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DIG PETER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The House of Merrilees
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Exton Manor
The Squire's Daughter
The Eldest Son
The Honour of the Clintons
The Greatest of These
The Old Order Changeth
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The Graftons
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Sir Harry
Many Junes
A Spring Walk in Provence
Peggy in Toyland
The Hall and the Grange
Peter Binney
Big Peter

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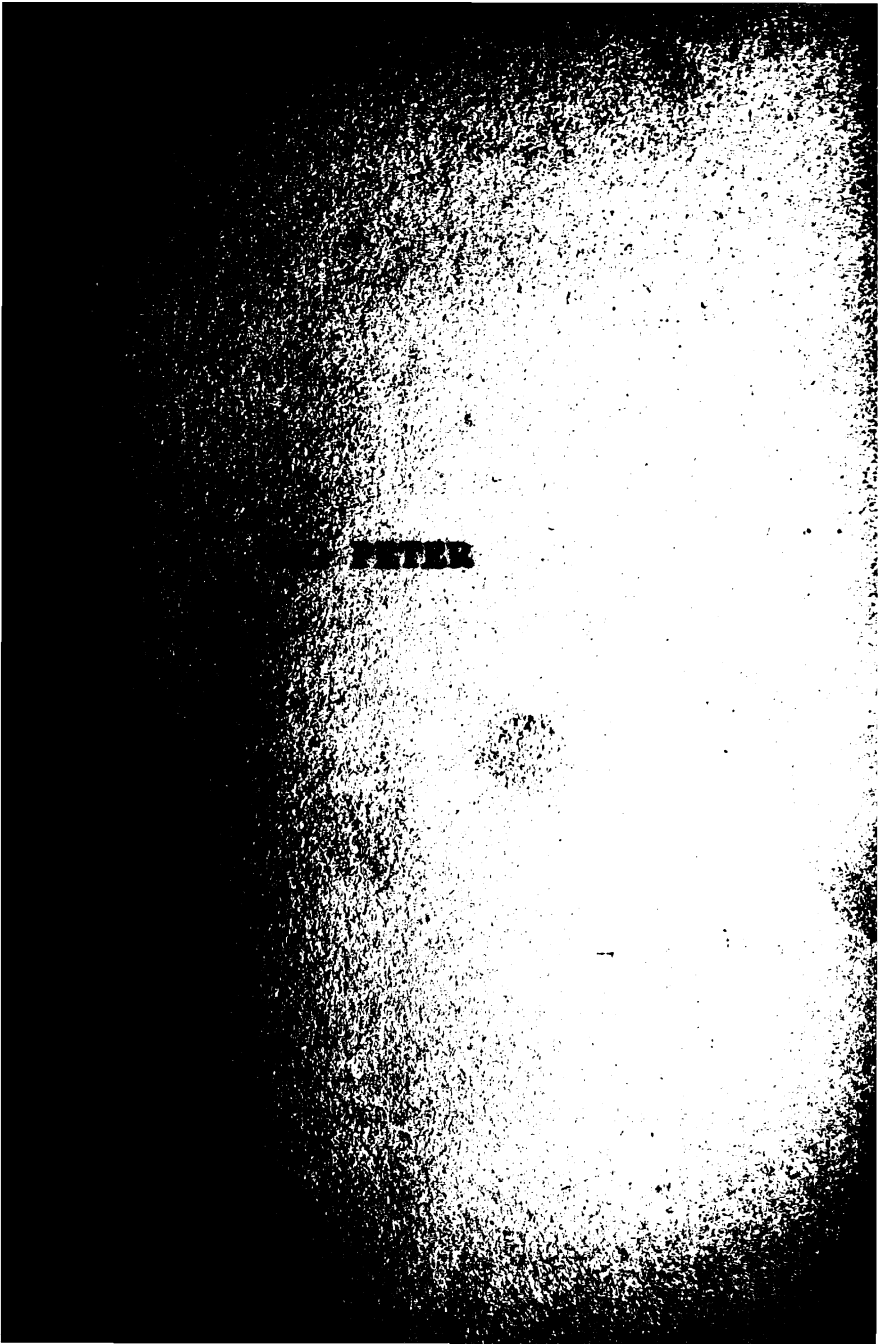
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BIG PETER

CHAPTER I

STRIKING IT RICH

THE owners of the Buckingham claim had struck it rich.

There were three of them, and it would have been difficult to find, in all the new gold-field of Kampurli, three partners who were less alike.

They were known as the Swell, Scotty and Big Peter.

No one knew the Swell's real name. He was a tall, handsome man, of perhaps five and thirty, and every feature of his face, every movement of his clean-built body, every tone of his rather low voice, marked him out as a man who had come of a very different stock and lived a very different life from the majority of those about him. No one knew what mistake, or perhaps what fault, had brought him tumbling down from the world of clubs and balls and smart race-meetings and shooting-

parties, to that other more real world where men work with their hands, and fight with them, too, if they have a mind. There were few who could beat the Swell in that respect. He was a scientific boxer, and although he never took the initiative in a row he was never known to draw back from one. The loud bullies who are to be found in every collection of men where the law has not had time to assert itself were apt to soften their manners wonderfully when that dangerous glint appeared in the eyes that were generally so quiet and even sleepy.

Scotty's real name was MacDonald. He had emigrated to Australia twenty years before. Until the gold rush to Kampurli he had worked among the sheep and the shearers, and had already saved money, with the idea of going back to Scotland some day a rich man. Now he could go back any day he liked, a very rich man, for the Buckingham claim was destined to be one of the richest even in that goldfield of unexampled richness. Scotty was a taciturn, rather morose sort of fellow, but he had a great respect for the Swell, and something approaching an affection for his other partner, Big Peter.

Big Peter was the most amiable giant of a man who ever rejoiced in strong muscles and perfect health. He was Australian bred, and

as fine a specimen of that virile race as could be found anywhere. He was not much over thirty. He stood six foot two in his socks, and had a chest measurement to correspond. He was blue-eyed and fair-bearded, a magnificent figure of a man, and his heart was as soft as his muscles were strong.

The three partners had built themselves a hut, and because it was weather-tight and substantial it was considered a palace in those early days of Kampurli, where the lust for gold was so strong that few of those who were after it had time or inclination for housing themselves in anything but the most make-shift way. It had, in fact, been dubbed Buckingham Palace by the wits of the field, and the three partners had accepted the name, and called their claim the Buckingham claim for luck.

The interior of Buckingham Palace, where everything to be seen was sternly for use, and ornament was in no way considered, was decorated by one picture tacked on to the wooden wall above Big Peter's bunk. It was a full page reproduction from some illustrated weekly paper of the photograph of a beautiful young girl. She was sitting upright in a high-backed carved chair and gazing out in front of her with a smile. She had masses of dark hair, dressed low over a broad brow, eyes of which the photo-

graph had succeeded in expressing the liquid depth, and only left out the colour, a face of pure oval, and a very sweet mouth. She wore an evening gown, and her graceful neck and beautifully rounded arms, resting in her lap, were bare. The pose was completely natural. She was fingering a trinket hanging from her neck by a thin chain, and wore no other jewels. She must have been very young; and to Big Peter's eyes she was the most beautiful thing in girlhood to be found anywhere. He would lie on his bunk when there was nothing else to be done, smoking, and contemplating her. He had fixed up a rough sconce just by the picture, so that the candle would enable him to read, and would also light up the sweet, eager young face, which looked out so strangely into this primitive apartment and on the men who occupied it; and the more he gazed on it the deeper grew his admiration.

There was nothing to show who the girl was. Peter had picked the picture out of a wastepaper basket in an hotel smoking room, and its former owner had cut off all the margin and left no word of inscription. There was nothing even to show the date to which it belonged.

Peter's admiration for the girl of the picture was known far and wide. He kept very little of what he was thinking about to him-

self, and visitors to the hut were always welcome to pass comments upon it as long as those comments were of an appreciative character. He had been known to take people by the scruff of the neck and turn them out with an indignant kick for a word of detraction, and the nearest that any one now dared to go who wished to take a rise out of him was to suggest either that the photograph had been taken so long ago that the lady must now be a middle-aged matron, or that she was some beauty of the Variety stage whose fresh charm could not outlast more than a year or two of her entering on that career. Others told him—and this kind of chaff pleased him much better—that she was probably a royal princess and far beyond his reach.

Whatever criticism or suggestion was made he considered seriously, and generally consulted the Swell about it.

The photograph could not be very old, said his friend, because it was not more than a few years since that kind of reproduction had been generally used, and a year or two added on to the age of the girl would increase the beauty of that type, if anything. He did not think she was a royal princess. They were not generally so good-looking.

The suggestion of the Variety stage he did

not deal with entirely to Peter's satisfaction.

"Look here," said Peter, "you ought to know a swell when you see one; you're one yourself. Now tell me, doesn't that girl show breeding in every inch of her? She's no painted beauty of the stage, I know."

"Breeding?" echoed the Swell. "What's breeding? There isn't such a thing. It's all a question of good food. What you call the painted beauties of the stage have it just as much as the daughter of a duke; generally a good deal more, or they wouldn't be where they are."

Peter looked pained. "I am sorry to hear you say that," he said. "I like to think of that girl as brought up in some lovely old castle, walking amongst the roses in a beautiful garden, with a peacock trailing after her, and sitting down on the edge of an old fountain with goldfish in it, trailing her fingers in the water."

The Swell laughed. "That's a pretty picture," he said.

"You've seen it, haven't you?" asked Peter. "You've seen girls like that in gardens like that?"

A shadow came over the face of the other. "I have seen a good many things," he said, "which I don't talk about over here."

"Well, I don't want to pry into your secrets,

old chap," said Big Peter. "But just you think of the most beautiful garden you have ever seen in the old country, and tell me if you don't think that that girl would look at home in it—much more at home than she would prancing about on the stage of a Theatre."

"If you want my real opinion," said the Swell, "she was never on the stage in her life, and is never likely to be."

Big Peter breathed a sigh of relief. "I am glad you've said that," he said. "I'll tell you what it is, I'm getting soft about that girl."

The Swell did not smile at this confession of an obvious fact. He was sitting at the door of the hut, his chin on his hand, looking out to where the great silver southern moon was hanging over the mean deserted scrub, and perhaps his thoughts were far away in just such a garden as Peter had conjured up from some novel he had read or some picture he had seen.

"If we strike it rich," Peter went on, "I should like to go to the old country and find out that girl. I dare say she wouldn't look at a rough fellow like me; I dare say she would consider herself far above me; and she wouldn't be wrong, either. I don't know that I should want anything of her, but I'd just like to set eyes on a girl as good and lovely as that one. It would be like looking at a beautiful picture."

The other turned to him and said with a touch of impatience, "No girl in the world is worth putting on a pedestal like that. They are all the same when you get beneath the surface." Then he got up and strolled out of the hut.

Scotty also showed some scorn of Peter's attitude of adoration. "If you want a girl," he said, "go and take her; don't go crawling about her with your mouth open as if she was a golden image. Put some value on yourself, man! If we strike it rich you will be able to marry any girl you want to."

But such a way of looking at things seemed sacrilege to Big Peter. He lay on his bunk night after night, gazing at the picture, and wrapping himself in his golden dream. Certainly, if they struck it rich, he would go home to England and look for this girl. But as to what he should do when he found her, he could never come to any decision that could be imparted to others, or even acknowledged to himself. But the decision was there all the same, like a little spark ready to blaze into flame at any time. It was true that any man could win any girl if he were enough of a man, and she was not already won. And Big Peter, in spite of his modesty, felt himself to be every inch a man.

The discovery of that wonderful seam of gold

in the Buckingham Claim had been celebrated by a carousal in Buckingham Palace. Any one who wanted a glass of champagne, or half-a-dozen glasses, or a bottle, could get it by going up to Buckingham Palace and congratulating its occupants on their good luck. For champagne was to be had freely at Kampurli, by those who liked to pay for it, although water was scarce enough.

When the carousal was at last over, the Swell had not turned a hair; Scotty was morose and almost tearful, but liable also to be suddenly quarrelsome; and Big Peter was radiant with the most foolish good-humour and abounding affection for every one around him. He alone had accepted every word of hearty congratulation as genuine, and ignored all the envy and jealousy that lay behind much of the noisy good fellowship in which a great part of the night had been spent.

The air was chilly, and to men whose blood had been thinned by the fierce heat which burnt this desolate place during all but a few hours of a few nights in the year, warmth of body was necessary. They shut the door and the window-flap of the hut, and prepared to turn in with all the extra coverings that they could find, in spite of the atmosphere heavy with smoke and fumes of drink. There was still an

echo of the former pandemonium going on outside, but it was receding from their hut, as the revellers made their slow and unsteady way homewards.

