she was beginning to get on my nerves.

"You can't? You mean you won't, Lord Garthoyle. I see what it is—I suspected it. You sympathize with this libertine. Are you or are you not

going to purge Gartholye Gardens of this abominable scandal?" she boomed in a perfectly awful voice.

"I couldn't if I tried, don't you know?" I drawled. "And anyhow it isn't the kind of thing for a young bachelor like me to interfere with. It's a matter for a woman—a well-grown woman," I said.

"Am I to understand that you definitely refuse?" she boomed.

"Yes, I do. I'm too shy," I said.

"Very good, Lord Garthoyle—very good. I will arrange that all your tenants shall leave in a body as a protest against this disgraceful state of things," she boomed, rising.

"Well, I shall bear up," I drawled. "They'll go on paying their rent just the same till their leases are up. And then I shall always get a fresh lot of tenants. All this fuss about a blue frock and yellow hair—it's ridiculous."

"It isn't the hair—it's the principle," she boomed; and she sailed out of the room, rustling richly.

Of course, I was not at all afraid that my tenants would really clear out, though Lady Gargery got furiously to work, and seven of them wrote, threatening me that they would go. People don't chuck

away two thousand a year for moral reasons. But the Great Clipp Scandal raged; and the Gardens sizzled and sizzled. Lady Gargery went about them in leaps and bounds, exhorting; and I had from thirteen to twenty-two letters of protest every day. I could not understand for the life of me what all the fuss was about. Nugget's Colorado beauty was thickly chaperoned; her "Mommer" was always coming out on the balcony and hovering like a square elephant round the happy pair. If my tenants had objected to the Buffalo Belle's habit of breaking coals with her voice, whenever she had a satisfying meal, I could have understood it. But as far as respectability went Nugget had a perfect right to have any musical comedian he liked to stay with him—as long as she was properly chaperoned.

When after a while Lady Gargery and her supporters simmered down a little, and merely asked me to remonstrate with Nugget, I refused. I said that if they did not really like the Colorado beauty's hair, they could go and buy themselves some like it. I was not popular for quite a while. But there were at least three of my tenants who adopted my suggestion.

Then Lady Gargery and two unfortunate married

women she had dragged into it went to Nugget in a lump and remonstrated with him. He more than remonstrated with them; he accused Lady Gargery of having been a persistent suitor for his hand, and of attacking the Colorado beauty—a lady of the highest character—out of jealousy. The deputation wrote me, calling on me, as their landlord, to horse-whip Nugget. I refused; and the Gardens went on sizzling.

Then one morning I saw from my balcony that the fair Coloradan had changed from the bright blue frock into a yellow one; and from the notes that were rushed round to me, I gathered that the Gardens were foaming at the mouth. It was quite clear that if the infatuated Nugget did not marry his beauty very soon, I should have to get him shut up in a lunatic asylum.

The relieving point about this business was that it brightened Scruton's parties enormously; all the men enjoyed their wives' fury so thoroughly. Algernon Hawk made a big book about whether the marriage would come off or not; and the betting was quite interesting.

Then came the climax; and there were none of those wedding-bells in it the Gardens expected. I

was strolling home to dinner one evening, and as I came to the top of the triangle, Nugget passed me in a taxicab; he waved his hand at me, and grinned as he went by. It was like his cheek, for I had been cutting him ever since his successful evening at baccarat.

I walked on, confounding his impudence; and at the bottom of the triangle I stopped before crossing the road, to let a four-wheeler go by—in the four-wheeler sat Nugget.

“How—how the—— What the devil?” I muttered, quite staggered; and then in a flash I saw it; the Nugget who had passed me in the taxicab could not be the Nugget in the four-wheeler. *There were two Nuggets.*

The four-wheeler drew up to the curb and stopped; then Nugget’s head came out of the window and he bawled: “Garthoyle! Garthoyle!”

I turned back and went to him.

“What’s this? What’s this I hear about some one impersonating me, Garthoyle?” he howled. “Carew met me in Venice and told me that I was in London, and had been in London. But I was in Venice; and I have been in Venice nearly a month.”

I stepped close to the cab, thinking of Nugget's little letter-writing ways; and I said gently but firmly: "No, Nugget; you have *not* been in Venice. You have been here in Garthoyle Gardens, raising every kind of Cain."

"But I tell you I haven't," he howled.

"It's no use your telling me you haven't, because you have. You've been here; and you have been caught cheating at baccarat," I said more firmly still.

"But there are forty people who can swear I have been in Venice!" howled Nugget.

"There are five hundred and forty who can swear that you've been in Garthoyle Gardens, whiskers, checks and all, outraging our deepest feelings by flaunting a peroxide Colorado beauty in blue and yellow before our chaste eyes from your balcony. We never dreamed you were such a rip."

"Baccarat? Colorado beauty?" gasped Nugget.

"Yes; and then you go and tell me that you've been in Venice for nearly a month. Rats! Nugget; rats!"

"I have! I swear I have! I've plenty of evidence of it—heaps! I've been impersonated! Oh, come along with me, and help me look into it," he wailed.

I jumped into the cab; and we rattled up to Number 3. He paid the cabman what he asked without a word; he let himself into the house with a latch-key. It was very still, there seemed to be no one in it. We went into the dining-room. The lunch had not been cleared from the table.

"The '92 Pol Roger! Three bottles of it! My best Cabanas! And the Sèvres vases! Where are the Sèvres vases?" howled Nugget; and he dropped into a chair.

The sham Nugget had had the thoughtfulness to leave a bottle of old brandy on the table. I poured out half a tumberful and pressed it on the real one. He did not want much pressing; and down it went.

When it had strengthened him we made a tour of the house. There were gaps on the walls where pictures had been—his best pictures. There were gaps in his china-cabinets where china had been—his best china; his portfolio of Meryon etchings had gone; so had his old silver—the best of it. The sham Nugget may have had a weakness for cheating at cards and for Colorado beauties; he may have had no taste in music; but in the matter of the arts he was a connoisseur.

Nugget was in tears before we reached the first floor. When he saw that his Fragonards had gone from the drawing-room wall, he collapsed.

I sent for a doctor and the police. The doctor was useful; he put Nugget to bed. But what could the police do? The thief had had more than three weeks in which to plunder the house. He had taken his time about it and done it thoroughly.

We found he had sold his loot always as Sir Nugent Clipp in person; and he had sold it, not only to dealers, but also to leading collectors, and at top prices. But the police only discovered the whereabouts of about one-sixth of it. The memories of a good many collectors must have been shocking; short as the time was since the transactions, their dealings with the sham Nugget had slipped entirely out of their minds.

The police hunted for that great connoisseur high and low; and they are hunting still. It seems as if he had worked without an accomplice. The servants he had employed had all come on a temporary engagement from the same registry-office. The cabmen who had driven him from Number 3 with his trunk or kit-bag, loaded with spoil, had always driven him to a railway-station and there lost him,

so that there was no finding out half the addresses to which he had carried his spoil. The fair Coloradan and her "Mommer," while praising his fascinating manners—so unlike those of the real Nugget—and lavish hospitality, could throw no light on him. They had met him at a supper-party and accepted his invitation to stay with him. They displayed no sympathy with the real Nugget. They were too much annoyed by the fact that the marriage which the fair Coloradan's "Mommer" had arranged between her daughter and the sham Nugget had fallen through.

I do not think that any of us will recognize the sham Nugget if we meet him. The real Nugget looks like a caricature, and so did the sham one; and the hay-fever made him look more of a caricature than ever. It also let him disguise his voice. He is probably a simple, ordinary man with a mustache; and we may be seeing him every day. All that the police have got to go on is, that he must have known a great deal about the real Nugget. He must have studied him, but then they discovered that thirty-three valets, butlers and footmen had been discharged, or left situations in the Gardens, during the last three years only. So that is not

much help. He may have been one of these, or he may not.

Nugget gets very little sympathy in his loss. All the women insist on reckoning him responsible for the shock of the visit of the fair Coloradan to the Gardens. I say that it serves him right; a man who wears those whiskers and that broad-checked tweed suit, is a walking temptation to people to impersonate him. He ought to get his whiskers shaved and go to a decent tailor.

CHAPTER XI

THE BECHUT MYSTERY

THE Gardens were again at peace. The children and the nursemaids filled the central garden without fear of being suddenly put to flight by the presence of a fair but bright-blue Coloradan; and all was well.

Now the central garden, like the Gardens themselves, is in the shape of a triangle. There is a gate in the middle of each of the three sides of it, and at each gate is a notice-board informing people that only residents in the Gardens, their families and friends are allowed in it. The gardeners have strict orders to turn strangers out.

But my Uncle Algernon, though he was a bachelor himself, had a soft place in his heart for young people in love with each other; and he had given instructions to the gardeners not to interfere with pairs of lovers who happened to stray into the garden. I let these instructions of his stand, because

the garden looks more as if it had been laid out for the purpose of love-making than any other place of its kind in London. There are a good many little lawns enclosed by shrubberies in it; and there are nooks in the shrubberies with benches in them. Indeed, I think that on a summer's evening it would look rather incomplete—wasted, as it were—without some pairs of lovers in it. Pairs of lovers seemed to think the same; and I am bound to say that I have never found it looking incomplete.

I have never used it for love-making myself. About the only girl I ever talked to in the garden was Alice Devine; and I stuck very firmly to my intention of not letting myself fall in love with her, because of the ghost trick. All the same, I went on finding her prettier and prettier and more and more delightful to talk to. Indeed, I was never able to understand how she came to help Scruton in that little game; for it was quite unlike everything else in her. But she had; and so even if I wanted to make love to her, it made it quite out of the question.

On the Friday night after the return of Nugget to his looted house, I had arranged to go to a Covent Garden ball. I dined at home, rather late, read a

book for an hour, and then went out into the central garden to take a little fresh air, for it was a very hot night. The garden never grows stale, like the rest of London, in the summer, because it is always being watered; in dry weather, all night long there is a gentle patter of falling water from two or three revolving standards on most of the lawns; and if the moon is shining the sprays sparkle very prettily.

As I crossed the road to the gate of the garden, which is nearly in front of my own house, I saw a pair of lovers going up the central path of it. At least, I took them for lovers, though perhaps they were walking rather too quickly for people engaged in that occupation. But perhaps they were walking quickly to one of those secluded nooks. The girl was in evening dress, for I saw her shoulders white in the moonlight, and she had a scarf twisted round her head. The man was wearing tweeds and a straw hat.

At the same time I noticed a man in evening dress coming along the pavement on my left, in a rather slinking way, in the shadow of the trees which hang over the railings on the edge of the garden. I went through the gate and up the central path; and I had gone thirty or forty yards up it, when I heard his

feet crunch on the gravel by the garden gate. I looked back to see if it was any one I knew, but a little cloud was passing over the moon and in the dimness he was too far off to recognize. He turned sharply off to the right and passed into a shrubbery out of sight.

I went on a few yards and sat down on a seat, and lighted a cigarette. I had been sitting there two or three minutes when a woman came through the gate. She came along at a smart pace, and I saw that she was wearing a feathered hat. I could not see her face, for it was in the shadow of the hat, and was further hidden by a veil. She did not look like the wife or daughter of one of my tenants; she looked like a lady's-maid, and she did not walk like an Englishwoman. I doubted that she had any right to be in the garden, but I was not going to tell her so; that was the business of the gardeners. I never see any point in doing my own barking when I keep a dog. She went straight up the central path into the central ring of shrubberies, out of sight.

Presently I grew tired of sitting still, got up from the bench and strolled up the central path. Just before I came to the middle of the garden, I met Alice Devine. We did not often meet in the garden

in the evening—generally it was in the afternoon. We shook hands; she turned round, and we went on to the middle of the garden. She was wearing an evening gown, with a light filmy kind of wrap round her shoulders; and in the moonlight she looked, if anything, prettier than in the daylight. I thought that her eyes shone like stars.