But presently the noise seemed to become stationary and to increase in volume, and with ears accustomed to gauge the meaning of such sounds, the Swell listened, his hand up to compel silence inside the hut, and then threw open the door again.

“It’s Bully Jones,” he said. “He’s murdering somebody.”

Then he ran out into the night, leaving the other two to follow him.

The scene upon which he arrived was ludicrous enough, if it had not been fraught with considerable danger to one of the chief actors in it.

A man as big as Big Peter himself, and a great deal bigger than the Swell, had hold of a much smaller man by the neck, and was shaking him to and fro and lifting him up and down in his powerful arms, while he kept on saying in a plaintive voice, “You know you’ve got an ugly face. Say you’ve got an ugly face and I’ll let you go.”

The man who was being subjected to this rough treatment was making no difficulty at all about complying with the request of his tor-

mentor. He was shouting, "Yes, I've got an ugly face," with all the force of his lungs, and shrieking "Murder!" in the intervals. But still the treatment went on, and became more and more violent; so violent indeed that by the time the Swell had pushed his way through the surrounding crowd, which was swaying and shouting with helpless laughter, the protesting voice was beginning to drop to a moan, and its owner was on the point of collapse.

Perhaps the Swell wanted something to loose the pent-up excitement in his brain, which the carouse of the evening had only locked in more securely. He did not wait to expostulate in words, but drove his fist full in the face of Bully Jones, who went down backwards and pulled the other man on top of him.

He loosed hold of him instantly and got up with an oath and rushed upon his assailant. There was a wild cheer at the prospect of a real fight, and a ring was cleared as if by magic.

But the fight ended almost as soon as it had begun. Bully Jones was drunk and the Swell, besides being his superior in science, was sober. Within a couple of minutes the Bully was being led away bemoaning an eye soon about to close entirely, a streaming nose and the loss of a tooth. The Swell, shaking the blood from his knuckles, turned towards the man he had res-

cued. Big Peter had raised him from the ground and was embracing him tenderly, while he said in a heartfelt voice, "Why did he say you had an ugly face? It's as handsome a face as I ever saw." Then he wept a few sympathetic tears and said it was a cruel world, but fortunately no bones were broken, and there were a few bottles of champagne still unopened in Buckingham Palace.

There was some reason for Bully Jones's criticism, although the way in which he had treated the offence to his æsthetic ideals may have been overdone. The man who presently sat blinking in a corner of the hut was not attractive in appearance. His features were ordinary, and he was not in that respect uglier than the majority of mankind. But there was something sneaking and unpleasant in his air, and he held himself cringingly. He was like a dog with his tail between his legs, who invites the attacks of other dogs of a more open and swaggering composition. If he had walked through the crowd of which Bully Jones was the centre, boldly, he would probably have been unmolested. But he had tried to sneak round it, and this had drawn notice to him, and an attack which might have had serious consequences if the Swell had not come to his rescue.

But he soon revived under the influence of

the wine which was opened for him, and from being unpleasantly humble and grateful for his rescue, he became as unpleasantly boastful and talkative.

He was dressed like a clerk out of a city, and his linen was filthy after his long overland journey. He had been carrying a rolled-up "swag," which had been flung down into a corner of the hut. He told his hosts he had arrived up that night and was looking about for some place to "camp."

"I went to the hotel," he whined, "but, my Gawd! the prices there! They'd kill you if you was made of money."

This he said with a furtive glance round the hut, as if apprising the chances of his being offered hospitality of a more permanent description than he was now enjoying.

"Oh! you'll soon make money here," said Big Peter encouragingly. "It's the richest gold-field in the world, and we three have struck it rich, my boy. Fill up your glass again. The more I look at you the more I like you. As long as I've got a crust of bread you shall share it. Make yourself comfortable here as long as you like, and you'll soon strike it rich yourself."

Thus reassured, the newcomer's attitude underwent a quick change. His back lost some

of its curve, and his eyebrows, which had been lifted, returned to their normal position.

“My name’s Robert Walker,” he said. “Although I dare say I don’t look much now, I’m a gentleman, and a solicitor by profession. I’ll have the law on that swine who went for me, if there’s any law in this God-forsaken place; and you, gentlemen, shan’t lose by what you have done for me.”

He swallowed a tumbler of champagne, and immediately became noisy and excited. While Scotty glowered at him, the Swell turned away in contempt, and began to take off his coat again in preparation for turning in, and Big Peter sat gazing at the visitor in rapt sympathy, assuring him that he was among friends, and that he need think nothing more of what had happened.

When he had emptied another tumbler, Walker unexpectedly changed his attitude into one of high scorn. He kicked over the half-empty champagne bottle which stood on the floor by his side, and threw his glass into a corner of the hut. “What’s all this?” he exclaimed. “Talk about striking it rich—you’re all beggars to what I’m going to be. I’ve struck it rich already. I shan’t have to work for it, either. There’s half a title waiting for me over in the old country, and half a great

estate, too, and half of everything I am going to get hold of for some lucky man that I've come here to find. And if he won't give me half of it, then he shall have nothing, and I'll have it all. He needn't think he's going to play with me. He shall give me half or he shan't have anything."

Big Peter put a large, soothing hand on his knee. "Don't get excited about it, old pal," he pleaded. "I'm sure he's a good fellow and will give you half."

Walker rose unsteadily and looked round him with ineffable scorn. "What sort of pigstye is this to invite a man to who'll have half a castle of his own by and by?" he asked.

He got no farther. Scotty also rose from the edge of his bunk, where he had been sitting gazing at him with ever-increasing distaste. "Here, you get out of this," he said, "and take your swag with you. If it isn't good enough for you, go and camp out in the bush. We've had enough of you."

He laid a forcible hand on his coat collar, and the touch recalled the unpleasant experience from which he had been rescued. Instantly he was again the cringing, terrified creature of half-an-hour before.

"Oh, I didn't mean it," he whined. "Let me

camp down here. It's so cold outside. I'll be as quiet as a mouse."

Peter added his entreaties. "Don't be cruel, Scotty," he expostulated. "He's overwrought, that's what he is—overwrought. If you were overwrought you wouldn't like to be turned out into the night."

"I'm tired of the beast," said Scotty inexorably.

But the Swell said from his bunk, where he now lay under his blankets, "Let him stay. But if he talks again out he goes. And you shut up, too, Peter, and turn in. You're drunk—drunk and maundering."

Big Peter was so overcome by the injustice of this charge that he could only expostulate feebly; and presently there was silence in the hut, while its four occupants slept and the night crept on towards the dawn.

The next day was Sunday, which was given up to various cleaning processes, when there was anything to clean with, and to general sociability and leisure.

All four occupants of the hut slept late.

Big Peter was the first to awake. Piercing shafts and pencils of light were making their way in through the cracks in shutter and door, and between the logs which made both inside and outside walls. The cold of the night was

gone, and after throwing off his blankets, stretching himself and yawning mightily, he sprang out of his bunk and opened both door and shutter, letting in to the close atmosphere of the hut the sweet freshness of the Australian morning.

There was no doubt that Big Peter had drunk rather more champagne than was good for him the night before; but his magnificent health enabled him to wake up as fresh and keen as the morning itself. He had not drunk so very much, after all, and he had not mixed his beverages, but had stuck to the champagne, which had been of a sounder brand than that apt to be supplied for such carousals as he had taken part in. It had been more from excitement than from the wine, that he had seen everything and everybody in such a rosy light the night before.

Now, as he looked down on the recumbent form of Mr. Robert Walker, who lay stretched on the floor, with his head on his "swag," his red-rimmed eyes closed, and his mouth open, the doubt crossed his mind whether he was quite worthy of the brotherly affection and admiration he had expressed for him.

"Well, I'm not so sure that Bully Jones wasn't right," he said to himself. "You *are* rather an ugly beggar to look at, and I can only

hope that your behaviour will turn out to be better than your appearance.”

Mr. Walker's behaviour did not turn out to be very much better than his appearance. He did not arouse himself to do anything to help in the preparations while a fire was made and breakfast prepared outside the hut, and when he was told that his grub was ready for him turned up his nose at the “billy-tea” which the others were drinking, and expressed his preference for the tippie of the night before. A bottle of champagne was opened for him, as he had asked for it, and the laws of hospitality in the Australian Bush are stringent. The consequence was that Mr. Walker soon became as unpleasantly boastful as he had been on the night before, and made further allusions to having struck it rich, and to his title and castle and estates in England.

“What's the yarn?” asked Scotty disagreeably, removing the bottle from him. “Let's have it before you get too full.”

After some expostulation at this measure as being rather strong, he embarked on his yarn. “I dare say you coves can help me,” he said. “I have come up here on the lookout for a man called Chandos.”

“What do you want with him?” asked Peter.

“That’s what I’m going to tell you. That’s the man whose fortune I’m going to make, and the man who is going to make my fortune, too, or else I’ll leave him where I find him.”

“Perhaps he has made his fortune already,” said Big Peter, with a laugh.

“Well, if he has he can’t buy the sort of things I’m going to give him out of it. Do you know the man?”

“Perhaps I do and perhaps I don’t,” said Peter. “What is it you’re going to give him?”

A sudden access of caution came over the man, who was already halfway on the road to intoxication. “I don’t know why I should let it all out to you,” he said, with a cunning leer.

“Well, if you don’t, you won’t get anything more to drink,” said Scotty, and Peter added, “Besides, if I don’t choose to tell you who he is, nobody else can.”

“Well, if I do tell you, you won’t go back on me, will you? It’s my show, and I’m going to work it.”

“Cough it up or else keep it to yourself and clear out,” said Scotty. “Your company wants something to make it go down, and if you’ve got a yarn about titles and castles let’s have it.”

“I’ll trust you,” said Walker, handsomely.

“Give us half a glass to wet my whistle and I’ll tip you a yarn as good as you ever read in a story-book.”

His request having been complied with, he embarked on a story, which showed him, in spite of an unprepossessing exterior, to possess some skill in the art of narrative, as he understood it, and some imagination to work on.

“In one of the most beautiful parts of England,” he began, “there stands an ancient castle, surrounded by lovely gardens and thousands of acres of rich land, which has been in the possession of the same family for centuries. That castle and those lands rightfully belong, not to the proud Earl who looks upon them as his, but to a miner on this very field.”

He looked round him to take in the effect of his announcement. The eyes of the Swell were fixed upon him narrowly, but he did not speak, and Walker went on:

“A hundred years ago a younger son of the twelfth Earl of Cambray married when he was quite a youth a girl out of a little out-of-the-way village in Norfolk. He married in his own name—Mervyn Chandos. But nobody there knew who he really was, and he soon grew tired of his wife. She died within a year of the marriage in giving birth to a son, and he had that son brought up in a cottage near Cambray Cas-

tle until he was twelve or thirteen years old, and then he sent him out here, and gave money to the people who brought him, to give him a start.

“Now in the meantime the Earl had succeeded to his title and married a lady in his own rank of life, none other than the proud and peerless Lady Alicia Vaux, scion of a noble family as ancient as his.”

“That’s good, matey,” Peter encouraged him. “You’re warming up to it.”

“From this marriage,” continued Walker, “sprang the race that now enjoys the Cambray title and estates. The present Earl of Cambray is grandson of the thirteenth Earl and the Lady Alicia. But as I have told you, it was not the Earl’s first marriage. The boy who was sent here to work for his living was his rightful successor, and his descendants after him.”

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Peter, with eyes wide open. “Is that gospel truth, mate?”

“It’s nothing but a yarn,” said Scotty scornfully. “If the kid who was sent out here was brought up near the Castle everybody would have known that he was the rightful heir. That’s so, Swell, isn’t it?”

The Swell did not appear to have taken much interest in the story, and Walker broke in before he could reply.

“They *did* know he was his son,” he said. “Everybody knew he was his son. But they thought he was illegitimate, and his father shipped him off when he wanted to get married to the Lady Alicia.”

“And how do you know he wasn’t illegitimate?” asked Peter.

“That’s my secret,” said Walker. “But I do know. I know where the marriage register is to be found, and when I find this cove, Chandos, I’ll tell him all about it, when he has signed a paper to say he’ll give me half of everything that’s rightfully his—title, castle, estates—everything.”

“How is he going to give you half his title?” enquired the astute Scotty. “Is he going to call himself Lord Cam, and you call yourself Lord Bray? It’s a name that would suit you all right.”

“Well, I don’t know about the title,” admitted Walker. “I dare say he will have to stick to the whole of that. But it has its money value and he will pay me for it.”

“What’s going to become of the Earl who is sitting at home in the Castle now?” asked Peter. “Has he got any family?”

“He is an old man with one daughter,” replied Walker. “I don’t know what’s to become of them. They’ve enjoyed what isn’t theirs all

their lives, and they must be content with that. I dare say they will get along somehow."

Peter looked at the picture of the girl on the wall and his eyes flashed. "What! turn a lovely young girl out of the beautiful home that she's enjoyed all her life," he exclaimed, "and let her go penniless, with an old man who has never been brought up to work for his living? That's a nice thing to be laying up against them. If this man Chandos is anything like the chap I think he is, he will kick you and your yarn out together. You are not the man I thought you, Mr. Walker. I don't like your manners and I don't like your ideas. Finish your drink and clear out. You're no mate for honest men!"

Walker's expression changed to one of surprise and indignation. "What are you getting at?" he exclaimed. "I didn't say his daughter was a beautiful young girl. If he's an old man she is probably an old spinster. Besides, it's every one for himself in this world. This Earl of Cambray and his father have kept out the rightful heirs for two generations. It's they who ought to have been out here working for their living. Let them work for it now, and let honest people come into their own."

"And you're one of the honest people, I suppose," said Peter, whose indignation was rising

apace. "You're to go in and take half of everything that they've enjoyed—a mean skunk like you, who's done nothing but nose out a scandal a hundred years old. Why, you're nothing but a blackmailer. Take the bottle with you and clear out. We don't want such men as you drinking with us."

He held out the half-empty champagne bottle to him. Walker did not refuse it, but stood with it tucked under his arm while an ugly flush came over his face.

"You're nothing but a soft fool," he said contemptuously. "I don't want to have anything more to do with you. Tell me where this man Chandos is to be found, and we'll soon see if he takes the silly view of matters of business that you do."

"Where is he to be found?" echoed Peter, striking his broad chest. "Why, he's to be found here. My name's Peter Chandos, and you can take your yarn away with you and drown yourself. I'm a free-born Australian, and I've struck it rich. I don't want any other man's title, or estates either. I'll stand on my own feet. Now clear out."

CHAPTER II

TITLE AND ESTATES

THE SWELL spoke for the first time. With one glance at Big Peter, he said to Walker, who was standing with his mouth open in the utmost surprise, "Sit down again. We had better have this out. Who are you and how did you get hold of this story?"

Walker sat down rather unwillingly, while Peter said, "Oh, let him go, we don't want to have anything more to do with him."

The Swell took no notice of him. "You said you were a solicitor," he said to Walker. "What's your firm and its address?"

After a moment's hesitation Walker gave an address in a suburb of Sydney. "I'm on my own," he said. "Robert Walker is my name, and that's where you can find me."

The Swell pencilled down the name and address. "I dare say we can get hold of some book which will tell us whether you are really a solicitor or not," he said. "You don't look like one."

Walker looked uncomfortable. "I'm in the law," he said. "I never said I was a fully admitted Solicitor."

"Yes, you did," replied the Swell, "and you didn't suppose you would knock against any one who would know how to find out whether you were one or not. Well then, you're not a solicitor, but you've got hold of this story. How did you get hold of it?"

"It doesn't matter to you how I got hold of it," replied Walker. "And who are you, anyway, to be trying to come over me with your airs? My business isn't with you."

The Swell looked at him with his eyes narrowed. He looked like a man used to the habits of command, and the other man's eyes went down before him, as he asked again in a level voice, "How did you come by this story?"

"It was sent over by a correspondent who had come across the marriage register and followed up the clue."

"Was it sent over to *you*?"

Walker turned away from him with an elaborate air of indifference and addressed Peter. "I have got a piece of information to sell," he said, "and I'll sell it to you if you prove to me you're the man I want, either for cash down or on terms to be arranged. I shan't stick out for half. That was a piece of bluff to begin

on. I'll leave you to think it over, and come back later on for your answer."

"And my answer is that I don't want anything more to do with you," said Peter. "You're a mean, dirty skunk, and if you come back here I'll spoil your face for you."

"Wait a minute," said the Swell, as Walker rose once more, with an ugly look in his face. "I want to get to the bottom of this. If *you* don't, Peter, you can hold your tongue. Now then, sir, how did you get hold of this piece of information? Did you steal it, or what?"

Walker turned on him with a blasphemous oath. "Find out for yourself!" he began.

But the Swell said instantly, without raising his voice, "If you speak to me like that again I'll make you sorry for it. You'll answer my question before you go away from here. I want to know how you came across this piece of information."

"And if I don't tell you?" hazarded Walker, a look of fear beginning to come into his mean, shifty eyes.

"You are going to tell me," replied the Swell, "and you are going to tell me the truth."

Walker produced a not very good imitation of a laugh of amusement and sat down again.

"Well, I see you're going to have it," he said, "and I don't mind. We're all pals here, in

spite of our little differences, and I know it won't go any farther. Promise me that and I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh! go on," shouted Scotty, suddenly enraged. "Tell us without any more hawering."

Walker looked from one to the other, and decided not to press for a promise of secrecy.

"I was a clerk in a big lawyer's office," he said sulkily, "and had to deal with the correspondence. The information came in a letter from England and I took a copy of it when I left them."

"What did you leave them for?" asked the Swell.

"Well, we didn't get on very well together, and we both thought we'd better part. It was what you might call a mutual arrangement."

"You were sacked," said the Swell, "for something we needn't enquire into at present. Very well. Then you stole this letter with the information in it? How was it put exactly? What did the man who found it out want for it?"

Walker's face broke into a sneer. "He was one of those antiquarian fools," he said, "who didn't know a good thing when he saw it. He had got hold of the name of the firm somehow, and wrote to them suggesting that they might find the rightful Earl of Cambray. He said if

they didn't he should keep the information to himself, for the present, as he didn't want to upset existing arrangements."

"Very sensible of him," said the Swell. "What did the firm reply?"

"They wrote him a short letter saying it wasn't the sort of business they wanted, and that was the end of it."

"No wonder you didn't feel at home in such a firm as that," remarked the Swell. "Well, *you* thought it was the sort of business that *you did* want, so you stole the letter, and I dare say you've got a copy of it on you—eh?"

Walker's face changed. "Look here," he said in a whining voice, "you're not going to take it off me. You're too much of a gentleman for that. I've told you all you wanted to know. If you want to do a deal I am ready. You're not going to rob me."

"You needn't be afraid of that," said the Swell contemptuously. "You can keep your stolen property. How did you track down our friend here?"

In his relief Walker permitted himself to be facetious. "He wasn't very difficult to track," he said, with a glance at Peter. "His goings on were known well enough."

"Stow that," said Peter. "We don't want to hear any more about your sneaking ways."

You've tracked me and you've found I'm not the sort of chap you thought I was. So now you can clear out and keep out. You have drawn a blank, and if you want to make a bit you had better go and find some other way of making it."

"Yes, I think we've had enough of you, for the present," said the Swell. "You can clear out now, and if we want to see you again, I dare say we shall be able to find you. You can take the bottle with you. Now don't say any more. We've heard enough of your sweet voice. Take your swag and don't take anything else. Good-morning."

Walker went inside the hut and emerged with his bundle tightly rolled in a blue blanket. Several times he opened his lips as if to speak. But each time the Swell said, "Now, don't talk." Finally he slunk off in silence. But when he had got a safe distance away he turned and shook his fist at the three men who were watching him, and they replied with a simultaneous laugh, which sent him finally out of sight in obvious but helpless rage.

"Well, that's over and done with," said the Swell, rising and stretching himself. "Scotty, it's your turn to fetch the water. You might go now if you've finished, because I want to

shave. Peter and I will clear up while you're gone."

His airy dismissal of the subject of Mr. Walker and the story he had brought them, as if it were not worth discussing, or even thinking about, may rather have surprised the other two. But it was just in this sort of way that he exercised an influence over them, and for the moment they accepted his view of the situation and relinquished the subject. Scotty went off with a somewhat inadequate vessel to fetch the water available for all the uses of all the day.

When he had left them alone together it became plain that the Swell had by no means dismissed the disclosures made by Walker as unimportant. When he and Peter were inside the hut, he turned to him and said, "This is a surprising yarn, but it's worth following up."

Peter looked at him in surprise. "Why? Do you think there is anything in it?" he asked.

"I think it's worth following up. Did you know anything about your parentage before?"

Peter did not immediately reply to this question. "You're not going to advise me to go in with a swab like that, are you?" he exclaimed. "Whatever I might get through him would stink of his dirty fingers. Besides, what sort of a chap should I be to go and turn an

old man and a young girl out of all the riches and luxury they've been used to all their lives? Why, I couldn't do it. Supposing it was a girl like that one!"—he jerked his thumb towards the picture on the wall,—“and it might very well be,—although not so beautiful, of course—brought up in just such an old castle as I have always thought of her living in. I should never forgive myself. I shall have plenty of money of my own, now. Surely you're not going to advise me to go for dirty money like that.”

“I don't advise you to do anything through Mr. Walker,” replied the Swell, “but we will talk about that later. What I want to know is whether you know anything about your father or your grandfather?”

Peter, somewhat unwillingly, set himself to answer this question. “I know as much as most fellows out here,” he said. “My great-grandfather did come from England in the early days, when he was a youngster. But whether he was a boy of twelve or thirteen, or a bit older, I couldn't tell you. Anyhow, he took up land in New South Wales, and my grandfather owned the Maluka Station on the Murrumbidgee. My father was a hell-raky sort of a chap—you'd know all about him if you had been out here long. He got rid of everything—racing and so on. He left me without a bob. For-

tunately for me, my old grandfather didn't die until I was about eighteen, and he saw that I got some decent education."

"Wasn't there any tradition in your family about where you came from in England, and who your people were?" asked the Swell.

"Not that I know of. Well,—there *was* a sort of idea that we were better than most. You see Chandos is a swell sort of a name. That's why I've never been very keen on claiming it in a place like this; and as a matter of fact, I don't believe we've always had the name. I seem to have heard some time or other that my great-grandfather came out here under another name, and changed it afterwards. So perhaps after all I am not the fellow that that scoundrel was looking for."

"If that's so," said the Swell, "it seems to me to make it more likely that you *are* the fellow. I dare say your great-grandfather knew whose son he was. He would very likely have been brought up in England under his mother's name, and took his father's when he got on here. Didn't he leave any papers?"

"Now you mention it," said Peter, "there is a tin box full of papers at my father's lawyer's. It's about all that there is there, for everything else went in the smash. But I have never been through it."

“Then what you’ve got to do, my friend, directly you get back to Sydney, is to get hold of that box and see what’s in it. Very likely it contains the clue to the mystery.”

“Then you think I really am the chap? It would be a pretty surprising thing if it turned out to be so. Fancy me an Earl, with a castle of my own! That would be a rummy job, wouldn’t it? But look here, I’m not going any farther with it. I meant what I said just now, and said before, to that dirty cad. It would be a beastly thing to turn out the other people—that old man and his daughter. What sort of a job should I make of it—bossing an estate? He’s been brought up to it, and no doubt plays the game much better than I ever could.”

“He doesn’t play the game at all,” said the Swell, shortly.

Peter stared at him. “Why, do you know him?” he exclaimed.

“I know all about him. He’s a dissipated old scoundrel. He has the worst managed estate of any man in England. All his cottages are tumbling down, and he won’t spend a penny on them. He has bled his tenants for years, and spent the money on himself. It would be the best thing in the world for the people who are dependent on him if he were turned out and a better man took his place.”

“You don’t say so,” exclaimed Peter. “To think of that now!”

“I tell you,” went on the Swell, “that if that man’s title and estates are properly yours, it’s your duty to claim them. He has almost ruined the property, but you’ll have plenty of money now to pull it round. You go for it, Peter, my boy! Find out whether what that fellow said was true, so that you won’t be starting off on a wild goose chase, and if you find that it’s as he says, go straight home to England and put forward your claim.”

“But, my dear fellow,” said Peter, “fancy me an earl in a castle! I shouldn’t know how to behave.”

“You would know how to behave a good deal better than the man who is there now. You would know how to behave as well as any earl in any castle. You have only got to be yourself. Nobody can ask anything better of you than that. I am not given to flattery, but that’s what I say, and that’s what I mean.”

Peter’s eyes wandered in perplexity round the hut and rested on the picture of the beautiful girl in the carved chair. Gradually his face broke into a smile. “By Jove!” he said. “Supposing I was to find her and tell her I was an earl with a castle of my own, and plenty of money to keep it up with. Isn’t that the

sort of thing that might please her? Isn't that the sort of thing that she might expect from a man who wanted to marry her?"

The Swell laughed. "You go home and try," he said.