The pair of lovers and the woman in the feathered hat were nowhere in sight.

Alice said that she, too, had found the house stifling, and had come out into the garden for fresh air. We both agreed that, if it only could be done, it would be much nicer to sleep in the garden on a night like that than in a stuffy room.

We came to the middle of the garden, which is set with a ring of shrubberies in the shape of a wheel. The hub is a circular clump of shrubs; the spokes are narrow shrubberies running from it; and the tire is a ring of shrubs about fifteen feet thick. In between the shrubberies which form the spokes are little lawns. Each of these lawns has a narrow entrance—a break in the tire of the wheel.

We turned into the nearest of these little lawns and went to the seat at the end of it, which was right up against the hub of the wheel, and well sheltered.

We sat down and began to talk. We always had plenty to talk about; there were the poor children whom Alice was in the habit of collecting in the Park. She had always plenty to tell me about them, and I always found it interesting to hear. They are such rum little beggars. As we talked I heard the sound of voices, very faint, on the lawn on the other side of the shrubbery on our left. I just noticed it, and no more. I was giving my attention to Alice.

We had been talking for about ten minutes, when there came the loud startling bang of a revolver from the lawn on our left, and then a woman's scream.

Alice sprang up with a little cry of fright, and I got up more slowly. There was a crashing in the shrubbery on our left and a man in evening dress burst out of it, bolted across the lawn and out of the entrance. He went too quickly for me to recognize him, and I only got a three-quarter back view of him.

"Come on!" I cried to Alice. "We must look into this!"

"No, no! Be careful! Oh, do be careful!" she cried, and she clutched my arm with both hands.

"It's all right!" I said. "They won't hurt *me*."

"You wait here for a minute or two and I'll come back. You'll be quite safe," I said, and I tried to loosen the grip of her hands.

"No, no; you'll get hurt!" she cried, holding my arm still more tightly.

"But I must go—I must really," I said.

"Then I'm coming, too," she said.

"Very well; only don't be frightened. I'll see that you don't come to any harm," I said; and I slipped my arm round her waist to keep her courage up.

We hurried out of the entrance of the lawn and I saw at once that we had lost time. The man in evening dress was already out of sight, and there was no saying which way he had gone. But in the open garden to our left, the girl in evening dress was hurrying down a path that led to the left-hand gate.

She was a good way off, but I shouted to her: "What's happened?"

She did not answer; she did not even look round, she hurried on.

Then, beyond her, on another path also leading to the left-hand gate, I caught a short glimpse of the woman in the feathered hat as she passed a gap

between two shrubberies. She, too, was hurrying fast, as if the sound of the shot had frightened her badly.

I hesitated a moment; if Alice had not been with me I should probably have rushed after the girl in evening dress. Alone I could have caught her before she got out of the garden, but with Alice it was hopeless to try; the girl had far too long a start. Then I hurried Alice to the entrance of the lawn from which the sound of the shot had come. In the middle of it lay a man, fallen on his face, with his arms outspread. Alice stopped short at the sight; I went quickly to him, dropped on one knee, and turned him gently over on his back. He looked to be a foreigner, a man of about thirty, and he smelt of garlic. His face was very pale, his eyes were half closed and his mouth was open. I felt his wrist, but I could not feel any pulse. I was quite sure he was dead.

Alice burst into a frightened sobbing.

I could do nothing. It was a matter for the police and a doctor. I rose and said: "Come on, we must go and tell the police at once."

I slipped her arm into mine; she was very pale and looked very scared; but she hurried along beside

me at a good pace, and before we had gone fifty yards she had stopped sobbing.

We took the path to the left-hand gate. When we came out of it, neither of the two women was in sight. That side of the gardens was empty.

It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to save Alice all I could. She would have to give evidence at the inquest, and that would be trying enough. I took her straight to Scruton's house, telling her not to be too much distressed about the business, and saw her let herself in with her latch-key. Then I ran to the top of the gardens and down the other side. At the bottom I found Brookes and told him what had happened, and then, on his suggestion, we hurried round to my house and told Richards to telephone the news of the murder to the police-station. Then Brookes and I ran to the lawn where the murdered man was lying.

He was lying just as I had left him. Brookes knelt down and examined him. Then he shook his head and said: "He's quite dead, m'Lord."

Then he rose and began to look about the lawn, holding his lantern about two feet from the ground and searching it carefully. About six feet from the dead man he found three envelopes, lying close to-

gether. They were empty, but all three were addressed to Sir Theobald Walsh. The addresses were typewritten. Knowing Walsh, I was able to assure Brookes that the dead man was not he, and he went on searching. The dead man's straw hat was lying quite ten yards from the body, close to the left-hand shrubbery, as if it had pitched off his head and rolled along when he fell. On the other side of the lawn, behind the dead man, half-way between his body and the right-hand shrubbery, Brookes picked up a small revolver. It was stuck sideways in the turf, which, since it had been lately watered, was soft. By the light of the lantern we saw that the name of the maker was French, and that the top of the barrel was choked with earth.

"Now, why on earth was it stuck in the turf?" I said. "It couldn't have merely been dropped, because it's not heavy enough to stick into the turf of itself."

"It do seem odd, m'Lord," said Brookes.

"Of course, when people are excited they do odd things," I said.

But I was puzzled. It seemed so very odd that after shooting the man, the murderer should have

stuck the revolver in the ground. There seemed no purpose in it.

Brookes said we had better not trample the lawn too much, and we came out of it and waited at the entrance, discussing the crime. It was quite plain to us, that either the girl in evening dress or the man who had bolted out of the shrubbery had fired the shot. It seemed more likely to be the man than the girl, for she had screamed after the shot had been fired. But what they were doing with this seedy foreigner in Garthoyle Gardens passed guessing.

We had only waited a few minutes when an inspector of police, a doctor and a man in a gray tweed suit came hurrying up. They were followed by two policemen, wheeling an ambulance. I gathered that the man in the tweed suit was a detective and that his name was Pardoe. He seemed to have been at the station when Richards telephoned. He was tall and thin and hook-nosed, with bushy eyebrows and thin lips. He looked like a hawk, as one expects a detective to look. Most of them don't.

He took charge of the affair and gave the orders. As soon as the two policemen came with the ambulance, he sent them off to search the gardens for

people who had heard the shot fired, or seen either of the people likely to have fired it—the lady or the man in evening dress. Then he and the doctor went on to the lawn to the body.

The doctor knelt down beside it and presently I heard him say: "Cervical vertebræ smashed. Must have been killed instantly. The bullet is embedded in the neck. You can take him straight along to the mortuary, Pardoe."

Pardoe himself fetched the ambulance, lifted the body on to it, and wheeled it out of the lawn. Then, by the light of the lanterns of Brookes and the inspector he searched the dead man's pockets. In the breast pocket of the jacket was a good-sized bag of money. He opened it and took out a handful of coins. They were all sovereigns. There was a handful of loose silver and coppers in one of the trousers pockets; and in one of the side pockets of the jacket was an ugly-looking sheath-knife, such as sailors carry, and very sharp. In the other side pocket of the jacket was a packet of Caporal tobacco and a packet of cigarette-papers. In one of the waistcoat pockets was a cheap black American watch; and in the other were four visiting-cards on which was printed the name "Etienne Bechut."

When he read the name on the visiting-card, Pardoe took a lantern and again looked at the dead man's face closely.

"I thought I knew him. A bad lot. Soho," he said in quick jerky sentences.

"Well, if you know him, we shan't be long finding out all about him," said the inspector in a tone of satisfaction.

Then Brookes handed Pardoe the revolver and the typewritten envelopes addressed to Sir Theobald Walsh. Pardoe studied them for a minute or two, then he questioned me closely and at length about what I had seen and heard.

I told him that I had seen a man in a tweed suit and straw hat, like those the murdered man was wearing, walk up the central path of the garden, with a lady in evening dress with a scarf round her head, that I was pretty sure that he was the murdered man. I also told him that I had seen the man in evening dress come into the garden and go up the right-hand path parallel to the central path, and that a woman, veiled, and wearing a big feathered hat, had gone up the central path about fifty yards behind the lady and the murdered man, and that I had strolled up that path myself, met Alice Devine, and

gone with her into the lawn on the left; and that we had heard a revolver shot and a scream, and seen the man in evening dress bolt.

"Did you recognize him?" said Pardoe.

"No, I didn't. I only saw a little bit of his face. He bolted with his back to me," I said.

"Would you know him if you saw him again?" said Pardoe.

"No, I shouldn't," I said.

"Would the young lady know him?" inquired Pardoe.

"I don't think there's a chance of it," I said. "She got just the same view of him that I did and she was very much startled by the shot and the scream."

"That's a pity," said Pardoe. He paused and added: "Did you see the lady in the evening frock plain enough to recognize her again?"

"No; she was a good way in front of me up the path. But I got an impression that she was all right—a lady, don't you know?" said I.

"This foreigner hardly looks the kind of man a lady would be walking with at this hour, here," said the doctor.

"You're right there, Doctor Brandon," said Par-

doe slowly. "But then there's this bag of sovereigns."

"Blackmail?" said Doctor Brandon.

"Looks very like it," said Pardoe.

"But why should she shoot him? She's got the letters," I said.

"We don't know that, m'Lord," said Pardoe. "She may have got them after he was shot."

"But then she'd have carried them off, envelopes and all. She wouldn't have waited to make sure that they were the right letters and dropped the envelopes," I said.

"That's so," said Pardoe.

"She may have wanted to make sure that he did not blackmail her again, and shot him as the best way of doing it," said Doctor Brandon.

"We don't know that it was her who did shoot him," said Pardoe.

He began to question me again about the man in evening dress, about his figure, his height and breadth, whether he walked like a gentleman or not.

I told him what I could remember of it; but it was not much. When the man came into the garden, I had not been particularly interested in him; and that little cloud had made the moonlight dim.

Then he asked in what position the murdered man had been lying when I first came on the lawn. I told him that he had been lying on his face, and that he had fallen with his face toward the left-hand shrubbery out of which the man in evening dress had bolted. He asked Doctor Brandon whether a man with that wound would fall straight forward. Brandon said that he might pitch forward on his face, or he might spin round and then fall.

"Well, the way he lay doesn't clear the man in evening dress from the shooting; it leaves the place where the shot came from quite open," said Pardoe.

Then he questioned Brookes about the finding of the revolver. He, too, seemed puzzled by the fact that the barrel of it had been sticking in the turf; and I pointed out that it was lying half-way between the body and the right-hand shrubbery, so that if the man in evening dress had fired it, he must have bolted right across the lawn past the woman. Pardoe went on to question Brookes about the people he had seen in the Gardens while on his beat that evening. Brookes had seen none of the actors in the tragedy.

Then the two policemen who had been scouring the garden for some one who had heard the sound

of the shot, or seen the lady or the man in evening dress as they came into the garden or fled out of it, came back with the tidings that they had not found any one who could give any information. They had found four pairs of lovers, but each pair had been so absorbed in each other's society that they had seen and heard nothing.

Pardoe stood quiet, frowning and thinking; then he told the inspector that he was going straight off to Soho to try and find something at Bechut's lodging that might throw some light on the matter, and that he would come back at half past three, when there would be light enough to search the lawn and the shrubberies thoroughly.

Leaving the inspector and Brookes in charge of the lawn, Pardoe, the doctor and I came out of the garden, followed by the two policemen wheeling the ambulance with the dead man on it. I bade them good night, and went home.

I had an engagement to meet a party at the Covent Garden ball; but I did not feel in the least like keeping it. The murder had cleared away any wish for a dance. I went up to the library, sat down in an easy chair, and tried to work out the murder—whether the lady or the man had shot the black-

mailer. It was hard to decide. Also I could not think who either of them could be, though it was very likely that they were both tenants of mine. I did not think it likely that Alice could throw any light on the matter; she had seen less of them than I had. The man who could throw light on it was Sir Theobald Walsh. He would know the sender of the letters that had been in the envelopes.

At twelve o'clock I had some supper; and after it I smoked and read a novel. I kept stopping my reading again and again to puzzle over the crime. I read till half past three; then I went back to the garden and found Pardoe and the inspector just about to begin their examination of the lawn.

At the very entrance Pardoe made a discovery. Hanging from the projecting bough of a shrub was a black lace scarf. It was surely the scarf the girl in evening dress had been wearing when first I saw her in the garden; and it had been caught from her head by the branch as she ran out of the lawn. It was an expensive scarf, but not very uncommon.

On the lawn itself they found nothing fresh; but Pardoe questioned me carefully about the exact position in which the murdered man had been lying before I turned his body over. Then he examined

the little hole in the turf which the barrel of the revolver had made. Then they searched the left-hand shrubbery, from which the man in evening dress had bolted. In that they found nothing; not so much as a single footprint, for the soil was hard. They went on to search the shrubberies at the back of the lawn, that is to say, the central clump, the hub of the wheel, and then the shrubbery on the right of the lawn. In that they found one of those leather wrist-bags in which women carry their handkerchiefs, powder-puffs and purses. It was old and worn and shabby. It might have been thrown away by a housemaid. It smelt strongly of some coarse violet scent; but in the dry weather we had been having, it might have lain there for a day or two and still kept the scent.

There was nothing more to be done; and I went off to bed. I breakfasted early, and went round to Scruton's house directly after it. I wanted to talk the matter over with Alice and prepare her for Pardoe's visit, which might frighten her if she were not prepared for it. I found that she had, very naturally, had a bad night, and was looking pale. She was rather relieved to hear that the murdered man was not a person on whom one need waste much

sympathy. She could throw no light on the identity either of the man in evening dress or of the woman, for she had seen the man no more clearly than I had; and the woman she had not seen at all, save for that distant glimpse. Pardoe came, and the three of us discussed the matter together.

I was surprised to find no mention of the matter in the evening papers; plainly the police were keeping their own counsel. Pardoe paid me a visit in the afternoon to coach me in my evidence at the inquest; and I learned from him that Sir Theobald Walsh had declared himself quite unable to identify the three envelopes. That enabled me to assure him that there was no chance whatever of his getting any information from that quarter; having once said a thing, Walsh would stick to it till all was blue; he is as stubborn as an ox. For my part I did not blame him in the slightest for refusing to give the woman away. In any case he could not have done that; and since it was a matter of this Soho foreigner, probably a blackmailer (in fact, Walsh must know that he was a blackmailer), it made his course all the plainer.

The inquest brought no new facts to light, if anything made it plainer that the crime was a really

complicated affair. It made it quite clear that the revolver had most likely been fired from the right-hand shrubbery; and the coroner brought out the fact that it was very unlikely that it had been fired by the girl in evening dress, since she had screamed after the shot had been fired, and not before it. It certainly looked as if the report had frightened and surprised her.

The coroner had a great struggle with Walsh, trying to get information from him about the envelopes. Walsh stuck to his guns; he said that he did not identify the envelopes; that all three of them were different; and that in the last month he had had hundreds of typewritten envelopes from tradesmen, charitable institutions, his solicitors and so on.

There were not many people at the inquest. But among them I noticed the piebald duke; and I saw that he was taking a great interest in the evidence. I was a good deal surprised to see him there; for I had not known that he was one of those people who are keen on crimes and trials. Indeed, he had never struck me as being at all morbid.

But I was a good deal more surprised by the fact that there was no newspaper storm. I had expected that there would be columns and columns about the

business in the evening papers. I could find no report of the inquest in any single one of them, nor in the morning papers. Some one had done a lot of squaring. This certainly deepened the mystery.

Now, Walsh had the key of it. He must know who the girl in evening dress was; and he probably knew, or could guess, who the man who had bolted was. In the case of any other man but Walsh, it would have been possible to guess the lady. In the case of Walsh it was practically impossible—there were too many of them. There were three at any rate in Garthoyle Gardens; and half a dozen more lived within half a mile of them. I have never been able to understand why that hulking brute had such an attraction for women; but there it was. I could not fix on any one of them as the woman I had seen.

It was curious, how after the inquest nothing seemed to happen. The affair fell dead. Yet I know that the police went on hunting, for I saw Pardoe about the Gardens frequently; and three or four times he came to see me to talk about little clues he had found. They were not of any value. I had an idea that he believed that I, like Walsh, knew more about the business than I said; that I could have told him who the girl in evening dress

and the man who had bolted were. He was always trying to trip me up by sudden questions.

One day I said to him: "Look here, Pardoe, it's not a bit of good your trying to catch me out, because I don't know. I don't say that if I did, I'd tell you. Very probably I shouldn't. But I don't know."

"You people do hang together so, my Lord," said Pardoe grumpily.

"Why don't you get it out of Walsh?" I said.

Pardoe shook his head.

It was clear to me that the police were balked. They had not traced the black lace scarf to any one; and they could not find the woman in the feathered hat. She had bolted after the revolver had been fired; and it seemed likely that she could throw some light on the matter. I suggested to Pardoe that they should advertise for her. Pardoe only shook his head and said that if she were a foreigner, as my description of her suggested, it was any odds that she would not read the English papers, and the advertisement would be wasted. But after all he did advertise for her; for I saw the advertisement in the agony column of the *Daily Mail*.

In the meantime I went on making quiet inquiries

myself. If I had discovered anything, I had no great intention of informing the police of it. I meant to exercise my discretion. I was not going to get any of my friends, or even my tenants, into the mess of a lifetime on account of a wretched, blackmailing foreigner. I made the inquiries entirely on my own account. The murder had excited my curiosity as nothing else in my life had ever excited it; and I wanted to satisfy it.

Everything turned on the question, who was the woman in the evening frock? If I could find her, I could find the man who had bolted from the shrubbery. I had no doubt that one or the other of them had shot the blackmailer.

It was most likely that she was one of my tenants, or rather a wife, or daughter, of one of my tenants. She plainly knew the central garden well. Also she was one of the ladies who was, or had been, attached to Walsh. There were three of these ladies in Garthoyle Gardens; and the girl I had seen walking with the blackmailer might have been any one of the three. Two of them, indeed, were dark and one fair; but since the girl in the garden had had her hair wrapped in a scarf I had not been able to tell whether she was dark or fair, while as regards

figure, the three ladies who loved, or had loved Walsh, were about the same height and breadth. The girl I had seen might be any one of the three.

I set about trying to find out what these three ladies were doing on the night of the murder, making my inquiries as quietly as possible. I found them very difficult inquiries to make; it was so hard to make any reason for wanting to know such a fact. I came to the conclusion that the only way to make such inquiries was to be a policeman. Then you go straight to the person whom you want the information about and say straight out: "What were you doing on such and such a night?"

I inquired and inquired, and I did not get the information. I saw two of the ladies several times in the gardens, or at other people's houses. If either of them had committed the murder, they were very good actresses, or very sure of not being found out; and shooting a blackmailer did not weigh at all heavily on their minds. But I did not come across the third lady anywhere, though I had been meeting her about often enough before the murder; and I began to fancy that she was keeping out of sight. Then, coming into the Palladium late one night, I found her husband in the smoking-room; and I saw

at once that he was looking very much off color. I kept my eye on him, wondering; and I saw that he was fidgety and restless, and very nervous. He had a way of looking at the door, whenever it opened, with a frightened stare that made me think he was expecting to see a policeman come in at any moment and collar him. After that I only tried to find out what he and his wife had been doing on the night of the murder. I thought I was getting warm.

Then one night about a week later, when I was playing baccarat at Scruton's, I noticed that the piebald duke kept looking at me in a rather odd way. The interest he was taking in me must have put him off his usual game, for he actually won—over four thousand.

As usual the party broke up about half past three; and just as I was going out of the house, the duke called to me: "Half a minute, Garthoyle, I'll stroll along with you."

We came out of the house together; and at the bottom of the steps he said: "Are you in a hurry to go to bed?"

"Not a bit," said I. "After a long gamble like that I'm often quite a time getting to sleep; and a quiet stroll and some fresh air are soothing."

"Have you got the key of that middle garden of yours on you?" he said. "I want to talk to you; and the air in the garden will be fresher and less dusty than here."

I had a key on me; and we went into the garden.

"You might take me to the lawn where that foreign blackguard got shot," said the duke.

The words "foreign blackguard" were rather an eye-opener. I saw that the duke knew something about the matter; more, in fact, than I did. I took him straight to the lawn.

He looked slowly round it and said: "It's about that murder that I want to talk to you. I know who the lady was who was blackmailed; and I know who the man was who bolted out of this shrubbery past you."

"The deuce you do!" said I.

"Yes," said the duke. "They came to me and put themselves into my hands in the matter. If you go on much further with these inquiries you're making, you'll find out who they were yourself. That wouldn't matter much, because you would very probably keep your discoveries quiet. But it's your inquiries that are dangerous. In enlightening yourself you will very likely enlighten the peo-

ple who, if they got the information, would do a lot of harm in the way of causing an infernal scandal. Now, I want to give you my assurance that I am absolutely convinced that neither of these two had anything to do with the shooting. Both of them were as much surprised by the report of that revolver as you were yourself; and, as you say, both of them bolted. They bolted in a hurry of course; but I believe that it was the very best thing they could have done under the circumstances, for they were very awkward. Now, I don't know whether you care to accept my assurance that those two are innocent; but after what they told me, and after testing their story, I am absolutely convinced of their innocence."

"Of course I'll take your assurance," I said quickly. "I'd sooner take your judgment in a matter like this than anybody's."

"Thank you. I thought you would," he said; and he sighed as if I had taken a weight off his mind.

Then he walked to the middle of the lawn and stopped and said: "There are one or two points which support my judgment. The man lay here"—he tapped the turf with his foot—"and

the revolver lay here, half-way between the man and the right-hand shrubbery. The man who bolted, bolted from the left-hand shrubbery on the other side of the body. My opinion is that the shot was fired from the right-hand shrubbery."

"Yes," I said. "I noticed that; and it does rather complicate the matter. It lets the man out pretty well; but it rather makes it look as if the woman fired the shot."

"Yes; but you yourself brought out the fact quite clearly that she screamed after the shot was fired. I am quite sure that she told me the truth when she said that she screamed because the shot surprised and frightened her. Besides, she had already got the letters; why should she shoot the black-guard?"

"Well, but if neither of those two fired the shot, who on earth did?" said I.

"Well, I think that the police did not attach enough importance to the wrist-bag they found in the right-hand shrubbery, and to the fact that the revolver was of French make. Those seem to me to be the real clues," said the duke.

"Then who do you think the murderer was?" said I.

"The woman in the feathered hat," said the duke.

"The deuce you do!" said I.

"Yes, I do," said the duke, in a tone of absolute certainty. "You say the woman walked like a foreigner. The man was a foreigner. She was veiled. I believe she was following this blackmailing scoundrel and the lady; that she followed them right to the lawn where he handed over the letters, and slipped into the right-hand shrubbery to watch them. After the shot was fired, you saw her running away. She has disappeared entirely, though the police made every effort to find her, in case she could throw some light on the affair. She never answered their advertisement. Why is she hiding?"

"These are pretty awkward facts," I said. "I shall have to work it out afresh from this new point of view. Didn't either the lady or her husband—I take it that it was her husband—see this woman?"

"No; they only saw the flash of the revolver, and both of them declared it came from the right-hand shrubbery," said the duke.

"These are certainly new facts," said I.

“And you might put them to that infernal detective who is always nosing about—Pardoe. He comes to see you. Working on his present lines, it’s just possible he might discover these two innocent people and make a great deal of trouble. It doesn’t seem likely; and I’ve seen to it that the police are not being encouraged to show too much zeal in the matter. If you could put them on the right track, the trail of the woman in the feathered hat—it would be a great relief; and they may show as much zeal as ever they like.”