CHAPTER III

BIG PETER IN LONDON

IN a month's time Big Peter was on his way to England in the R.M.S. "Orusco."

He had by no means made up his mind to claim the title and estates which seemed his to claim, but he had found out a good deal about himself. Walker had been lost sight of from the morning of his dismissal from Buckingham Palace, but Peter had gone to Sydney and looked through the box of papers in his lawyer's office.

He had learnt that his great-grandfather had been sent out to Australia by the Earl of Cambray, whose son he had been known to be, although neither he nor any one else seemed to have had any idea that he was his son by a legitimate marriage. He had been known as George Holden, but when he grew up and made money he changed his name to Chandos, because he said he was as much a Chandos as any of them, and many natural sons of great men had been recognized by their families when they got on.

Peter did not quite approve of this. He thought if it had been he, he would have kept the fact of his birth dark, and started altogether afresh. However, there it was. He was a Chandos, whether he liked it or no. And Walker had said that the marriage register which proved him to be the head of his family was in existence. It was in a village in Norfolk, but what village he did not know.

He was persuaded to take definite steps by an old lawyer named Fearon, with whom he struck up a friendship on board ship. Mr. Fearon had taken a long holiday to visit a married daughter in Australia, after a life-time of hard and honest work, which had been greatly to the benefit of those who had put their affairs in his hands, and to his own benefit also. He took a fancy to Peter, and was never tired of drawing his yarns out of him, at which he would chuckle dryly. They were mostly yarns of adventure in the Australian bush, and Mr. Fearon was not a little surprised to learn that there was another still more surprising yarn in connection with this big, cheery man, whom he had looked upon as a pure product of Australian life.

The old man was, of course, cautious about it, and told Peter that the facts could not be considered as settled by any means. This rather

egged Peter on to defend them, and the end of it was that he made up his mind to search for the register, even if he had to visit every church in Norfolk before he found it.

Peter made many other friends on board the "Orusco," and among them was a young widow, a Mrs. Saunders, travelling from Australia to England with her child, a delicate-looking boy of ten or eleven. She was rather an insignificant little woman and was evidently very poor. She was travelling second-class, where Peter had as many friends as among the first-class passengers.

Little Tommy Saunders was a genius with brush and pencil, and the fame of his drawings of everybody and everything around him soon spread through the ship. Big Peter, already anxious to spend some of the fortune he had made out of the Buckingham Mine in helping his poorer neighbours, decided that Tommy would be a good object to begin upon.

He got Mrs. Saunders's story out of her. She was an Englishwoman who had come out to Australia as a girl, married, as it appeared in rather poor circumstances, and was now going home again to fight the battle of life for herself and her boy, with very little money to do it on. She said almost nothing about her husband, and it was plain that her marriage had

been an unhappy one. Her immediate relations were dead, she told Peter; she was going to settle down somewhere in London and set up as a dressmaker, and give little Tommy an art training of some sort if she could possibly manage it.

It was not long before Peter relieved her anxieties on that score. "You leave all that to me, Mrs. Saunders," he said, largely. "I have a lot more money than I know what to do with, and I'll see that the little chap gets his chance."

He cheerfully brushed aside her tearful gratitude. "Why, good heavens!" he said. "It's a chance for me just as much as for him. He'll be a great man some day, and his name will be remembered long after mine is forgotten. There's nothing I could do with my money that could give me greater pleasure."

Peter found it very difficult to get Mrs. Saunders to consent to his helping her in any other way. She was very poor, as he made it his business to find out, asking her all sorts of searching questions with a good-natured persistence that would take no denial; but she was also very proud. If he could help her boy to learn, she said, she could do all the rest herself.

But he pressed her so hard that at last she gave in. "Look here, Mrs. Saunders," he said, "I'm going to take a little house for you, and

furnish it. And I'm going to make over a little income to you, so that you will be able to give Tommy the sort of home that a great artist ought to have when he's a child. I'm going to make myself his guardian. So it's no use your trying to stand out."

"Oh, how good you are!" she cried. "I've never met a man like you. I didn't know that men *could* be so good. My experience of them hasn't been a very happy one. Perhaps I ought to stand out, but I can't. Some day I may be able to do something for you in return, and then you can imagine how glad I shall be. Perhaps it is not so unlikely as it seems now. You are casting your bread upon the waters."

A week or so after he had landed, Peter dined with old Mr. Fearon, in his comfortable house on Campden Hill.

"Now then, Peter," said the old lawyer, when they were sitting together after dinner with a bottle of port between them, "what steps are you going to take to find this register?"

"Well," said Peter, "I have looked up the County of Norfolk on a map, and it seems to be about as big as an ordinary sheep run out west. It won't take long to run through it and have a look at all the registers until one comes across the right one."

“Do you know how many churches there are in Norfolk?” asked Mr. Fearon.

“No,” said Peter. “I suppose there’s one in every township, isn’t there?”

The lawyer laughed. “Yes,” he said, “there is one in every township, and there are a good many townships in Norfolk. Norfolk is a big county, as counties go. I should think there would probably be more churches in it than in the whole continent of Australia.”

“Oh!” said Peter, somewhat dashed at this piece of news.

“However,” went on Mr. Fearon, “it is the only way of setting to work. You can leave the towns out of account first, and your best way will be to take a tour round the country, say in a motor car, and examine every church register until you find the right one.”

“I shan’t do that,” said Peter. “I shall hump my swag.”

“And that means?” enquired Mr. Fearon.

“That means walking on my two feet with my blanket on my back,” said Peter. “I want to see something of the old country, and that’s the best way of doing it.”

“I don’t know but what you’re right. I used to do that sort of thing myself when I was a young man, and enjoy it. But you needn’t take a blanket with you. You’ll find plenty of nice

old village inns which will provide blankets, and sheets too. Take a knapsack with you, and send a bag of clothes on here and there, and you'll provide yourself with a pleasant holiday, even if you don't find anything. If you do find something, come to me and tell me about it."

Big Peter had taken rooms in a quiet Square in Bloomsbury, and when he left Mr. Fearon's house, as the night was fine, and he could never get enough exercise in London, he determined to walk home.

He had just left the noise and bustle of Oxford Street and was walking through a quiet street near the British Museum, when a man, coming down the pavement on the opposite side, suddenly started at sight of him and drew back into the shadow of a doorway, where he stood staring with his mouth half-open and a look of surprise, not unmingled with alarm, on his features.

Peter walked on all unconscious of being watched, or indeed of being known, among all those crowded millions of people in London, where he scarcely knew a soul. He looked very different from the rough miner of the Australian gold-fields, in his high boots, flannel shirt and old slouched hat. One of his amusements had been to acquire an extensive wardrobe of the best clothes he could buy. He wore a beautiful

silk hat, a thin dark overcoat, with a fine knitted scarf of white silk, and shining patent leather boots under his black trousers. He had still kept to his yellow beard and refused to have it clipped to a point. But it had been trimmed by a Bond Street barber and did not detract from his handsome appearance as he strolled manfully along the pavement. It made him look rather older than his years, but with his fine upright presence and active walk he might have been taken for a well-to-do country squire, more used to the pursuits of country life than to the pavements of London, but quite at home on them all the same. And if he had been seen striding with that self-reliant step in the direction of the House of Lords, it would not have needed a great effort to imagine him an hereditary member of that assembly. If he should succeed in taking his place in it, in appearance at any rate, he would bring no discredit on it; and if he still entertained doubts in that respect there was no one who would not have relieved him of them.

As he turned the corner of the street, the man who had stood watching him on the opposite pavement moved on, and as he came within the radius of light of a lamp-post, any one who had known him would have recognized the unattractive features of Mr. Robert Walker, whose presence in London boded no good to the man who

... had passed him so unconsciously, and probably had done no good to any one else, unless his character had considerably changed for the better since we last met him at Kampurli, on the other side of the world.

CHAPTER IV

AN ATTEMPTED DEAL

THE great pile of Cambray Castle stood proudly on the summit of a wooded hill which commanded a magnificent stretch of country, bounded in the distance by the blue line of the sea. The old fortified keep remained much as it had been centuries before, when its owners had used it to terrorize the surrounding country, and to ward off the attacks of those who would have taken from them by force what they had gained and kept by force. But considerable additions had been made in more peaceful times, and the wing of the castle now chiefly inhabited showed a long line of windows looking out over the valley, and in front of them a broad terrace, beneath which stretched the beautiful gardens, until they were closed in on by the woodlands.

Along this terrace, one sunshiny morning, an old man was pacing slowly to and fro, leaning on the arm of an attendant. If his movements were feeble, however, the face which looked out from under the wide brim of his hat, was of

almost startling vigour. It was not a face that would be likely to attract any one to its owner. It had something fierce and hawklike in it, something lowering and secret too, with its bushy brows, startlingly black in comparison with the whiteness of the hair and the heavy moustache, which almost hid the mouth and drooped over the heavy protruding chin. There are not many faces of which one can say definitely that they are bad. But this was a bad face. It was the face of a man who had been bold in vice, who had never scrupled to indulge himself in anything, but had taken his own course boldly and not feared for the consequences. A sort of animal courage was its only virtue; the eyes were still strong and piercing, and only the wasted body showed the price that had been paid for a life-time of such habits as a man of strong and bad passions gratifies himself with, when he is so placed that he can gain most of what he wants for the moment.

The man on whose arm he was leaning had an appearance no more attractive than the Earl of Cambray's own. Perhaps that was why he had remained in his service for some five-and-twenty years, first as a sort of confidential secretary, and latterly almost as a body servant; for Lord Cambray, in the wreck of his powers wanted no one about him whom he could not

trust. Perhaps he trusted Lorrimer no more than anybody; but he paid him well—twice as much for his menial assistance as he had paid him for the work of a gentleman. Lorrimer was a tall dark man of middle-age, and in the course of time his features had taken on a look that made him not dissimilar from his master, although he was many years his junior. There was something sinister in his dark reserved look. He held many of his master's secrets, and might have been said to have acted as his minister of evil. His manner was correctly respectful as he walked to and fro, giving aid to those weak footsteps. But it was familiar too, with the familiarity of a deep intimacy. The world would not have been edified by the conversation carried on between these two, as they paced up and down in the sunshine. It was chiefly a revival of old memories, in which the man's part had been almost as important as that of the master. It was a startling comment on the closing years of such a life as Lord Cambray had lived, that he was now almost entirely dependent upon this man to give him what companionship and pleasure he could still enjoy.

The sun shone brightly over the lovely scene, and its light was flashed back from the many windows of the great house; gay flowers of early summer were blooming all about the terrace and

in the garden below it; the birds were singing in the woodlands. Perhaps the old man to whom all these beauties belonged was vaguely affected by them, but if it was so he made no comment on them, but just moved slowly up and down in the sunshine, and fed his mind with the memory of the base pleasures he no longer had the power to seek out and enjoy.

A footman came out of the house and tendered him a card on a salver. "Mr. Robert Walker," he read, bending his bushy brows with a terrific frown on the footman, who met the look manfully. "Who the devil is Mr. Robert Walker, and what does he want?"

"I don't know, my lord. He said he had something of great importance to communicate to your lordship."

He considered for a moment. "You had better go in and see who he is and what he wants, Lorrimer," he said. "I will sit down here until you come back."

The footman departed. Lorrimer helped his master to a seat and went indoors, leaving him sitting there, in the full sunshine, looking out over the wide stretch of country that was his, with his fierce bad old face telling nothing of the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

Presently Lorrimer came back. "I can't get

out of him what he wants," he said. "He says he won't tell it to anybody but you alone."

"Oh, he won't, won't he?" said Lord Cambray with an oath. "What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Rather a shabby looking man. Looks rather as if he might be a private detective."

"Bring him out here and give him a chair not too near me. Get behind the curtains in the morning-room and keep a lookout."

Lorrimer seemed to be in no surprise at these somewhat unusual instructions, justified probably by more lurid experiences of the past. He came out again immediately, accompanied by Mr. Walker, placed a garden seat for him, not too near that occupied by his master, and retired through an open window just behind.

Mr. Walker took his seat with a jaunty air. His eyes looked a little frightened, and the old man, who fixed his own keen eyes on him, may have noted that look of alarm. But there was none to be noted in the tone in which he said, "Very pleased to have the honour of meeting your lordship. I have come all the way down here to give you a little piece of information which you ought to have. In fact, I've come all the way from Australia, you might say, on purpose to give it to you, and it has been rather an expensive trip, my lord."

"Go on," said the old man, still fixing him with his steel-like glare.

Walker hitched his chair a little closer, and Lord Cambray suddenly shouted at him, "Keep back, keep your distance!" in such a tone as to make him jump, and remain where he was.