“I’ll try my best to put them on it,” said I.

“Thank you,” said the duke.

We turned and walked to the bottom of the garden. As we came out of the gate I said: “I suppose, whether the police come into it or not, this business has smashed up those two people’s lives pretty badly?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said the duke slowly. “I think that it will be rather the other way about. They were drifting apart, but this business—being in this mess together—is rather drawing them together again.”

“That’s all right,” I said.

After considering the matter, I thought I had

better lose no time putting the police on the trail of the woman in the feathered hat. If I waited till Pardoe's next visit, he might in the meantime light on the two unfortunates whom the duke wished to save from the scandal. I therefore sent a wire to the detective asking him to look me up in the afternoon, and at three o'clock he turned up, looking rather eager, as if he expected to learn something from me.

I gave him a whisky-and-soda and a cigar; and when he settled down comfortably I said:

"Well, Mr. Pardoe, at last I have discovered who murdered Etienne Bechut. It was neither the lady he was blackmailing nor the man in evening dress. They do not, very naturally, want to appear in this matter; and they have put themselves into the hands of a third person and told him all they know about it."

"They have, have they?" said Pardoe quickly.

"They have; and I am absolutely convinced that they had nothing to do with shooting that blackmailing scoundrel."

Pardoe scratched his head and looked at me very keenly; then he said: "You'll excuse me asking

you, m'Lord, but do you really, honestly and truly believe that?"

"I give you my word that I believe them to be absolutely innocent," said I.

He hesitated for a few seconds and then he said: "I take it, m'Lord, that you're the person they put themselves into the hands of?"

I said nothing.

"Well, my Lord, what are your new facts?" he said.

"The shot was fired from the right-hand shrubbery by the woman in the feathered hat," I said.

He frowned thoughtfully and said: "I've thought about her a good many times. It was odd that she bolted in such a hurry and never came forward, even when we advertised. We ought to have been able to find out something about her—we tried hard enough—but we didn't."

"Well, my theory is, that she was following Bechut for some reason or other, carrying with her the revolver, in the wrist-bag you found in the right-hand shrubbery. She saw him meet the lady and followed them right to the lawn, and slipped into the right-hand shrubbery, watched

them, took the revolver out of the bag, dropped the bag, shot Bechut and threw the revolver on the lawn so that it stuck in the turf. It's just the kind of thing an excited woman would do after firing it. Then she bolted."

Pardoe sat very still, frowning, then he said: "There may be something in this. The facts fit in all right. I'll look for her in Soho."

"And mind you let me know if you find her," said I.

"I will, my Lord," said Pardoe.

He asked me a good many questions about the woman in the feathered hat; her height, her breadth, the color of her hair, the color and shape of her dress, the shape of the feathers in her hat, and the color of her boots. I answered his questions as well as I could remember the details. Then he finished his whisky-and-soda, wished me good afternoon and went away.

During the next three days I wondered how he was getting on. Then on the fourth morning he came again. I went up to him in the library, and when we were settled down he said:

"Well, m'Lord, I've found the woman in the feathered hat—or, to be exact, I've got on her

track. This man Bechut was mixed up in half a dozen shady games—white slave traffic and black-mailing—and this woman, Césarine Thibaudier, helped him. She seems to have been infatuated with him, and just as jealous as could be. She was always quarreling with him about other women, and half a dozen times different people heard her threaten to murder him if ever she caught him carrying on with any one. He must have got jolly well tired of it all, for I found out long ago that he had arranged to slip quietly away to France as soon as he got the money for the letters. He was just running away from her. She found out this plan of his and rowed him about it; for she'd made up her mind that he was going off with another woman. After that she must have watched him and followed him."

"It seems to look very promising," I said.

"Yes, it does fit in," said Pardoe. "And then, without a word to anybody, she went off at six o'clock on the morning after the murder and has not been seen since. Probably she's in Paris."

"Well, you ought to be able to catch her without much difficulty," I said. "Will you go over to Paris yourself?"

“Wait a bit—wait a bit, my Lord,” said Pardoe, smiling. “Where’s our evidence? I’ve not been able to find any one who saw Césarine Thibaudier nearer Garthoyle Gardens than Soho. It’s true I found two of her friends who declare that the wrist-bag we found is the very image of one that belonged to her; but it’s a very common pattern. In fact, I counted nine women in Soho carrying the identical wrist-bag, in the course of one morning. Also, Césarine Thibaudier used the scent of violets, of which the bag smelt. But the two women who told me so smelt of it themselves. I have not been able to trace the revolver to her; and I shouldn’t wonder if it belonged to Bechut himself, and she stole it. Again, neither the lady who was blackmailed, nor the man who bolted, saw anything of the person who fired the shot; or, I take it, they would have told you about it. Unless this woman chooses to confess—and she doesn’t seem the kind who confess—we haven’t enough evidence to hang a cat on.”

I got up and walked up and down the room. It sounded extremely annoying. I certainly had no particular feelings for the blackmailer himself, but

one has a feeling that when a murder has been committed, somebody ought to be hanged.

"All the same, I am quite convinced that this woman followed Bechut to Garthoyle Gardens, carrying that revolver in the wrist-bag, and shot him from the shrubbery," I said.

"I'm inclined to think it was so myself," said Pardoe.

"Well, I'm quite sure of it," I said. "I think she ought to be tried."

Pardoe took a long pull at his whisky-and-soda; then he said: "Ah, my Lord, if we were to arrest all the people we're sure have committed murder we could keep the Central Criminal Court going with murder trials for the next six months. But I don't suppose we'd get one in ten of them hanged. Murder's one thing, and evidence is another."

"It's very cheery hearing," I said.

He finished his whisky-and-soda and went away. He has not been to see me since, nor have I heard that the police have arrested Césarine Thibaudier.

CHAPTER XII

WALSH INTERVENES

IT was a blessing to have the Bechut affair cleared up without any severe scandal, such as might very well have arisen from it. Over it I had grown friendlier than ever with Alice Devine, for there was so much in it which we had to discuss together. But I had never grown quite comfortable in mind about her uncle. Now and then fresh evidence turned up that Scruton was really a millionaire; and the clearer that grew, the more difficult it was to understand why he had tricked my uncle, and tried to trick me, into letting him have his house rent-free by setting Alice to play that ghost trick on us. I might have thought that it was his idea of a joke, if he had ever shown any other signs of a humorous disposition; but he did not. I never came across anybody more serious. Besides, he had never paid the quarter's rent out of which he had tricked my Uncle Algernon, as he

should have done if it was a joke. But, of course, his being a millionaire would explain that. Millionaires never part.

I had quite made up my mind that his baccarat parties were on the square. Too many of the keenest gamblers in London, men who could not be cheated for any length of time, played at them regularly, week after week. The only time that there had been anything wrong at them was when the sham Nugget rooked us of twelve thousand, and I was quite sure that Scruton was not standing in with him. I could not understand, however, why he gave these parties so often, for though he played most of the time himself, he did not seem at all a keen gambler, and not once did I see him plunge heavily. Again, he did not use those parties as a means of rising in the social scale. He seemed to have no ambition that way. I came to the conclusion that my idea, that it was his hobby to have the severest gambling in London at his house, was the right one. I always noticed that he kept a close eye on our winnings and losings; and at the end of each party he would rub his hands together, and say gleefully that twenty-five or thirty thousand pounds had changed hands in the course of

the evening; and then he always added: "Fine gambling—first-class gambling! Eh? What!"

But it did seem to me a trifle thick that he should use Alice as an attraction to bring men to his parties, if they were merely his hobby. It would have been more excusable if he had been playing some shady game with them. But there, millionaires are queer fish.

I went to most of his parties, and every time I went I was annoyed afresh to find Alice being used as a decoy. It was really no business of mine, except that she and I were growing more and more friendly. In fact, I liked to go to them chiefly because I could keep an eye on her and see that she was not annoyed by any of her uncle's guests. I felt that that was rather my business, since, by helping Freddy Gage to carry off and marry Kitty Maynard, I had robbed Alice of her chief support. If Kitty Maynard had also been used by Scruton as a decoy, none the less she had been a support to Alice. New guests who did not know the ropes were apt to be familiar and needed checking. I did it.

One night, some one who ought to have known better—I think it was Alpertton—brought with

him a bubbling young stock-broker. I suppose the stock-broker had put him on to a good thing in oil or rubber. They had done themselves not wisely but too well at dinner, and the young stock-broker was in very high feather at finding himself among what he called "the nobility." He seemed also to be considered a fascinating fellow in his circle and he set himself to fascinate Alice in what I suppose is the stock-brokerly way. Alice snubbed him with a quiet straightforwardness that would have shut up any decent sort of chap, and I told him quite plainly to hold his tongue. It did not seem to have any effect. Alice rose and went to the door; he followed her, apologizing. I opened the door for her; she went out and he went out after her, still apologizing. Then, on the empty landing, I was on him like a knife. I got him comfortably by the scruff of the neck, ran him down the stairs, along the hall to the front door. The butler opened it smartly, and I kicked my young friend heartily down the steps. He did not come back for his hat.

I came quietly back up the stairs and found Alice leaning over the banisters of the landing, from which she had watched the young cad's de-

parture. There was a very fine flush on her face and her eyes were sparkling quite fiercely.

"Oh, I'm so much obliged to you," she said. "I wonder how that cad got into the house?"

"Must have sneaked in at the back door," I said.

"Well, I don't think he will come again," she said.

"I don't know about that. He only got what he was asking for. Perhaps he likes it and will come back for more," said I.

"I am so much obliged to you," she said again; and she moved toward the stairs to the second floor.

"Don't let him drive you off to bed," I said. "It's quite early yet."

She hesitated a moment; and then she came back into the baccarat room with me. We went on to the balcony and had a very pleasant half-hour's talk.

That bubbling young stock-broker was only a passing nuisance as it were; Sir Theobald Walsh was a nuisance every time. He had been a guest at Scruton's parties since the beginning, long before I had ever come to one. He seemed to think, or at any rate he pretended to think, that that gave him some kind of a claim on Alice, and unless

something prevented him, he always spent a good deal of the evening hanging over her and talking to her with a proprietary air.

Now, as I have said, Walsh is not at all the kind of man one likes to see hanging about a nice girl. Married women are all very well, but a young girl is different. Besides, it wasn't only Walsh's ways, and what we all know about him among ourselves, but his bad character was notorious. He had not only appeared in the Divorce Court as co-respondent in the Cumberly scandal; but at the inquest on the unfortunate Mrs. Bulkeley it came out that she had committed suicide owing to the blackguardly way in which he treated her. Also I happened to know of the orgies—they were really orgies—which he held at The Cedars, his country house near Pinner. Naturally he was not the kind of man who could hang about a girl without harming her reputation, and whenever I saw him hanging about Alice I interrupted.

He hated to be interrupted, but I never missed a chance of doing it. I joined in their talk, or rather I joined in his talk—for Alice had very little to say to him—firmly; and every time we were soon snapping freely. I would sneer at things he

said, and he would sneer at things I said, till our conversation grew rather cheery. Nearly always before ten minutes were up, I got him rabid and snarling, and generally at the end of half an hour I drove him off to the card-table. He must have lost quite a lot of money from playing baccarat in a bad temper. Sometimes, however, he would stick it out till Alice went off to bed.

Alice enjoyed our little bickerings up to a certain point; when Walsh began really to snarl it made her uncomfortable. I scored because she was always on my side. In fact, as far as Walsh's getting encouragement from her went, there should have been no need for me to interfere at all. She snubbed him straight and steadily all the time. But he could get on without any encouragement. She might have snubbed him ninety-nine evenings running, and the hundredth he would have turned up scowling, driven away any one except me, who happened to be talking to her, and then leaned over her and talked to her for an hour, in a low confidential voice, with his air of a proprietor.

One night—we had grown quite friendly enough—I said to her: "I say, I wish you would keep away from these gambling parties. I know it's

pretty dull for you, and they make an amusing break. But all the same, they're not quite the thing for you, don't you know?"

She frowned a little and said slowly: "Oh, I don't come to them because they break the dulness, but because my uncle makes a point of it."

"I shouldn't take any notice of that, if I were you," said I.

"Oh, but I must," she said. "Here I am living in his house, practically dependent on him; and I must do what he asks me. And what forces me to do it more than anything else is that it's the only thing he does ask me."

"Well, if that's so, I must keep on being sociable with Walsh," said I.

"You do annoy him," she said; and she laughed softly.

"I do it for his good," said I.

I kept on being good to Walsh, and at last I worked him up to a state of first-class fury. Whenever he saw me his eyes began to sparkle, and his usual amiable scowl grew blacker and blacker.

Then one night I had been particularly bland with him, and though we came out of Number 9 in a nice bright morning light, and he should have

had time to cool, since Alice had been in bed this four hours, it seemed that he was boiling still.

I went down the steps first and walked toward my house, expecting him to keep his distance behind me, for outside Scruton's I always cut him.

But he caught me up at once and said: "Look here, Garthoyle: we've got to come to some arrangement about that girl of Scruton's."

"That's a pretty way of speaking of Miss Devine," I said.

"I'm not in a punctilious temper to-night," he said savagely. "I'm in earnest. I'm going to have the matter settled up here and now."

I looked at his working face and saw that he was indeed serious.

"Don't be an ass," I exclaimed. "How can *you* settle it? The woman always settles this kind of thing."

"It's no good your shuffling. You know she can't settle it," he snarled. "You won't let her. You keep diverting her attention from it."

"From you, you mean," said I.

"Yes, from me. You're always trying to set her against me. And it isn't as though you meant anything yourself. You don't. You're just play-

ing the dog in the manger. You'd never marry her," he said.

"Would you?" said I.

"Yes, I would—I will," he cried.

"Poor girl," said I.

He stormed and cursed at me in a growling roar.

"Don't make so much noise, you'll wake my tenants," I said.

He made more noise.

I waited till he had run out of breath. It gave me more time to think. Then I said. "No; you shan't marry her—not if I can stop it. You're not fit to come near a decent girl, much less marry her. I'll stop it if I can; and I think I can."

"You think you can, do you? You infernal prig!" he cried. "Well, I'll show you all about that, and inside of a month, too."

With that he went off down Carisbrooke Street and I turned off to my house. He had given me plenty to think about and I was uneasy. I did not see what he could do; but I did know that he would stick at nothing where a woman was concerned. At the same time I was a good deal surprised to learn that he was carrying *le bon motif* concealed about his person.

On consideration, I did not believe in it; certainly he would not marry Alice, he had no intention of marrying her. Well, I must look after her more carefully than ever when he was about.

But that was where he put a spoke in my wheel. Three mornings later, Herbert Polkington came to see me. I hadn't seen him for some time; not since I had congratulated him on having been saved from marrying Kitty Maynard by Freddy Gage. He came looking his most portentous—more like a funeral than a human being—and I braced myself.

He sat down, crossed his legs and looked at me in what he believes to be an impressive way. It makes him look like an excited codfish; then he cleared his throat and said:

“I've come to see you about a serious matter, Rupert—a very serious matter indeed.”

“You generally do,” I said, without any show of gratitude at all. “What is it? Fire away and try to put it plainly.”

Herbert frowned. “It's about Miss Devine,” he said. “I have been assured that you propose to contract an alliance with that young woman, the niece of that more than suspect New Zealander, Scruton.”

"Well, you've been assured wrong," I said. "But suppose I did? Miss Devine is a very nice girl—quite charming."

"I wish I had been misinformed," said Herbert gloomily, shaking his large head. "But my informant——"

"Who is your informant?" I said quickly.

Herbert hesitated, then he said: "Sir Theobald Walsh."

"The biggest blackguard in London. You Liberals do keep nice company," I said.

"I met him quite by accident," Herbert half apologized.

"We all know all about those accidents," I said. "And now I come to think of it, it was you who first took me to gamble at Scruton's. You Liberals do lead lives!" I said.

"As a matter of fact, I met him at one of your clubs—the Palladium," said Herbert, his round face beginning to grow purplish. "And in a case like this, I would as soon take the opinion of Sir Theobald Walsh as anybody's. His intrigues have made him an expert, and he is convinced that you are infatuated with this girl—infatuated. But it won't do, Rupert. With your name and money,

you can't marry a girl who is merely a decoy in a gambling-hell. That's what Scruton's house is."

"I like this, from you," I said. "It's exactly what you wanted to do yourself. You wanted to marry Kitty Gage, and she was just as much and just as little a decoy as Miss Devine is. In fact, I think that Kitty Gage was a great deal more aware of the part she was playing than ever Miss Devine was."

"Yes; I did want to marry Kitty Maynard, and I have learned that you saved me from the marriage——"

"Saved her, my good chap—saved her," I interrupted in a kind voice.

"—by helping Freddy Gage to carry her off and marry her," Herbert went on without heeding the interruption. "I am grateful to you now, though I was very much annoyed at the time. It was an unfortunate fascination, and I had a lucky escape."

"She had, at any rate," said I, keeping up the kind voice.

"I could not let you fall into the very pit out of which you helped me, without a word of protest and warning," Herbert went on. "And this mar-

riage wouldn't do. Walsh is very shrewd, and we both agreed that it wouldn't do."

"I'm devilishly obliged to both of you for your interference," I said. "But I've never dreamt of marrying Miss Devine; and I'm quite sure she's never dreamt of marrying me."

"Oh, hasn't she?" said Herbert. "It's no use telling that kind of thing to a man of the world like me. Of course, she's had your thirty thousand a year in mind all the time."

I stood up rather suddenly.

"You'd better go, Herbert," I said quickly. "I should hate to kick a cousin out of my house."

Herbert rose suddenly, too, and he went, protesting that that was not the way to receive a well-meant remonstrance. But he went quickly.

I was really angry. Alice was the last girl in the world to think about my thirty thousand a year—the very last. He had no right, moreover, to talk about my marrying her. We were not at all on that kind of footing. We were just good friends, and nothing more.

I was glad that Herbert went quickly; on second thoughts I should have certainly kicked him out of

the house. At any rate, I had checked his interfering and I thought no more about him. I had two or three of my usual talks with Alice, in the central garden or at her uncle's parties. Then for two days she did not come into the garden once—at any rate, while I was in it. I began to wonder what kept her away, and I was quite surprised to find how much I missed her. When I first caught sight of her at her uncle's next party, my heart gave quite a funny little jump.

But something had gone wrong. She did not smile when I shook hands with her, she looked at me in quite a different way. There was no friendliness in her eyes. She only said "Yes" and "No" to everything I said to her.

Presently I left her, thinking I would talk to her when she was not so busy with her uncle's guests, and went to the card-table. I wondered a little what had upset her. Then Walsh came, and she was very different with him. She smiled and talked to him quite cheerfully. They seemed all of a sudden to have become quite friends. I was a good deal annoyed. An hour later, when Walsh was playing baccarat, and no one else was with her, I went to

her and tried to talk to her again. It was no use. She looked at me with no expression at all in her face, and had nothing whatever to say to me.

All that week she did not come into the central garden—at any rate while I was there. During Scruton's next party I left her alone and she seemed more friendly than ever with Walsh. It was very annoying. I wondered whether it was that he had made it plain that his intentions were on the square, and she was consequently trying to have less to do with me to please him. I did not think it was so, for she seemed really offended with me, not merely cold.

At the party after that, I made my effort. I tried to get her to tell me what I had done to offend her. She said she did not know what I meant, and pretended I had no reason at all to fancy that I had offended her. Then she let Walsh talk to her for more than an hour and seemed to enjoy it thoroughly. She was bright and cheerful with him all the time. It was very annoying.

I saw that some of the other men noticed her new friendliness with Walsh, and I saw that they did not like it, for they were friends of hers. Then I was

helping myself to a drink at the side-table—when the piebald duke came to it and began to mix a brandy-and-soda.

He looked at me in a rather hesitating way, then he said: "I say, Garthoyle, that little girl—Scruton's niece—she's a friend of yours, isn't she?"

"Yes," I said, wondering what was coming.

He paused and looked at the cheerful pair on the sofa, then he said: "That hound Walsh seems to be getting very friendly with her. Doesn't it want checking? You know what Walsh is with women. And she seems a nice child—simple. She has no business to be at these parties at all, don't you know? Couldn't you play a little less and keep her amused—keep Walsh away?"

"I might try," I said. "Not that she will take any harm from Walsh—she's not the kind."

"Yes, yes; of course. But she's very young. No use taking any risks. You know what women are—silly."

"Well, I'll do what I can," I said. "But I don't think I can do much at present. Either I've offended Miss Devine, or Walsh has been telling her lies about me."

He looked at Walsh not at all as if he liked or admired him.

"I should think it's that Walsh has been lying," he said.

"Well, anyhow, I'm afraid I shall have to play a waiting game," I said.

"It would be an awfully good thing, if you could find a reasonable excuse for blacking both his eyes and keeping him at home for a while," said the duke almost viciously.

"He wouldn't give me the chance. He knows too much about me," I said. "If a middle-weight amateur champion wants a scrap, he has to find a perfect stranger to oblige him. As a matter of fact, I gave Walsh a fair chance a few nights ago. I told him several unpleasant things about himself. But he didn't take it."

We finished our drinks and went back to the table. I was a good deal surprised by the duke's speaking to me. I had not thought that he could keep his attention off the game long enough to notice such a thing as the friendliness between Alice and Walsh. His warning made the matter much more serious. A duke is naturally an expert in women; they run

after him so. He must be thinking that things were getting pretty dangerous. I knew that Walsh was in dead earnest; and now there was no relying on Alice's dislike of him. He seemed to have worn it down. It was very annoying.

If only I could find out how I had offended her, and set that right, it would be a different matter; for, if she and I were friends again I thought I could queer Walsh's game. But I could not think what on earth I had done, or what she had been told I had done, though I thought of every possible thing.

Then Walsh himself gave me the hint. At Scruton's next party he was sitting by Alice talking to her when I came in.

"Ah, the gay abductor!" he said in his sneering way.

Then I tumbled to it. He was friendly enough with Herbert to learn from him how I had helped Gage carry off Kitty Maynard. I might take it as pretty certain that Herbert had also told him that I had said that I never dreamed of marrying Alice. Walsh had told Alice this with embellishments. He had made it seem absolutely offensive. No wonder

she was angry with me. I could have wrung his neck cheerfully.

When I came to consider the matter I found myself no better off now that I had guessed why she was furious with me than I was before. I could not go to her and say: "Look here; you've been told that I've been saying that I should never dream of marrying you. I didn't say it the way you think I did."

It was absurd. I did want to wring Walsh's neck.

Well, I could only sit tight and keep my temper. I did. I took Alice's snubbings like a lamb, a cheerful lamb. But once or twice when Walsh chipped in, I was pleased to get the chance of showing that the lambness was only skin-deep. Certainly I gave him every excuse to punch my head. I only wished he would. But to Alice I tried to make it plain that whatever she might say, I was still her friend. Yet it was hard work to see her playing with fire, and keep quiet. If I had not been so tied up, if I could have let myself go, and made up my mind to marry her, and ask her to marry me, I thought I could get into a position to set things right. But I could not. The ghost trick stuck in my mind.

All the while she went on growing friendlier and friendlier with Walsh. I found that she was even letting him help her take her waifs into the country for afternoon outings. He spoke to her about it before me just to annoy me. He took them in his motor-car, just as I had taken the anarchists; and she went with them to look after them. I must say that that did annoy me worse than anything. I could only hope that her old distrust of him was still alive under this new friendliness; and I had an idea that she showed herself far more friendly with him when I was present, hearing their talk, than when I was not. He tried to be quite insufferable with his triumphant airs; they did not get at me much. I took it that he was only putting them on just to annoy me.