"I have something very secret to tell you," he grumbled. "I don't want to shout it out where everybody can hear me."

"Nobody will hear you, and you needn't shout it out. Say what you have got to say. I'm not deaf. I shall hear you quite plainly where you are."

Thus adjured, Walker cast about in his mind for a fitting opening of his statement, and finding none better than a bald assertion of fact, said, "There's a man come over from Australia who is going to claim your title and estates."

Lord Cambray stared at him, and then gave vent to a disagreeable laugh, which was succeeded by an equally disagreeable frown, as he asked shortly, "On what grounds?"

"On the grounds," replied Walker, taking refuge again in a bald statement of fact, "that your grandfather, the twelfth Earl, was married to somebody before he married your grandmother, and had a son that this man is descended from."

Lord Cambray did not laugh at this state-

ment. It took him by surprise. He had not interested himself greatly in the history of his forebears, having had his mind pretty well occupied with his own, and had for the moment to make an effort of memory to recall the facts of his grandfather's marriage.

"My grandfather the twelfth Earl," he repeated. "I don't remember him or my grandmother either. Let me see, he married a Vaux,—Lady Alicia Vaux." He turned to the table at his side and rang a bell and waited.

Walker began to say something, but he silenced him, and after a short interval Lorrimer appeared, but not out of the window through which he had gone into the house.

"Fetch me a Burke's Peerage," he said to him, and waited again in silence until the book was brought and laid on the table beside him.

He turned over the leaves until he had come to the record of his own family, and then said, "My grandfather married when he was thirty-five. Now what's this story? You say he was married before. Who to?"

Mr. Walker coughed nervously. He was not unimpressed by the old lord's autocratic manner, and did not relish the idea of arousing it against himself. But he had certainly not come there to give up all his information at a mere

brusque request, and he intimated as much as politely as he could.

“Well, my lord,” he said, with an ingratiating smile, “you will understand, I am sure, that I haven’t come all this way just to tell you something that I think you ought to know, and then go back again. It just so happens that I have got hold of all the facts of a very interesting story, and, if you’ll excuse me for mentioning it, I think they’re worth paying for.”

If it had not been for the expectations he cherished, Mr. Walker would have quailed at the frown that was bent upon him. But he stuck to his guns, however uneasily, and said, “If your lordship will think it over, I am quite sure you will see that that is quite reasonable.”

“How did you get hold of this lie?” asked Lord Cambray.

“It isn’t a lie, my lord,” replied Mr. Walker quietly. “If it was I shouldn’t have thought it worth troubling about.”

For the first time the old man’s eyes dropped for an instant, but he fixed them again on Walker’s face as he said, “Of course it’s a lie. But have it your own way for a moment. How did you get hold of the story?”

“I have no objection to telling you that, my lord,” said Walker. “It was sent over to a

firm of solicitors I was connected with, by a man who had come across the register of the first marriage. I held a subordinate position in the firm, and I got the sack for doing something I ought not to have done, which I won't trouble you with. So before I left I took down the particulars, as I thought they might be of use to me, and I might be able to make money out of them."

The impudence of this confession seemed to arouse in Lord Cambray's mind an interest in his visitor which he had not formerly exhibited. "You're a pretty cool customer," he said. "But if this fellow has come over here with a claim that has anything in it, I don't quite see what value your information has. We shall hear it all soon enough from him."

"If that was so, my lord," said Walker, "I shouldn't have troubled you. But he hasn't got the information. He hasn't got the most important part of it."

"What's that?"

"He doesn't know where the register is to be found, and I do. He's not likely to be able to find it either, for he doesn't know where to look. It is in a part of England that he would never think of looking in, and as it has been hidden there for a hundred years, it is no more likely to be found now than it was before."

There was one little fact Walker was unaware of. He did not know that in the half-drunken excitement in which he had told Big Peter the story which he had now brought to his kinsman, he had let out that the village where the marriage had taken place was in Norfolk. But his statement impressed Lord Cambray, who now proceeded to ask him many questions.

"I see," he said, with a sneer, when Walker had answered such as he meant to answer, and refused to answer those that were cunningly designed to draw from him what he wished to conceal. "You tried to sell this information to the other side, and when you find they won't deal, you come to me with it."

"That's so, my lord," said Walker, unashamedly. "It's a matter of business."

"Very well then, Mr. Walker, you are something of a rascal and I won't mince matters with you. I am very much obliged to you for what you have told me. The most important part of it seems to be that this register of marriage, if there is one, is where nobody is in the least likely to find it. It's a great relief to hear that. If you would like any lunch before you go back where you came from, my servant shall see that you have some, and he will send you back to the station so as to save you the expense

of a fly. I owe you something for the entertaining half-hour you have given me."

His hand moved towards the bell on the table, but he did not immediately ring it, and Walker, who was quite as sharp in his own way as he was himself, noted this fact in the midst of the unpleasant surprise caused by his speech.

"Wait a minute, my lord," he said. "I don't think you've quite got the hang of it all yet. The secret isn't hidden now. It is known to the man who discovered it, and I know who that man is."

"And from what you have told me about him, he's not likely to do anything about it."

"Oh, well!" said Walker, with an air of unconcern. "If you are willing to run that risk! But I'll remind you, my lord, he isn't the only one who knows it. I know it."

"Yes, and what use is it to you? You tried to sell it to the other side and they wouldn't buy. And you've tried to sell it to me. Who else is going to buy it of you?"

"Nobody else," said Walker boldly, "who will pay me for getting rid of the evidence?" He said this slowly with a meaning look that was not lost on Lord Cambray. "That's why I don't want to go away before we've discussed it further. I want to make big money out of this, and I don't mind saying so. But as for

making *some* money out of it, if you send me away, that won't be very difficult. There are plenty of papers who would pay handsomely for such a story as that."

Lord Cambray ignored the last statement. "What do you mean," he asked, "when you talk about being paid for getting rid of the evidence? Do you know what you're saying?"

"I know very well, my lord, what I'm saying, and what I'm doing too. I'm putting myself in your hands. But from what I have heard of your lordship I am not much afraid of doing that."

"I have got such a reputation for kindness and goodness, haven't I?" sneered the old lord.

"I don't mean that. I shouldn't put my head in the lion's mouth if I didn't know that I had got some means of preventing the lion from shutting it on me."

Lord Cambray laughed at this. "Well, what *do* you mean?" he asked, with an approach to good humour.

Walker hitched his chair a little closer, and this time he was not rebuked.

"I mean," he said, in a low but expressive voice, "that I am ready to do the work for you that you couldn't do for yourself. I am ready to go and steal this register and bring it to you. I am not asking you to pay for mere informa-

tion. What I'll sell you is what I'll steal, and what you couldn't buy if it wasn't stolen."

Lord Cambray looked at him with something like admiration. This was bold wickedness of a sort that he could appreciate. But all he said was, "A pretty sort of a fool I should be if I were to let myself be drawn into compounding a felony with a fellow like you! Your appearance doesn't exactly inspire confidence, Mr. Walker."

"Well," said Walker coolly, "perhaps your lordship would like to think it over for an hour. I shall be much obliged for that lunch you kindly offered me just now, as I've had a long journey and haven't had anything to eat since I left London this morning. If you'll excuse me, I'll just point out to you that I don't ask you to do anything till I bring you what I've said. Supposing I got caught in helping myself to it, there will be nothing to show that you had had any connection with it at all. I am willing to run all that risk myself, and you can deny all knowledge of me. But if I get it, because of the price that we should agree upon—I've got to trust you for all that—then I'll ask you how much it's likely that I shall split and land myself in gaol, when I shall have got everything that I've run all the risks for."

"You put it very lucidly, Mr. Walker," said

Lord Cambray. "As you are so much to be depended upon, perhaps there is no harm in asking you what price you would suggest for doing this little service for me?"

Now that it had come to this point, Mr. Walker showed some hesitation in naming a price. He began to enlarge on the dangers of the enterprise and the expense and trouble to which he had already been put.

"You can drop all that," said Lord Cambray coolly. "I am quite aware of what it means. You are going to suggest some absurd price, which you know I should not think of paying. Don't be shy. Let's have it out."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Walker plumped out, "Five thousand pounds."

"Ah!" said Lord Cambray. "I thought you would have asked ten. Well, I dare say you think I'm a far richer man than I am, Mr. Walker. In these hard times a person in my position finds it somewhat difficult to raise a sum in cash, however important the object may be. I even had to refuse our excellent Vicar here a subscription towards reseating the church last week, although you can imagine that it gave me an almost sleepless night to think that perhaps he might not be able to do it after all."

Walker laughed nervously at this pleasantry, and waited for what should come.

“But I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” Lord Cambray continued. “If you bring me what you say you can bring me—you talk in a crude sort of way about stealing it, but of course I couldn’t countenance anything of that sort—I will undertake to raise five hundred pounds for you, and I call that a very handsome offer under all the circumstances.”

Walker’s face showed a dull flush of resentment. “Your lordship is playing with me,” he said sulkily. “I didn’t come here prepared to bargain. I made up my mind what I would ask and I dare say I was a bit nervous in bringing it out, because it’s a pretty tidy sum of money. But I shouldn’t have been in the least nervous about stating a sum of money that I expected to have cut down. Five thousand pounds is my price, my lord, and I won’t take a penny less.”

“Very well, then,” said Lord Cambray quietly. “I don’t feel inclined to pay your price, and that seems all that there is to be said about it. If at any time you feel inclined to accept my offer, you have only got to give me the pleasure of another visit, from you, Mr. Walker. I shouldn’t write, if I were you. Better not to put that sort of thing in writing. I will now give you over to my servant.” And this time he rang the bell without further hesitation.

“Oh! wait a minute, my lord,” cried Walker as before.

But Lord Cambray said, “Do you accept my offer or not?”

“No, of course I don’t. But—”

“Very well then, I have nothing more to say. I want my own luncheon and I dare say you are quite ready for yours. Lorrimer, give this gentleman something to eat and tell them to drive him wherever he wants to go to afterwards. Good morning, Mr. Walker. We have had a very interesting conversation.”

CHAPTER V

MASTER AND MAN

LORRIMER waited with perfect patience and propriety until his master should choose to enlighten him as to what had passed between him and Walker. He knew that it would not be long before he was taken into confidence. Lord Cambray could do nothing without him. He might think and scheme and bend his terrific brows over all sorts of plans and ideas, but when it came to putting them into practice he was as helpless as a child. He could not even write a letter, except it passed through Lorrimer's hands; and he was probably under no illusions as to what would happen if he wrote a letter on any subject he might wish to keep from Lorrimer, if that gentleman did not see the necessity of secrecy.

After his solitary luncheon Lorrimer came and led him into the room he mostly occupied and helped him to lay himself down on a sofa by the open window for an afternoon nap. This was the invariable programme, and the attend-

ant was free for an hour. At the end of that time his bell would ring, and for the rest of the day he was on duty. It was perhaps hardly the life that one would have expected a man of Lorrimer's appearance to choose for its own sake. One might say that an active bodied man, whose days were spent waiting hand and foot and brain on the whims and necessities of a capricious tyrant, would be doing so with the hope of some reward; and that the reward expected would be more than a handsome salary.

This afternoon, when the hour had passed, Lord Cambray's bell was still silent, and it was not until another hour had gone that its insistent summons called Lorrimer to his master's side.

"I've had something to think about," growled the old lord in half apology. With very little left to him but to eat and to sleep, it still irked him to have it thought that he had slept away two hours of a sunshiny afternoon. "I'll drive now, and you can come with me."

Within a few minutes master and man were seated side by side in a roomy carriage, driving quickly through the country roads. There were not many horses left in the stables of Cambray Castle now, but such as there were were good ones, and it was one of Lord Cambray's pleasures thus to drive far and fast, even although

he had to sit in a barouche like any old dowager, while a coachman held the reins.

After a time he entered on the subject that Lorrimer was waiting for, and told him all about it.

“I dare say there’s something in it,” he said. “As the fellow won’t come down in his price, which is, of course, out of the question, the best way might be to let him think he is going to get it, and get the paper, whatever it may be, from him somehow.”

He said this quite naturally, in a thoughtful tone of voice, as if robbery by force or cunning were quite an ordinary suggestion to be made by a nobleman to his paid companion. And the way Lorrimer took it seemed to show that it was not such an extraordinary suggestion from this particular nobleman to this particular companion.

“I think a better way than that,” said Lorrimer smoothly, “would be for me to go and find the register.”

“Of course it would,” said his master, “and you would be sent off pretty quickly to do it, if we had any idea where the register was.”