Naturally I was delighted to see, one evening at Scruton's, that Walsh had received a set-back. Alice had plainly quarreled with him; she would have nothing to do with him. He kept leaving the bacarat-table and coming to her and talking. But from his face I gathered that she was snubbing him worse than she snubbed me. He was a blackish purple. At the same time she showed herself no friendlier with me; she did not use me to annoy

Walsh. Then I thought that she looked rather unhappy; and it spoilt my pleasure in her quarrel with Walsh. It looked as if she were feeling unhappy because she had quarreled with him.

I was taking her coldness in my usual cheerful way; and I could not help saying: "I'm glad to see you've found Walsh out. I thought he was pretty sure to give himself away. He's not the sort of man that it's safe for a woman to be decent to at all."

She was sitting stiffly enough; but she drew herself up even more stiffly; and her pretty eyes sparkled, and she said: "I—I don't see anything whatever to choose between Sir Theobald Walsh and Lord Garthoyle."

"Oh, but there is—lots," I said.

She said a little breathlessly: "Oh, you have—you have a—a——"

"Cheek? Yes; I have. I was born with it," said I, stroking it. "But all the same it's true. And honestly, where Walsh is concerned, you have to be careful—you do really. You can tell him I said so, too."

She looked at me as though she did not know quite what unpleasant thing to say—as if I was too

aggravating for words. She opened her lips; then she shut them and said nothing.

Of course, it was cheek; but I was glad to have given her the warning. I suppose, however, that that was why she let Walsh make peace with her, and seemed more friendly with him than ever. It really looked as if he would win out and marry her. It would be a great pity; she was far too delicate and sensitive to be the wife of that scowling scoundrel. She might be happy with him for a couple of months at the outside; then it would be the usual neglect and other women.

It was very annoying. It worried me and made me restless. Things grew so tasteless—polo, and motoring, and even being the complete house-agent, and running Garthoyle Gardens. Baccarat was rather better; though I had to be careful to play sitting with my back to Alice, that I might not see her and Walsh together. I felt so helpless to prevent her making a mess of things. Yet somehow I could not get it out of my head that she did not really care for Walsh, that she was just friendly with him and no more. I wondered how he would take it when he found out that it was so. I was afraid he might make himself violently unpleasant. I could only

hope that I might be at hand when he did; for I did not think that, even if she went to Scruton, he would be of much help to her. The whole business was very annoying.

Then, one evening I noticed that they had had another quarrel; for Walsh came scowling to the baccarat-table, and did not go near her for an hour; then they seemed to make it up.

The next afternoon I went down to Wembley Park for some polo practise. As I motored into the Gardens, on my return, I saw a small and rather ragged boy hurrying along the pavement, and I recognized Alice's protégé, Robespierre Briggs, the anarchist. I stopped the car and called to him.

He came running up and cried: "Mr. Garth, it's Miss Alice! She's bin carried awye!"

"Carried away! What do you mean?" I said.

"It's Sir Theerbald Walsh—'im what's a baronit. 'E an' Miss Alice took us to Chipperfield Common in 'is moter, the syme as you did. An' we got outer the car, an' 'e shoves a 'andful of money—silver—inter my 'and, an' catches 'old of Miss Alice an' pulls 'er back inter the car. 'An' she tells 'im ter let 'er go; and 'e says 'e ain't never goin' ter let 'er go. An' she calls out ter me: 'Go to Mr. Scruton, Gar-

thoyle Gardens, Robbie, an' tell 'im!' An' the car goes orf an' leaves us there. An' I gives Cherlie most of the money, an' I run most of the wye to King's Langley stytion, an' a tryne to London come in, an' I come by it to Euston, an' got 'ere in a bus; an' there ain't a copper abart, an' I can't find which is Mr. Scruton's 'ouse!"

He was white and breathless and ready to cry. I bade him jump into the car, and ran round the triangle to Scruton's.

We were taken straight to him in his smoking-room, and found him sleeping peacefully in an easy chair.

Our entrance woke him, and I said: "I've nice news for you, Scruton. That blackguard Walsh has kidnaped Miss Devine."

"Kidnaped? What the deuce are you talking about?" he cried, waking up thoroughly.

I told him Robespierre's story of the abduction.

"I wouldn't have had this happen for fifty thousand pounds!" he cried. "Alice's all the kith and kin I've got in the world! How are we to find them? How are we to get at the swine?"

He was growing if anything blacker than Walsh was after I had said a few kind words to him.

“Well, there’s just a chance,” I said. “Walsh has a house near Pinner, and I happen to know that he uses it in his love-affairs. Now, Pinner’s on the way between Chipperfield and London. It’s any odds that he’s taken her there. He doesn’t know that I know anything about it. We might try it on the chance. My car’s at the door.”

“By jove! It’s a chance! Quite a good chance!” cried Scruton.

He ran across the room to a bureau, opened a drawer, took a revolver from it, and thrust it into his hip pocket, saying: “I always feel more comfortable carrying a gun when there’s trouble about.”

I gathered that he had not spent all his life in quiet New Zealand. We hurried out to the car; I gave Robespierre a tenner for his promptitude; and Scruton and I jumped into the tonneau. When I want the best got out of it, I leave it to Gaston; I do not drive it myself then. I told him to get to Pinner as fast as he could; and he set her going as we settled back in our seats.

Then Scruton turned to me and said: “What does Walsh mean by it? What the devil does he mean by it?”

“He sticks at nothing where a woman is con-

cerned. I should have thought you knew that," I said.

"Does he think that I'm the kind of man to have my womankind kidnaped? If any harm has come to Alice, I'll throttle him!"

"If he's taken her to The Cedars, we shall be in plenty of time. She won't have come to any harm," I said. "But Walsh is very sidey; he thinks that, where a commoner like you is concerned, a British baronet can do anything he chooses."

I thought it as well to get Scruton furious. Besides, it was true.

"Oh, he does, does he? Well, I'll teach him to play a scoundrelly trick on a young girl! I'll wring his neck for him all right—all right!" he roared. "And the duke did give me a hint to keep my eye on him. But I didn't give heed to it, for I knew that Alice was all right. I never dreamed that Walsh would play this game on me."

"Walsh is just the man to do it, you see. He doesn't give a damn for a man like you," I said.

"I'll teach him all about that," roared Scruton.

I saw no point in telling him that Walsh had told me that he wanted to marry Alice, and was not up

to serious mischief, but merely trying to force her to marry him by compromising her in exactly the same way as Freddy Gage had forced Kitty Maynard to marry him to save her from Herbert. In fact, Walsh had cribbed the idea from me; and the one abduction had led to the other.

At the same time I was infernally uneasy. There was no trusting Walsh; and if we did not find Alice at The Cedars, I should be frightened out of my life.

Scruton was properly furious. All the way he was either growling or raging at Walsh; and I did hope to goodness he would get the chance of dealing with the hound.

Gaston made short work of the road to Pinner. But oh, it was a devilishly uncomfortable journey! I was so frightened lest Walsh should have taken Alice somewhere else.

I did not let Gaston drive the car to the front gates of The Cedars. I told him to turn down a side lane half a mile on the London side of it; and we came to a gate in a little wood. I knew of this entrance from Carrie Delamere. I had taken her out in my car one afternoon; and she had suggested

that we should have a picnic tea in the little wood. After tea she had taken me along a path through it which had brought us to the garden of The Cedars.

Scruton and I hurried through the wood to the gate of the garden. It was locked; but we lifted it off its hinges and slipped into the covert of a shrubbery which ran right up to the house. I was pleased to see that several of the windows were open, and a glass door leading from the house to the garden.

"Somebody's living here, at any rate," said Scruton.

We came under covert to within ten yards of the house; then we heard a murmur of voices from an open window in the left side of it on the ground floor. As we worked our way noiselessly toward it, I heard the tones of Alice's voice; and my heart gave a little jump of relief.

When we faced the window, there was Walsh sitting with his back to us, right in the window-seat, with one elbow sticking out over the sill. Beyond him, sitting at a little table with tea on it, was Alice. I saw that her face was pale; and I saw that she was looking at Walsh with an extraordinary expression of contempt and dislike.

"For the hundredth time, I tell you there's no

way out of it—you've got to marry me," said Walsh, in a lazy aggravating drawl.

"If you were the only man in the world I wouldn't—after to-day," said Alice.

She spoke quite calmly, without any temper, but as if she were thoroughly in earnest, and her voice was as full of dislike and contempt as her eyes.

"After to-day—after this visit you're paying me, I'm the only man left in the world who will marry you," said Walsh in a taunting tone.

"That makes no difference—you detestable cad!" said Alice slowly.

"What a way to speak of your future husband! On your wedding-day, too," said Walsh, and he laughed quietly, as if he were enjoying himself thoroughly. "And do bear in mind that it's only out of natural nobility of nature that I'm marrying you at all. It isn't really necessary."

He laughed again—a laugh that made the very toes of my boots itch to kick him.

While he laughed, in three noiseless strides Scruton crossed the turf, leaned in at the window, and his arm shot round Walsh's neck, scragging him. Then with furious jerks and tugs he began to drag him out of the window.

"Mind his neck!" I cried.

"Damn his neck! Come out, will you?" cried Scruton.

And Walsh came out, all waving arms and legs, grunting, black in the face with fury and being throttled.

"Get Alice away!" said Scruton.

She was already at the window; I caught hold of her, lifted her through it and carried her into the shrubbery. It seemed the natural thing to do.

"Put me down! Put me down!" she cried, trying to twist out of my arms.

"Very good," I said. "But we've got to hurry."

I put her down, but kept an arm round her as I hurried her along. She tried, not very violently, to push it away. But it seemed all right where it was—to me—and I kept it there. She might have tripped and fallen on the rough ground of the shrubbery.

"Oh, I *was* so frightened. I am so glad you came," she said in a shaky voice.

"And I was frightened, too—awfully frightened. I know that blackguard Walsh. It was the luckiest thing in the world that I lighted on Robespierre."

"Oh, it was lucky!" she cried.

We were nearly at the bottom of the shrubbery when Walsh began to shout. I pushed through it, out into the open and looked back. He and Scruton were going at it hammer and tongs on the lawn in front of the house. I had no fear for Scruton; he was the heavier man and as hard as nails, while Walsh was soft and on the puffy side. He was howling for servants. While I looked he went down heavily, and he did not get up. I hurried Alice out of the garden.

In the wood I loosed her—not that I wanted to—and we went through it more slowly.

“Oh, I *was* glad to see you!” she said. “How did you come to learn about it? Where did you see Robespierre?”

“I found him wandering about the Gardens, looking for your uncle’s house, and he told me that Walsh had carried you off.”

“I knew he’d find my uncle, I was sure of it,” said Alice. “But I didn’t see how my uncle could find me, how he would know where that horrible brute had taken me. I thought it might be days and days before he found out, and oh! I *was* frightened!”

“Well, I knew of that lair of Walsh’s, and we

drew it on the chance. It was lucky that he brought you here. If he hadn't it might have been days and days before we found you."

She shivered and we hurried a few steps without speaking.

Then she said: "It does seem strange that it should always be you who helps me when I'm in a difficulty." And she looked at me with thankful eyes.

"No one would think it if they saw the brutal way you treat me," I said quickly.

"Oh, that," she said, blushing. "Well, you—you deserved it."

"No, I didn't. I did nothing to make you jump on me for weeks. And you wouldn't tell me what I'd done to offend you. What was it?" I said, jumping at the chance of clearing things up.

She shook her head and blushed again. "I'm not going to tell you," she said.

"I know quite well that Walsh told you some lie about me," I said.

"Perhaps it was," she said.

"Of course it was. And I don't think it was at all friendly to believe it; at least you ought to have given me a chance of clearing it up."

"Perhaps I ought. But it seemed to be the truth. He wasn't the only one to say it," said she.

It *had* been that ass Herbert.