Lorrimer’s face showed a trace of disappointment, aroused, as it appeared by his next speech, by the fact of his master taking it quite for granted that he would consider the stealing of

a parish register, or a part of one, as coming within the bounds of his duty.

“Of course you wouldn’t expect me to do such a thing as that,” he said, “without taking the danger into consideration.”

“Of course I shouldn’t,” sneered Lord Cambray. “Do you suppose I look to get anything out of you but what I pay you for?”

Lorrimer let this go by, but his face showed a dull flush. “If I might suggest something,” he said—“It is quite possible that there are papers or letters somewhere in the house that might give you a hint as to the part of the country in which this marriage took place. Her ladyship found some old diaries which her maid mentioned to me, in a cupboard in one of the attics in the Keep.”

“I know she did,” replied Lord Cambray, “but they were older than that. They were at the beginning of the eighteenth century.”

“I was only meaning that there must be a lot more papers here and there that nobody knows anything about.”

Lord Cambray considered this. “It might be worth while,” he said, “to have a search made. I might get Lady Margaret to do it when she comes back. But in the meantime something may happen. She will be in London for another fortnight.”

"But you wouldn't like Lady Margaret to know anything about this," suggested Lorrimer.

"I don't know that I should. But I could get her to bring me any papers she might come across, and I could look over them myself."

"Then wouldn't it be better if I were to make the search under your supervision?"

"I dare say it might. It isn't a bad idea. It would give us something to do, and God knows there's little enough in these days. We'll do that, Lorrimer. We'll go right through the house and find out what's in it. I don't know half the things I possess. We may come across valuables hidden away somewhere."

Master and man searched through all the hidden receptacles of that great house for a week, and when the last lumber-room had been turned out they had found all sorts of curious and interesting things, but not what they wanted.

And yet they had got very close to it. An old diary had come to light written by the mother of that twelfth Earl whose record they were trying to find. It was racy, and rather scandalous, and in it occurred the following passage:

"Mervyn has been away for four months, and if he is not getting into mischief I know nothing of the breed from which he comes.

His letters amuse me, and I keep them. Some day I will make him tell me what it is that keeps him in so dead-alive a part of the country at a time when there is no sport to amuse him, and I promise myself some amusement in reading between the lines of his letters, and rebuking him for not permitting his mother to share in his amusements."

Lord Cambray read out this passage to Lorrimer, who was standing by him.

"The letters were kept, you see," he said. "Confound the old girl for not mentioning where they came from, and him for not making them plainer! If there was any wickedness on foot, she would have enjoyed hearing of it as much as anybody."

"Perhaps the letters were destroyed," suggested Lorrimer. "If he wanted to hush it all up, he would not be likely to let them remain."

"He wouldn't mind, if he had not given himself away. If he had happened to come across them he would probably have kept them as a reminder of an amusing summer."

Lorrimer's eye wandered round the big room, wondering whether it had given up all its secrets. "Have you looked through your own desk?" he asked.

Lord Cambray looked up at him with a sneer on his face. A heavy old-fashioned piece of Spanish furniture stood in a corner of the room. Part of it would open out to make a writing-table, but it was seldom so used. Its various drawers and cupboards had been fitted with inviolable locks, and he wore the keys of them hung round his neck by a little gold chain, night and day. The desk contained the very few secrets he still kept from his familiar.

“You would like to go through that with me, wouldn’t you?” he said.

“I should suggest that you went through it yourself,” said Lorrimer, unmoved by the sneer. “It is the only thing that we have not searched.”

That night Lord Cambray found what he was looking for tucked away at the back of a drawer in this old bureau. His grandfather had used it before him for his secret papers, and when he had taken it for his own he had simply pushed aside in the lower drawers what he had found there, without taking the trouble to examine it, and had forgotten all about it since.

If the old lady to whom the letters had been addressed had ever discovered a clue to what had puzzled her in them, she had left no record of it on the letters themselves, as she had threatened. They were as she had received them,—the hasty scrawls of a young man idling away a

summer in what, as it seemed, was to him rather an unusual way. His descendant, re-reading them after a hundred years, thought he understood quite well what the astute lady of the diary had seen, reading between the lines. The corners of his mouth twitched as he read a very stilted description of a sunset, and another ill-spelt rhapsody over a country of flat land and flat water. Yes, it was quite plain that Mervyn Chandos was not the kind of young man who would be content to linger in an out-of-the-way village for the three months during which the letters lasted, for the sake of scenery or sunsets.

When he had read the last of them, he tied them up again into a packet and rang his bell for Lorrimer, first of all locking the drawer in which he had found them.

"You were quite right," he said; "here are the letters, and I know the name of that village. Now we can talk."

"Yes," said Lorrimer, standing in front of him.

Lord Cambray talked in short sharp sentences: "Better not to waste time. You can go up directly to this place, get leave to examine the register, and cut out the sheet. You talked about a reward. I don't expect you to do this for nothing. I will add five hundred pounds to your legacy. Is that satisfactory?"

“No,” said Lorrimer at once. “You are asking me to commit a crime for which I may get into serious trouble. I want a much bigger reward than that.”

“The devil you do!” said his master, bending a terrific frown on him.

For once Lorrimer took the initiative. He said without waiting for more, “I shall be running a great risk. What I’ve got to do won’t be easy, but I am prepared to do it on my own terms.”

“Well, I don’t say that it’s going to be so easy. I can’t pay you any money now. I can’t get hold of it; and I don’t suppose you want money now; you’re content to wait. But I don’t mind adding a bit to what I’m going to leave you, and I’ll show you the codicil to my will if you like. How much money do you want?”

“I don’t want money at all.”

“Don’t want money. Then what *do* you want?”

Lorrimer drew a little breath and then made the astounding statement, “I want your permission to pay my addresses to Lady Margaret.”

If a tendency to apoplexy had been one of the ailments to which Lord Cambray’s excesses had brought him, it would probably have carried him off then and there. His face became crimson, his eyes started out from his head, and he half

rose from his chair as if he would have made a furious assault on the man who stood quietly before him, his eyes fixed on his face and his breath coming a little short, but otherwise unmoved.

“You scoundrel!” he cried at him. “You impudent rascal! How dare you talk to me like that?”

“If you will listen to me quietly, I will tell you exactly,” replied Lorrimer; and he went on speaking, heeding no interruptions until he had finished.

“I am a gentleman by birth, though now I’m practically your servant. I have been with you for nearly five-and-twenty years. I have served you in everything and taken plenty of risks on myself in doing so. For years past I have lived the life of a slave, doing everything for you and scarcely enjoying an hour to myself all that time, except when you were asleep. You owe me for all that what can never be repaid by money. And that’s not all. I know secrets of yours that would send you to spend your last years in a prison instead of in Cambray Castle, if I were to let them out. I have got you completely in my power. I have never said a word to Lady Margaret that I ought not to have done; I have been a great deal more careful of her than you, her father, have. You would have

sold her willingly to the highest bidder, if any man in your own station had cared to come in search of a wife to such a place as this. It can't make any difference to you what happens after you're dead. I shan't want the marriage recognized as long as you're alive, and I'll be to you exactly what I have been as long as you live. That's my offer."

"Get out of the room!" his master shouted at him. "Send that footman Henry to me, and don't dare to show your face here again. You'll be paid what's owing to you to-morrow, and if you're not gone by the evening, I'll send for the police to turn you out."

Lorrimer did not stir. "You don't suppose," he said, with a sneer, that made his face very much like that of his master, "that I can be got rid of as easily as that. You're only wasting time. If you were to dismiss me, I should immediately go and do what I told you. That is, let out some of your secrets. And if I went out of this room, I should take with me that bundle of letters. I shouldn't care about a struggle with a helpless man like you, but you can't have much doubt that if I wanted them I could have them. Then where would you be? Instead of spending the rest of your time here at Cambray Castle, looked after in the way I have always looked after you, and shouldn't alter. You

would be nobody at all, and wouldn't have an hour worth living for the rest of your days.'"

The old man looked at him as if fascinated. His face was horrible to see, but behind all its fury and passion there was a baffled conquered look which showed that he realized the truth of what had been said. He had put himself into the power of this man; he was dependent on him for practically everything that still remained to him in life for enjoyment. Whatever the price asked he would have to pay it.

But that he would consent to pay it at once, Lorrimer was far too astute to imagine. It must be brought home to him that he was helpless, that his mastery had been taken away from him and claimed by one who had the power to enforce his claim. Until those facts sank in there was nothing further to be done.

"I don't want an answer now," said Lorrimer. "I have stated my terms, and I will leave you to think over them. In the meantime, if you are ready for bed, I will take you there."

It was not until a week later that Lord Cambray, with rage in his heart and a fixed and furious determination to punish this man for his insolence by some means or other, ostensibly capitulated.

Lady Margaret had returned to the castle. He cared nothing for her, and was always far

more at his ease when she was absent. But she was his daughter, of the proud and ancient blood of the Chandoses, and it seemed to him an unspeakable insult that this man should have dared to raise his eyes to her. He was visibly the worse in health since Lorrimer had first put forward his proposal. He would lie shaking with anger when he was left alone for the night, and he had become frightened at the effect his agitation was having on him. He was in Lorrimer's grip and he knew it; and Lorrimer would wait no longer. If he did not consent to his terms at the end of a week, he had said that he would act. Lord Cambray knew at last that he could not face his action.

He waited until the last moment, until Lorrimer was about to leave him for the night.

Lorrimer stood respectfully by the door and looked towards the great canopied bed where the fierce lowering old face lay among the piled-up pillows. "The time has run out," he said. "If you have nothing to say to me now, you will not see me again."

If there had been any power in the frightful curse which his master threw at him with all the passion of which he was capable, he would have had small gain out of his presumption. But he stood there quite unmoved, and waited for the capitulation which he knew was to come.

“Have it your own way,” growled the old man in the big bed, with another violent oath, “and get ready to go and get that cursed paper to-morrow.”

Lorrimer took a step towards him. He showed no triumph, but only a cold capability in bargaining. Lord Cambray, he said, must prepare the way for him with his daughter himself, and until a secret marriage was arranged he would not move.

But in this he was worsted. “You’re such a scoundrel,” was the gist of the argument, “that you are quite capable of throwing me overboard when you have got all you want out of me.”

It was a case of two scoundrels, neither of whom trusted the other, fighting for the mastery, and in the end the older, and perhaps the greater, scoundrel won. When Lorrimer at last left the room, the compact was that he should pay his own addresses to Lord Cambray’s daughter. In a week’s time, whether he had been successful or not, he was to go and steal the register. When he came back with it Lord Cambray was to bring pressure to bear on his daughter, if she had not already capitulated; and not until Lorrimer had had his way was the register to be put into his hands.

The old man lay awake until long after daylight had begun to filter in through the thick

curtains of his room. The thoughts which set him quivering and shaking with helpless rage were a punishment almost great enough for the sins of his life. He had sacrificed everything almost to his base passions, and now the last thing that he had left, the youth and happiness of his daughter, who had flowered like a rose out of the foul soil in which she had been nurtured, was to be given in payment for them. It was he, her father, who was to soil her purity, and to fix disgrace upon her which would last long after he was laid in a dishonoured grave.

He may have thought of that as he lay through long hours, thinking over everything, but if it had had any weight with him, he would have made up his mind, even at this late hour, to break the wicked compact and take his punishment on his own shoulders. Then, for once in his life he might have fallen asleep peacefully, with a conscience cleared of its foulest blots. As it was, the last muttered words that broke the silence of the great room were, "I will make you pay for it." And then with another fierce oath, "I will make you pay for it."

The disturbance of mind which Lord Cambray had gone through, and his sleepless nights, had their revenge on his enfeebled body. The next

morning he was ill, and it was more than a week before he could rise from his bed.

During all this time Lorrimer nursed him with the ceaseless vigilance that he had always used, and that made him, whatever his character in other respects, the most priceless of servants. He was always at hand when wanted, never seemed to require any sleep for himself, or at any rate no sleep that he could not be wakened out of at the slightest whisper from the fevered uneasy being in the great bed, at the foot of which he rested.

During all these days and nights, no word passed between master and man as to the evil compact there was between them. And yet Lord Cambray knew, as surely as if he had been able to rise from his bed and follow Lorrimer wherever he went, that during the times he was absent from him he was doing that which it still shook him with anger to think of. Perhaps it was something in the man's face, perhaps it was what he knew of his persistent ruthless nature. He would have given anything to have known what was happening on the other side of his chamber doors. But no whisper from the great house reached him. No one entered his room but the doctor and Lorrimer, and once or twice in the day a frightened looking maid, who did

her duties as expeditiously as she could, and went out again with a sigh of relief at getting away from the range of those fierce eyes.