"I don't believe that you believed it—really. You just made it an excuse to jump on me," I said.

"Oh, no—no! I didn't *want* to be unfriendly. I did believe it truly!" she cried.

"Well, it was very wrong of you," I said. "But we're friends again now?"

"Yes, yes; we're friends again now," she said. And I thought that her eyes shone so brightly because there were tears in them.

Scruton came running round the corner of the path behind us, carrying a broom-handle.

"Hurry up! I've drawn a whole swarm!" he cried.

I slipped my arm round Alice again and we ran through the wood. As we reached the car we heard the clumping of thick boots and grunting voices behind us. We scrambled into the tonneau and I told Gaston to let the car go.

"I laid him out all right—all right!" said Scruton cheerfully. "And then I lammed him with this broom-handle. It was all I could find. I wasn't half through with him when a gardener and chauff-

feur—husky fellows—came bustling round the house, and as they came they shouted to some one else. So I gave Walsh three last souvenirs, and faded.”

“I’m so glad you thrashed him,” said Alice.

“Yes, missie; but for the future you cut out motoring with British baronets,” said Scruton.

“Yes; stick to peers—they’re far safer,” said I.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

I DINED at Scruton's that night, and a very pleasant dinner it was, since he had to go off to a bridge-party at ten o'clock and leave me and Alice together. I tried very hard to learn from her why she had insisted on quarreling with me, so severely and for so long, but though I teased her about it most of the evening, I could not get her to tell me. I was pretty sure, in fact I was quite sure, that she had been set against me by some idle lie of Walsh's, probably backed up by that idiot Herbert.

I was a long time getting to sleep that night. The whole of this Walsh business—the way his making love to Alice had worried me, the fright I had had when I learned that he had carried her off in his motor-car, that anxious journey to Pinner, and the enormous relief I had felt when I heard her voice through the open window—had opened my eyes as wide as they could be opened. It was quite plain to

me that my friendship for her was a good deal more than friendship.

Of course, it would be delightful to marry her; she was charming, and thoroughly nice, and as pretty as a girl could be. I, at any rate, could not remember ever having known or seen half so pretty a girl. If she would marry me (and I thought she would in time, if I were patient), she would make a perfectly ripping wife. But that confounded ghost trick stuck in my throat. There was no getting over the fact that she had helped Scruton to trick my Uncle Algeron, and to try to trick me out of a quarter's rent.

That trick was like nothing else in her; it did not fit in with the rest of her at all. In fact, there was no explaining it by any other single thing I had ever seen in her. It did seem likely that there was some simple explanation of it, but, worry as I might, I could not hit on it. I might, of course, have gone straight to her and asked her about it. But I did not like to. In fact, I dare not. There was that awkward fact that when I had caught her playing the ghost, I had kissed her. I remembered that kiss quite well, but I also remembered her fury at it, and the slap, with all the righteous indignation behind it, which she gave me. I was quite sure that she

had taken that kiss very seriously indeed; probably she had been awfully cut up about it. Very likely, she detested the unknown man who had kissed her. I knew that she never dreamt that I was he. If she did learn that I was the offender, judging from the way she had treated me over that silly lie of Walsh's, she would probably have no more to do with me.

Of course, it was very unreasonable to take a snatched kiss seriously. It might happen to anybody. But Alice was like that; of course, women never are reasonable about that kind of thing.

It was a very difficult business, and for the next few days I worried and worried over it. I could not make up my mind what to do. Then the Walsh affair, too, had changed Alice. She had grown rather shy with me. It was all right after we had been talking a while, but she was shy when she met me, and if I came on her suddenly, she blushed—faintly, but quite distinctly. It always made me want to pick her up and kiss her, and tell her that she was the only girl in the world for me. After a while I could not think of that kiss I gave her, when I caught her playing the ghost, without wanting to kiss her again. At least, it was more than wanting—it was a kind of burning to do it.

I kept on getting more and more worried, and I quite realized that I was in the mess of a lifetime.

At last I made up my mind that the only thing to do was to bolt, and be quick about it. A course of foreign travel was the only chance of curing myself, and the sooner I took it, the less painful I should find it. I saw plainly that it was not a case for big game shooting. If I got away to the loneliness of the woods and hills, I should only be worse. I should want Alice worse than ever. A good dose of racketing about the capitals of Europe was what I wanted.

I saw this quite clearly, but then I could not drag myself away from London. I could not bear the idea of leaving Alice. I had to struggle like anything to get myself to go, but at last I went off to Paris. I did not tell Alice I was going; I dared not. She might look hurt at the thought of it, and then, ghost trick or no ghost trick, I should pick her up and kiss her. I knew I should.

I put in three days at Paris, with lots of wild hilarity in them. Then the whole place seemed to turn sour, and after lunch on the fourth day, I told Mowart to pack my things and take ticket for Berlin, a much more amusing town, when you know the

ropes, than people will admit. I could only stand it for a day. I was restless, and bored beyond relief. At six in the evening I told Mowart to pack and came straight back to Garthoyle Gardens.

I was no sooner in my own house, within three hundred yards of Alice, than the restlessness left me. I wanted to see her as soon as possible, of course, but I could wait an hour or two without an effort.

I dined at home, with a much better appetite than I had had in Paris or Berlin; and then I went out into the central garden. It was late, for I had dined late—it must have been nearly half past ten. There was not much chance of finding Alice, for she did not often come into the garden at night. But there was a chance, and I strolled all round it, looking for her. I did not find her. I had made a circuit of the garden and come back to the gate opposite my own house; I turned and went up the broad path which runs to the middle of the garden.

I was about fifty yards from the ring of shrubberies which forms the center of the garden, when a figure burst out of one of the lawns in the ring and came running toward me. I saw that it was a woman; then I saw that it was a girl, and then I

saw that it was Alice herself. When she was ten yards from me I saw that she was as white as a sheet and was panting and sobbing. She almost ran into me before she saw me, and then, pulling up, fairly tumbled into my arms.

“Whatever is it?” I cried, holding her up.

“Oh, I’ve been so frightened!” she gasped.

She was as cold as ice, and trembling as I have never seen any one tremble before. I half carried, half dragged her to the nearest bench, and sat down on it with her in my arms.

“Gently, gently—you’re quite safe now—you needn’t be frightened any longer,” I said; and I kissed her.

It was rather taking advantage of her terror, but I was startled and did not think of that; and it seemed the natural thing to do—just as one would kiss a frightened child. She did not seem to mind it—and I kissed her again.

She sobbed and choked and panted for two or three minutes, then she recovered enough to say:

“Oh, I’m so glad you came. I should never have got as far as the gate—never!”

She looked up the path with terrified eyes and shrank closer to me.

“Who was it? Who frightened you? Was it that brute Walsh?” I said, beginning to get angry; and I half rose with the idea of going and smashing him.

“No—no—it was no one. It was the straw hat,” she panted.

“The what?” I cried.

“It was the straw hat,” she said.

“What straw hat? Tell me all about it, please,” said I; and I kissed her again, to give her confidence.

She pulled herself together with an effort that shook her; then she went on in a steadier voice: “I was coming toward the center of the garden—and I thought I saw a man—a man in a straw hat—go into the lawn—the lawn in which Etienne Bechut was murdered. He was very indistinct, and it was odd—and it puzzled me. So when I got to the lawn I went half-way through the entrance and peeped; and I saw his straw hat lying on the lawn just where it was when we found his body. And I knew that his body was lying there, too, just out of sight round the corner. But I didn’t stop to look; it frightened me so. And I ran and ran; and the farther I ran the more frightened I grew. I felt as if he were

after me. And I couldn't have run much farther when I met you; I should have dropped."

"Why, you poor child!" I said; and I kissed her again. "You imagined it all. You frightened yourself. There wasn't really any hat there. It was fancy—pure fancy—or perhaps it was the light falling through the trees in a white patch that looked like a hat."

"No; there was no white patch. There were no shadows to make them. The moon was shining full on the lawn, and the hat was lying full in the moonlight," she said.

I hesitated . . . she was so sure . . . I did not know what to do. Then I said: "When you've recovered a bit more, we'll go to that lawn and make sure."

"No! No! I won't go near the dreadful place!" she cried.

"All right," I said. "I'll take you home; and then I'll come back and look into it."

"No, no; you mustn't. I won't have it. It's dreadfully dangerous. I'm sure it is," she cried, and she caught hold of my arm with both hands, and held on to it as if she meant to keep me there.

I kissed her again; and then suddenly she flushed,

as if she had just noticed the kisses for the first time, and tried to slip off my knee.

I held her tight and said: "No; you're more comfortable where you are; and you feel so much safer."

I drew her closer to me and kissed her again. She was quite still.

We sat on that bench for a long time—I had it taken away to Garth Royal later; and it is in the rose-garden there, under a stone canopy. We did not say very much, because there did not seem to be anything to say. It seemed to be quite enough to be sitting there together. At last she said that she must be going, or the house would be locked up, and she would have to ring up a servant to let her in.

I rose very unwillingly, set her down and said: "Well, if you must, you must. As we go by it, we'll just take a look at that lawn. It will never do for you to be afraid to come into this garden at night, now."

"Oh, it will be horrid!" she cried, clutching my arm. "And there isn't any need—there isn't really. I shan't be frightened to-morrow at all."

I felt her quivering a little with a fresh terror.

"You'd better come along. You'll be ever so much less frightened about this, if you actually knew

that there's no hat on that lawn and no body either," I said in a coaxing tone.

She did not refuse any longer; but she did not come at all readily; and when we came near the lawn, her feet seemed to drag rather in spite of herself. As we went into the narrow entrance I held her very tight to reassure her.

The lawn was quite bright in the moonlight. There was no straw hat lying on it, nor any body of the murdered blackmailer.

Alice breathed a quick sigh of relief, and said softly: "Thank goodness!"

I kissed her and said: "I tell you what, it's possible that you fancied you saw a straw hat because you noticed it so strongly on the night we found the body; and the sight of the lawn again suggested it so vividly to you that you actually saw it."

"No; I saw it too distinctly—much too distinctly for it to be any fancy," she said firmly.

"Well, perhaps there was a real straw hat," I said. "It's a hot night; and very likely somebody did come on to the lawn and throw his hat down before he sat down himself. If you had looked further on the lawn, you'd have seen him sitting or lying on the

ground, and probably smoking—a quite harmless real man.”

“And where is he?” she said.

“He has had plenty of time to go away,” said I.

She shook her head as if that did not satisfy her, either; and we went a few steps farther on the lawn.

All at once I had an odd feeling, quite strong, that there was something wrong with the lawn. I thought that I must have caught some of Alice’s fright; and just as I felt it she shivered.

I did not say anything; I turned quietly round, and we walked off the lawn. It took rather an effort not to jump out of it at the entrance; a chill ran down my back, and I had a horrid feeling that something, something beastly, was behind me—coming after me. Alice gasped and gripped my arm hard.

Once we were clear of the entrance, the feeling stopped, as though the thing, whatever it was, came no farther than the lawn. But we walked away from it pretty quickly.

We had gone about twenty yards, when Alice said in a voice that had gone shaky again: “There is something wrong about that lawn. I am sure of it. I felt it—oh, ever so distinctly.”

“Well, it’s natural that you should find a place creepy where you suddenly come upon the body of a murdered man. But you saw for yourself that the lawn was absolutely empty,” said I.

I did not see that anything was to be gained by telling her that I had caught some of her fright, and found the lawn creepy, too. If I did, she’d never come into the garden at night without feeling uncomfortable.

“Yes; I saw that it was empty,” she said, after a pause; but she did not say it as if she found that fact at all satisfying.

We walked on out of the garden, going more slowly the nearer we came to the gate; and then we were some time in her uncle’s porch before she rang the bell.

I walked back to my house in a quite contented frame of mind. Alice’s fright had forced my hand and settled things for us. It had for the time being put the ghost trick out of my mind. In fact, one ghost had laid the other; and I was very glad that it had. In spite of the fact that I had spent the night before traveling across Europe, I was a long while getting to sleep. I had to think about Alice.