On the first day of his illness a message was brought to him, but not by Lorrimer, from his daughter, asking that she might come and see him.

He refused. The next day she asked again. And again he refused. After that there were no more messages. What his daughter was doing he knew no more than if she had been a hundred miles away instead of under the same roof.

The day before he was well enough to get up, he marked a subtle change in Lorrimer's face. If he had not known the man so well and watched him so eagerly, he would not have marked it at all; and he could not interpret it. But it certainly did not betoken satisfaction, and he had a fierce moment of joy in the conjecture that the servant presuming to climb had been foiled in his endeavour.

But his satisfaction was short-lived. If Lorrimer could not get his way by himself, then it was part of their compact that he should see that he got it. And there was no getting out of that compact, if he wanted to evade the danger that was hanging over him.

After all how was it likely that Lorrimer

could have succeeded? His daughter was nothing to Lord Cambray. If anything, her presence in his house had been a hindrance to the licence with which otherwise he would have surrounded himself. She had been in his way. He had no feeling of tenderness for her at all. But she was of his blood, and if Lorrimer had come and told him that she had given way, his indifference to her would have turned into hatred and contempt, because she had lowered her pride.

The explanation of the change in Lorrimer came when for the first time he led his master to his chair on the sunny garden terrace.

"I am sorry to have to tell you," he said, when he had settled him there with a rug over his knees, "that Lady Margaret has left the Castle with her maid. It was not within my power to stop them and—"

"Of course it wasn't in your power," said the old lord angrily. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to touch on those matters until you were better. Lady Margaret has gone to Grosvenor Square."

The Countess of Marlow, who had a house in Grosvenor Square, was the sister of Lady Margaret's mother. She had long since ceased visiting at Cambray Castle, and would have had

her niece to live with her permanently if Lord Cambray would have allowed it. But he hated her because she had dared to stand up against him and to rebuke him for his vices, and out of spite to her he would not allow his daughter to do more than visit her occasionally.

“Oh! she’s gone to Grosvenor Square, has she?” growled the old man. “Well then, she’d better stay there for the present.”

Lorrimer now dropped something of his respectful tone. “I beg your pardon,” he said; “that is not keeping to our agreement. I have not been able to get Lady Margaret to listen to me.”

“Did you ever suppose you would?” sneered Lord Cambray, with a ferocious scowl.

“Not unless I told her,” said Lorrimer coolly, “that there were reasons why she should. I did tell her that, and she knows that unless she gives way something or other is going to happen that will cover her name and yours with disgrace.”

“Curse your impudent face!” shrieked the old man at him. “What did you tell her that for?”

“For the reason I have given you,” said Lorrimer, unmoved by the outbreak. “I couldn’t expect her to listen to me without giving her a hint of what might happen if she didn’t. Now,

according to our agreement, it is for you to send for her and exercise your authority."

Lord Cambray choked down his fury. "That is not the next step in our agreement," he said. "I was to exercise my authority when you brought me that paper. Go and get it. Set off to-day. I have been lying here doing nothing for ten days, and that blackguardly little cad who came here may have set to work already. I haven't heard a word from him. We've put it off too long already."

"I'll keep my part of the bargain," said Lorrimer, "I'll go off this evening. But you must keep yours. You must write to Lady Margaret to come back here, and when I return with the paper, you must be ready to do what you promised. If you will write the letter when you go indoors, I will see that it is posted before I go."

There was no getting away from it. Lord Cambray wrote two letters, one to his daughter, ordering her to return home at once, and one to his sister-in-law, telling her that if she did not send Margaret home at once he would come up to London himself and fetch her, ill as he was.

Lorrimer took off the two letters in triumph, and that afternoon went up to London, on his way to Norfolk.

Two days later Lord Cambray received a letter from Lady Marlow which ignored the rude-

ness of his own, told him that Margaret had not come to her, nor written to her, and begged him to let her know where she was, if he had since learnt.

He could do nothing but wait in impotent anger until Lorrimer should return.

CHAPTER VI

PETER'S LUCK

BIG PETER took Mr. Fearon's advice, sent on a bag of clothes from one town to another, and with a light knapsack on his back and an ordnance map in his pocket, started to explore one by one every village in that great county of Norfolk. At the end of a fortnight he sat down on a bench outside the inn in which he was about to spend the night and stared at the map in front of him, appalled by the magnitude of his task. He had visited some dozens of churches and marked each of them off as he had done them; and only one little patch on his map was so marked.

When he had been walking and searching for a month, keeping mostly to the waterside villages, partly because he liked them best, partly because it had occurred to him that a young man, such as his great-grandfather had been, holiday-making in the summer, would be more likely to go where there was fishing and sailing to be had, he came one afternoon to the little village of Hollow Weir.

It was an enchanting spot, far away from the beaten track, and many miles from a railway station. The old inn to which he made his way was one of the best he had come across. It was a long, low house, with latticed windows, irregular tiled roof and deep eaves, under which the house martins were building. Inside, it was full of old oak beams and cavernous chimney corners, rambling passages and little bits of ballustraded staircase. Its furniture could hardly have been changed for a hundred years, and as Peter looked round the bedroom to which he had been shown to wash off the dust of the roads, he thought to himself that if this should turn out to be the place to which young Mervyn Chandos had found his way, he must be looking on the very same four-post bedstead and the very same sporting prints on the panelled walls that his great-grandfather's eyes had rested upon during that momentous visit a century before.

But he had had too many disappointments to make him very hopeful, and was thinking more that this would be a pleasant place in which to spend a day or two, as he went down the uneven stairs, than of the ultimate object with which he had come.

The sun was shining above the tall trees among which this quiet old inn nestled. The

waters of the weir, which was immediately in front of it, were splashing with a musical sound. The rooks were homing across the evening sky to their nests in the treetops, and he was looking forward to the meal which instinct told him such an inn as this would provide for him after his long day's tramp. For the present he had all he wanted, and life in this beautiful country and in the glorious weather was very sweet.

He had not been wrong about the meal. Such eggs, such butter, such thick cream and such home-cured bacon had never yet been set before him, and he did full justice to them, sitting in a cosy parlour with the windows open to the setting sun, and the pleasant country sounds outside greeting his ears.

When he had finished he strolled over to the weir with his pipe in his mouth, and the landlord came out and joined him and bade him welcome in the way of good old-fashioned inn-keepers.

He was an old man, and only half an inn-keeper, farming a good acreage of land and keeping on the house more because his father and grandfather had had it before him than for the profit he made out of it. So he told Peter, and promised him, if he would stay a few days, as good fishing as he would get anywhere in Norfolk. And Peter made up his mind that

he would send for his bag and stop for a day or two. He would take a little holiday. He had the whole summer before him, and if he found the evidence that would give him an earldom and an estate to-morrow, he could gain no more satisfaction out of life than he felt now.

If only he could have found the girl in the picture! That was all he wanted to make his happiness complete. He thought about her sentimentally as he strolled through the grasses by the riverside. This beautiful peaceful place seemed to speak of her, somehow. If only he could come across her in this sweet time of the year and among all this quiet beauty, buried deep in the heart of the green country! But, alas! such things never happened. Happiness was never perfect in this imperfect world.

The landlord had told him that a mile away from the inn the river opened out into a Broad, which he ought to see, as it was one of the prettiest in all that country of Broads, with trees growing down to the water's edge and a fine church standing quite by itself in a curve of a little bay, to which most people went by water.

It was only about six o'clock. There were hours of daylight yet, and Peter thought he might as well spend them on the water.

It took him some time to complete the business of hiring a boat, and quelling the desire of

its owner to come with him. The wind was freshening considerably, but he laughed at the fears expressed of his inability to handle her.

“Have you ever heard of Sydney Harbour?” he asked. “That’s where I learnt to sail a boat, and if you get upset there, there are sharks about, so you learn not to get upset more than is necessary.”

The owner of the boat had never heard of Sydney Harbour, but Big Peter’s confidence impressed him, and when he had watched him taking a tack or two down the river, very cleverly for one who was used to rather more room for his operations, he left the river bank quite at ease with regard to his cherished dinghy and its occupant.

When Peter reached the Broad there was one other sail on it besides his own. It showed white against the blue ripples of the water a mile or more away at the other end of the Broad. It was coming down towards him with a free breeze, and he could not at first see who was sailing it.

But after he had made a tack or two he saw that the sheets and tiller were held by some one in a white cap and jersey;—then that some one was a girl; and then—!

When his heart gave its first incredulous bound he was crossing the bows of the boat, and

her face was hidden for a moment by the sail. He crossed to windward, and the other boat came leaping towards him. Then he saw her plainly.

The day of miracles was not over after all. Big Peter was looking straight into the eyes of the girl of the picture.

CHAPTER VII

THE GIRL OF THE PICTURE

YES, it was the girl of the picture herself. Her cheeks were full of colour from the fresh wind, and her great dark eyes looked straight at Peter, just as they had looked out from the picture, and pierced right down to the very centre of his heart.

He kept his eyes on her face, until her boat rushed through the water across his stern. He had only time then to gaze and to wonder. But he made such use of the time that she withdrew her eyes from his with a slight change of expression, and then he realized that however familiar her face was to him, his was not at all familiar to her, and he must have appeared to her just a stranger staring rather rudely.

He tacked down to the end of the Broad with his eyes always upon the other boat and the white figure in it, which put about and beat to and fro after him, until it was his turn to fly before the wind and pass her again. This time the girl did not look at him, and the fearful

thought came to him that she had been offended by his stare, and that it would be out of the question to challenge her to a race, as he had half-formed the bold intention of doing, with the object of beginning an acquaintance.

The next time they passed he did not dare to manœuvre so as to come near her, for fear that she would divine the intention. But how long was this going to last? He must do something. Now that he had so astonishingly found her, hidden away from him on purpose, as it were, in one of the most beautiful places he had ever seen, he was not going to leave the Broad without getting into closer touch with her somehow. If a fellowship in sport was an excuse not good enough, he must find some other way.

The excuse was found for him in a somewhat alarming fashion. He was sailing up the Broad, and was getting near to her, at about the point where a boathouse stood, with some cottages on a little rise above it. The wind was blowing more strongly than ever, and her boat was heeling right over, and she was leaning out of it towards him in a way which brought his heart to his mouth. He had seen that she handled her boat cleverly, but it was foolhardiness to carry on with sail so close-hauled and with such a wind as this on her.

beam. He watched eagerly, edging closer to her to see her go about.

Just as she seemed ready to do so, a sharp gust struck his own sail and made his boat leap forward faster than ever, and the next moment the wind had struck hers, and before she could cry out her boat had capsized and she was struggling in the water.

Fortunately Peter was no distance from her, but it seemed an eternity before he could come up. The hull of her boat was drifting away from her, and she was trying to swim towards it. But her skirts clogged her, and as Peter raced through the water he saw that she could not keep up much longer. He shouted to her, and brought his own boat alongside just in the nick of time, let loose the sheet and leant over and caught her in his powerful arms. She clung to him, frightened and gasping, and then with difficulty he dragged her inboard over the stern, and she sat down shivering, and trying to laugh and thank him at the same time.

By the time they had reached the bank one or two men who had seen the capsizing of the boat were waiting for them, and a woman came running through the trees from the cottage crying out and wringing her hands.

“Oh, my lady! My lady!” she cried, as Peter ran the boat into the bank; and the girl

stood up suddenly and said in a voice that hardly betokened the respect due from a niece to an aunt:

“Don’t be silly, Aunt Ann. I am perfectly all right, thanks to this gentleman. I have only had a ducking, and there’s nothing to make a fuss about.”

Peter had not caught the strange form of address used by the other woman, who now turned on him with manifest disapprobation, as if he had been the cause of the accident, and said, “Thank you, sir, I will take care of my niece now.”

He had been helping her out of the boat, with perhaps more attention than was absolutely necessary, although it is true that her knees were shaking, and she had by no means yet recovered from her sudden immersion.

Miss Parker—he found out later that that was the name of the two ladies—was certainly a somewhat remarkable contrast to her niece, who in spite of her severely simple costume, had the air and bearing of a young princess. She was a plain woman of middle-age, with sparse hair, plastered sleekly down on her head, and a black gown rather more like what would be worn by an upper servant than by a lady of quality.

But Peter had no eyes for Miss Parker at

all. She might have been without hair entirely and dressed in sackcloth, for all the attention he paid her, for the girl was smiling at him now, and he was holding her hand in his as she thanked him sweetly for saving her, and said good-bye to him for the present. Then she went away quickly with her aunt, and Peter was left to think it all over.

His heart was singing loud pæans as he sat in his boat again, after having helped the men to recover the capsized craft floating in the water, and housing her snugly.