When, blushing and smiling, she met me in the

garden next morning, she looked perfectly adorable. We lost no time in finding a secluded corner; and we were very happy in it.

We had plenty of things to talk about; but our talk was rather jerky and interrupted. It must have been nearly an hour before we got to the subject of her fright the night before. She was still quite sure that she had seen a straw hat lying on the lawn, and that it was not a real straw hat.

At last I said carelessly, without thinking: "Then I tell you what it was. It was a judgment on you."

"A judgment?" she said, looking puzzled.

"Yes; a judgment on you for the fright you gave me."

"Me? Give you a fright?" she said, looking more puzzled.

"Yes; when you played the ghost the night I slept at Number 9," I said.

She happened to be sitting on my knee. She jumped up and stared at me, blinking, as if she couldn't believe her ears.

"You—you—was it you?" she stammered; and there was a fine flush on her face; and her eyes began to sparkle.

"It was, indeed," I said.

"You—you—were that—that horrid cad?" she cried.

"Oh, come," I said, rather taken aback. "What did you expect me to do? I catch a pretty girl playing a trick like that on me to get her uncle out of paying his rent, and of course I kiss her—*à la guerre comme à la guerre*. I couldn't beat you for the horrid fright, you'd given me, could I?"

"My uncle's rent? What do you mean?" she cried.

My heart jumped joyfully. I had been right; she had not known her uncle's little game. I had always been sure of it really.

"Why, didn't you know? Your uncle was trying to get his house rent-free on the ground that Number 9 was haunted," I blurted out like a born idiot.

She stood quite still, staring at me, and wringing her hands: "So that was his joke," she said, "And—and what you must have been thinking of me all this time! Oh——"

"I thought that your uncle had told you that it was just a joke he was playing on a friend," I said quickly.

"You did not!" she cried.

"I did!" cried I.

"You did not! You thought—oh, you thought that I was a party to the trick."

"I did not—never. I knew you couldn't be," I said stoutly.

"You did—you did. Oh, I understand now—the things that puzzled me—the way you've looked at me sometimes. And that kiss—oh, how I've hated you for that kiss!"

"It couldn't have been me you hated for it, because you didn't know it was me. Besides, the other kisses have wiped it away," I said.

She rubbed her lips; and her eyes blazed at me.

"I'll never—never speak to you again," she cried. "Not for the kiss so much, but for thinking that of me. It was—it was shameful! And oh—I did think so much of you!" Her voice broke a little.

"But I tell you, I didn't think it!" I cried.

"You did. I know you did," she said. And she turned and went quickly out of the lawn, not straight, but wavering, as if she did not quite see where she was going.

I sat still; and if I looked as big a fool as I felt, I must have looked a congenital idiot. I did not follow her. At the moment I did not quite see what to do. I thought I had better give her time to get

over it a little. It *was* a mess: it was not only that she believed me to have been thinking badly of her, I was also the person she had been detesting for that kiss. I thought that she would get over the kiss pretty soon; for as I told her, there were those other kisses. But she would be some time getting over my having believed that she had been a party to her uncle's little game. I was sure that that would hurt her horribly. I wondered how I could ever have been such a fool as to think it. Then I told myself, with details, what I thought of myself for letting her learn that I had thought it.

It eased my mind a little; and I settled down again to decide what I should do. I first made up my mind to give her a week to get over it somewhat. Then I considered how horribly hurt she would be feeling all that time, and how wretched it would make her. I could not stand it. It must be stopped at once, somehow. But I could not think how. It was beyond my brains to find a way. At last I had an idea; there was just a chance that she might be bullied out of her wretchedness at once, while she was still upset.

It was worth trying; in fact, it was the only thing to try if I would not wait. I walked quickly to

Number 9; and on the way it occurred to me that her uncle had got us into the mess, and the least he could do was to help us out of it. He might have a great deal of influence with her; she might even be frightened of him. It would be so much better that she should have one unpleasant quarter of an hour than that she should be miserable for a week. Besides, I should probably find it very difficult, if not quite impossible, to get an interview with her on my own account; he might at least try to work that for me.

I made up my mind to try it, and rang the bell. The butler said that Mr. Scruton was at home, left me in the drawing-room for a couple of minutes and then took me to the smoking-room. Scruton was sitting in a big armchair, smoking a cigar, with a novel on his knee. When I came into the room he jumped up to greet me with such a bright face that I fancied that novel-reading was not one of his strong points.

We greeted each other; he gave me a cigarette; and we sat down facing each other.

"I've come to see you on an important matter," I said. "I want to marry your niece."

Scruton rose, came slowly to me with a solemn

air, held out an enormous hand and said: "Shake, Lord Garthoyle."

I shook the enormous hand; and he said solemnly: "She is yours."

"That's just what she isn't; and it's your fault," I said.

Scruton's face fell; and he said anxiously: "My fault?"

"Yes. I had fixed the matter up, and I was just thinking of beginning to discuss the date of our marriage, when I stopped to say something about the ghost trick you set her to play on me."

"She didn't know why she was playing it; she thought it was just a joke," said Scruton quickly.

"Yes; but when she found out that I was the man she had played it on, she refused to have anything more to do with me. You see, when I jumped out of bed and caught her, I kissed her."

"That was not the way to treat a lady," said Scruton gloomily. "Any lady would resent it."

"Well, that's your fault; it was you that put her into the false position. It couldn't have happened if you hadn't," I said. "But that isn't the worst of it. I let out that I thought she knew that you were trying to get off paying your rent."

"But you ought to have known for certain that she didn't know anything about it. A girl like Alice wouldn't have a thing to say to a bluff like that," said Scruton.

"Of course, I know that now," I said shortly. "But how on earth was I to know that she was a girl like that at the time? It's so confusing to catch a girl in a woolen dressing-gown, walking up and down one's bedroom at one o'clock in the morning, and sighing like a woman who committed suicide in it."

"I thought that a man of your birth and social training could tell a lady at once, under any circumstances," said Scruton, with a kind of solemn surprise.

"In a nearly dark room? How possibly could I?" I asked.

"By instinct," said Scruton.

I stared at him. I thought he was pulling my leg. But he was quite serious.

"You must be mad," I said.

He shook his head, looked sad and said: "I'm an old-fashioned Tory, and I've a great admiration for the House of Lords. I certainly expect a peer of the realm to know a thing like that by instinct."

"But how the devil is instinct to get a show in a dark room?" I said rather loudly.

"It's a sixth sense," said Scruton.

"Sixth sense be damned!" I said louder still.

"It's no good getting heated about it. If you haven't got it, you haven't," said Scruton; and he looked at me in a disappointed kind of way.

It was no good getting heated about it, and I said nothing for a minute or two. Scruton said nothing either; he seemed to be thinking it out.

"Well?" I said at last, rather grumpily.

"Well, it will be a great disappointment to me if this match falls through," he said slowly. "I have always expected Alice to marry well, but this—this surpasses my most sanguine expectation. Though I must say that it is rather a disappointment to find you lacking in an instinct like that. I shall settle a hundred thousand pounds on her, if she marries you, Lord Garthoyle."

"That's very handsome of you; but as things are at present she won't marry me. She's dead set against it," I said gloomily.

"But she'll forgive you; you must persuade her; she must listen to reason. Surely something can be done," he said, frowning.

"Something has got to be done. Your infernal thriftiness in the matter of house-rent has got us into this mess; and I think it's up to you to get us out of it," I said firmly.

"Well, I'll see what I can do," he said slowly, evidently trying to think of a plan. "I'm not a ladies' man, of course; but I'm not unused to women. I've been married several times."

"Several times!" I howled.

"Yes; when I was in business on the Pacific slope—married and divorced. Oh, it's very common out there, you know. But am I to understand that before you let this out, Alice had definitely accepted you?"

"Oh, yes; quite definitely," I said.

"Well, an acceptance of a proposal of marriage is a very serious thing, and I shall have to speak to her seriously about it," he said solemnly, and he rang the bell.

The butler came, and Scruton told him to tell Alice that he wanted to speak to her in the smoking-room. We waited two or three minutes, and then the butler came back and said that Miss Devine had a headache and was staying in her room. I wondered whether she had guessed that I had followed

her home. Of course, she might have seen me come to the house from her window.

"Tell her that, headache or no headache, I want to speak to her at once," said Scruton impatiently; and the butler went.

"Look here, you're not going to be harsh with her. She's a good deal upset," I said, beginning to repent a little at having brought him into it.

"I shall do what the circumstances require—no more and no less," said Scruton; and I wondered if he had learnt to speak like a copy-book on the Pacific slope.

He took up his stand on the hearthrug and kept pulling at his beard. We waited for nearly five minutes, without saying much to each other. Then the door opened, and Alice came in.

She was pale; and she looked as if she had been crying her eyes out. But at the sight of me her face flamed red enough, and she stopped short.

"What is it you want, Uncle?" she said defiantly; and it looked as if Scruton was going to find it a difficult job.

"Lord Garthoyle has come to me with a complaint—a very serious complaint about you," said Scruton in a very solemn tone.

“Lord Garthoyle—a complaint—about me?” said Alice, rather as if the idea had taken her breath away.

“Yes, a complaint; he tells me that he did you the honor to make you a proposal of marriage. Is that so?” Scruton went on in the same solemn tone.

“Yes, he did. But——” said Alice.

“And he also tells me that you accepted it; and then you suddenly changed your mind, and rejected him.”

“Did he tell you why?” cried Alice.

“Let us keep to the facts,” said Scruton, with a lordly wave of his hand. “The Scrutons and the Devines have always been scrupulously honorable people”—he paused, and added quickly—“in their matrimonial affairs. It has always been the tradition of the family—both families. And I’m shocked—yes, shocked beyond measure—to find that you have been playing fast and loose with this—er—er—amiable young man.”

“Fast and loose—amiable?” said Alice in a stupefied sort of voice.

“Fast and loose,” said Scruton; and he reminded me of a talking steam-roller. “You accepted his

proposal of marriage, and in—in—how long was it?”—He turned to me.

“About ten hours,” I said.

“As short a time as that! Monstrous!” cried Scruton very indignantly. “In ten hours you chuck—you—er—er—reject him. It’s shocking, this coquetry!”

“Coquetry?” said Alice, with a gasp.

“Yes, coquetry—heartless coquetry!” roared Scruton. “I say it’s shocking! Why, dash it all! It’s bad form! Well, I have sent for you to tell you that I will not have it!” He was fairly bellowing now. “I will not have a niece of mine behaving in this disgraceful way. You will marry Lord Garthoyle in a month from now——”

“But, Uncle——” cried Alice, looking a little stunned.

“Not a word! Not a word!” bellowed Scruton. “You marry Lord Garthoyle in a month from now, and that’s all there is to it. I’m going straight to my lawyers to instruct them to draw up the settlements.”

He walked to the door rather quickly, and was out of the room before Alice could recover herself.

She turned on me furiously, with blazing eyes,

and cried: "To come to my uncle; Oh, you have—you have a—a——"

"Cheek—yes—I was born with it. I've told you so before," I said, walking quietly across the room. "But, after all, there was no one else to go to. Surely your uncle's the proper person. He's your guardian, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. And, after all, you can't deny that he has settled the matter in a thoroughly satisfactory way."

"Settled it! You think he's settled it? It isn't settled at all!" she cried, if anything more furiously.

"You heard what your uncle said. Of course, it's settled."

"It isn't settled!" she cried.

"Come, come. It's no good kicking against the pricks," I said gently. "Come and sit on my knee, and we'll settle next where we'll spend our honeymoon."

"Oh, you—how dare you?" she cried; and she made a dash for the door.

It was just what I was expecting, and I was ready. She dashed right into my arms, and I picked her up.

"Rupert, don't!" she cried.

The "Rupert" was all I wanted; so I did.

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