What luck! What immense, unheard-of luck! She had been in danger, and he had saved her. Perhaps he had even saved her life. She was grateful to him. She had smiled on him, a lovely radiant smile that had made her more beautiful than ever, and driven away all that sadness in her face which had so touched him. He had spoken to her and she had spoken to him. She had said good-bye "for the present." He hugged those three little words "for the present." What could they mean but that she would let him see her again, and that she would be pleased to see him?

The slow but sunny hours of the next day went by until the time came when Peter might make his call at the cottage. As he clicked the white-painted gate and walked up the garden

path, he saw that the parlour was occupied. Miss Parker was standing near the window, and when she saw him turned with a pinched expression towards a part of the room which he could not see, and said something which he could not hear. But it was evident from her expression that if he received a welcome it would not be from Miss Parker.

The landlady who opened the door received him with a friendly countenance. There was not an old woman in the world who could have resisted Big Peter.

“The ladies will be glad to see you,” she said, and opened the parlour door with the announcement, “Here’s the gentleman come.”

“Please come in,” said Miss Parker, coming to the door almost with the manner of a servant, and not offering to shake hands with him.

But he had no eyes for her. The girl of the picture was lying on the sofa under a rug. She looked pale, but she smiled at him in a friendly way and put out a slender hand, which he took gently into his big one.

“It is so good of you to come and see me—to see us,” she corrected herself. “We both want to thank you for saving me from a watery grave. We have come to the conclusion, haven’t we, Auntie?—that I should most cer-

tainly have been drowned if you hadn't come up just at the right time."

She turned towards the older woman, as if she were anxious to bring her into the conversation, and almost as if she were giving her instructions as to what to say.

Miss Parker set a chair for Peter by the couch, and said rather primly, but not disagreeably, "I think we ought to be very thankful that you happened to be there. I didn't think enough last night how providential it was, and how much we both owe you."

But Big Peter could never bear to be thanked for anything. "Yes, it was a great piece of luck," he said, in his big voice, which seemed so much too large for the little room, and meaning a good deal more than his words indicated. "But to tell you the truth, I had an idea you might be carrying too much sail. The wind was blowing pretty strong. You have to be careful, even on little bits of water like that."

"And I am afraid I wasn't very careful," she said with a smile. "Do you know what I was really doing? I was racing you, although you didn't know it. You had got ahead of me by nearly half a tack. I thought I could sail a boat with anybody, but you beat me handsomely yesterday."

Peter, enchanted by this confidence, declared that his boat was bigger than hers, and that if they had changed places, she would have been just as far ahead of him as he was of her. Then, greatly daring, he ventured to propose a regular sailing match when she should be ready to go out again.

"Oh, but I hope you won't think of sailing by yourself again after what has happened," Miss Parker put in. "I shouldn't get a moment's peace if you went out in that boat now."

The girl laughed at her. "I'll promise you not to go, Auntie," she said, "when there's such a stiff breeze. But you can't be so unkind as to want to stop me from sailing altogether."

Miss Parker did not seem able to issue a prohibition, which she would obviously have liked to do. She took up her work and sat for the most part silent, while the two young people talked.

When a man and a girl get into conversation for the first time, it is generally the man who does most of the talking, but it is the girl who, unknown to him, directs the conversation, and she usually directs it into a channel which will give her information about him. Very soon Peter was telling her about his life and adventures in Australia, and she was listening with

her eyes fixed on his face, as if he were opening out to her an existence of which she had had no conceptions, but could not hear too much. In everything he said he revealed himself, daring and modest at the same time; bold as a lion in face of danger; tender as a woman where tenderness becomes a man.

Even Miss Parker looked up at him once or twice from her work with something like approval on her thin face. He was a gentleman through and through. It was quite plain that he admired her niece, more than she would have had a strange man admire her, but his attitude towards her was irreproachable. There was not the faintest trace of presumption in it, and even towards herself he was considerate, for he turned to her once or twice and included her in what he was saying.

Presently the girl said to her, "I think we might have tea now, Auntie. It is rather early, but I want to hear such a lot more about Australia that we must offer Mr.—" Then she hesitated. "We must offer our guest some refreshment."

"I haven't told you my name," Peter said instantly. "It is Peter—" and then he paused. In this place he did not want his name to be known at present.

“Mr. Peter,” she said; “and my name is Margaret Parker. So now we are introduced in proper fashion.”

Peter had tea with her and looked around him sometimes, wondering whether it could really all be true, or whether he would not presently awake out of a heavenly dream.

They were already friends. He was as completely at his ease with her as it was possible for him to be, considering the sweetly disturbed state of his mind. He had come to the conclusion that she was far more beautiful than her picture. Since they had been together that pensive look had not once appeared on her face. Her voice was very sweet, and as she spoke she revealed to him a mind and a nature which seemed to be fittingly allied with her beauty. The picture had lacked life, and yet he had fallen in love with it. Now he knew her, he was more in love with her than ever, for there was twice as much to fall in love with,—her face and her mind, too.

He did not leave her until an hour after old Mrs. Geering cleared away the tea-things; and then he tore himself away with difficulty.

By this time Miss Parker had more or less capitulated to him. She had watched her niece constantly, and seemed to be gratified at the in-

terest he had aroused in her. When he took his leave she said, in a more naturally cordial tone than she had yet used to him, "You have cheered us both up wonderfully." But she did not invite him to come again.

But Margaret did.

"I want to hear a lot more about the Bush and about the gold-fields," she said as she shook hands with him, half-raising herself from her couch. "It is stupid of me to be lying down like this, but I did get rather a shock yesterday, and I still feel shaky if I try to walk. Come and see us to-morrow morning, if you have nothing else to do."

So Peter walked back to his inn in such a state of elation as he had never felt in his life before. So far his luck had stood by him surprisingly, and it rested with him now to use it.

He went to the cottage the next morning, not too early, and found Miss Parker and her niece sitting out under the trees of a tiny orchard next to the garden, from which they could get a view of the silver waters of the Broad.

Margaret was much better, she told him, and quite hoped to be able to sail a match with him the next day or the day after.

Again they talked together as if they had known each other all their lives, while Miss

Parker sat stitching, stitching at her needlework, and left them almost entirely to themselves.

Peter had formed a resolution during the hours since he had last seen her. He wanted to tell her something, but he did not want to tell her while her aunt was there.

Presently, however, Miss Parker, whose mind now seemed to be set completely at rest about him, rose and went into the house, saying that she was going to fetch a glass of milk for her niece, and Peter, welcoming the opportunity, but not without some inward perturbation, said at once, "I have got something to tell you, Miss—Miss Margaret. I am afraid that when I first saw you when you passed me in your boat, I stared at you rather harder than I ought to have done."

"Well," she said with a smile, "you certainly did stare rather hard. I thought it was probably because I had been hidden by the sail, and you had expected to see a man, and were rather surprised to see a girl instead."

"No, that wasn't the reason," said Peter. "The reason was that I had been looking everywhere for you and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw it was really you."

She stared at him with a face from which every vestige of colour gradually receded, until

it seemed to leave nothing but a pair of frightened eyes.

Peter was terrified. "Oh! you're ill," he cried, springing up. "What have I said? Shall I call Miss Parker?"

She seemed to make an effort to control her emotion. "I felt a little faint," she said, "but I am all right now. Tell me what you mean."

A little colour had come back into her cheeks. She now looked at him steadily, as if she were nerving herself for anything he might say, and when he again asked if he should call her aunt, said rather impatiently, "No, no, she will be out in a minute. Tell me what you mean by saying you were looking for me, before she comes."

Peter, somewhat disturbed at this reception of his statement, said, "If I had known your name I might have found you before. It wouldn't have been for want of looking. Miss Margaret, do you know that at Buckingham Palace, out in Kampurli, your portrait was hanging up on the wall? It was the only picture in the place, perhaps the only picture on the whole field."

Her colour had come back to her now, and she laughed, nervously, but still as if what he had said had relieved her of some fear or other. "What a curious coincidence!" she said. "I

suppose it is of some girl very much like me.”

“No. It was you, yourself. It was cut out of some illustrated paper. You were sitting in a high-backed oak chair, playing with a little chain.”

“Oh!” she said, with a change of tone, “you mean it really was my portrait. But wasn’t my name underneath it?”

“I wish it had been,” he replied. “It had been cut off before I got it.”

Again she laughed, this time more naturally. “How very odd!” she said, “and you really recognized me when you saw me in the boat?”

“Yes,” said Peter, “I wasn’t likely not to.”

He said it leaning forward a little, looking straight at her. She was sitting in her low wicker chair, looking out across the water, and she did not turn to him to receive this statement; but it almost seemed as if she felt his eyes fixed on her face, for the delicate rose on her cheeks grew deeper.

Peter was about to say more, but just at that moment Miss Parker came out from the garden carrying a little tray, and her niece said to her, “Auntie, you are spoiling me. I don’t want all this feeding up. I am not an invalid;” and she went on talking as if she did not wish him to pursue the subject.

So he kept silence about it, with a feeling

towards Miss Parker less friendly than hitherto.

But it seemed that the girl wanted to hear more on the subject, for presently she said, "Auntie, the whole of me is feeling terribly lazy except my hands. Would you mind fetching me that needlework that I haven't touched yet, and I'll go on with it as we talk?"

Miss Parker rose at once, as if she were used to running her niece's errands. "I am not sure whether I unpacked it," she said, "but I will go and find it."

Directly she was out of earshot the girl said to Peter, "What paper did that picture come out of, and what was it doing in Buckingham Palace?"

She mentioned the name of his late residence with a little smile, and he took her question as a challenge to declare himself further, and felt a great disturbance of heart as she asked it.

"I don't know what paper it was in," he said. "If I hadn't had the wonderful luck of finding you here, directly I got back to London I should have bought all the papers from a year back and gone through them until I found it, and found out who you were."

"Well, you needn't do that now," she said rather hurriedly, "because you know who I am."

“Thank heaven, I do!” said Peter fervently. “You can’t think how much I wanted to know. Why, I have carried that picture about with me wherever I have been. I have got it with me in the inn now. The first thing I did when I made that money I told you of at Kampurli, and got down to a city, was to buy the handsomest frame I could find for it. It was only silver, and I couldn’t get one large enough to put the picture in without cutting it a trifle more. If I hadn’t been a fool I should have taken down a bar of gold out of the Buckingham Mine and had a frame made up out of that, for that’s what I felt like about your picture.”

This was straight speaking indeed, and the girl did not affect to misunderstand it, although the colour dyed her face again as she listened to him. She looked at him with her beautiful eyes a little narrowed.

“I have never had a compliment paid me like that before,” she said. “Thank you very much, Mr. Peter.”

Again Miss Parker interrupted them, having found her niece’s needlework much more quickly than Peter had hoped for; and this time she remained with them until he could no longer put off his departure.

As he went away he made a desperate bid for another near invitation. “I should like to show

you that book of Gordon's poems that I told you about," he said. "I am sure you will like them. I shall be sailing on the Broad this afternoon; may I bring them in to you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Peter," she said, as she gave him her hand. "Come to tea this afternoon and read them to us. I am sure I shall understand them much better than if I were to read them to myself."

So he had taken the first step. He had declared his admiration for her, and she had not rejected it. Well, with Gordon to help him, he hoped he might be able to get a little farther that afternoon. Faint heart never yet won fair lady, and although the faintest hint of offence on her part would throw him out terribly, there had been none so far. He got into his boat and sailed up to Hollow Weir again, building all sorts of castles in the air, all of which had for their foundation the memory of a pair of beautiful kind eyes and a sweet, low voice, and the soft pressure of a little hand.

He spent nearly two hours with her that afternoon. But Miss Parker did not leave them alone together this time, and nothing could be said, even if she had wanted it said, which was perhaps a little doubtful, that would make clearer the feelings with which he regarded her.

But their intimacy had certainly advanced,

and when he left her it seemed only natural that they should arrange to meet again on the morrow, when she promised, if she was well enough, to sail again.

When Peter got back to the inn and sat down to his tea, the landlord came in to have a word or two with him.

“You’re not the only gentleman going about on a walking tour in these parts,” he said. “There was another one here this afternoon, and he seems to be interested like in the old churches, the same as you are. He thought there must be one here, and seemed surprised when I told him that we were in Thaxted parish and our church was a couple of miles away down the Broad. He said he shouldn’t have time to see it, as he was going off in another direction. But I told him it was worth seeing. You ought to see it, too, you know. There’s an old screen in it with painted panels well worth seeing.”

The landlord seemed almost excited at having had another visitor. With such hospitality as his comfortable old house and excellent fare could afford, it was rather surprising that he so seldom had demands made upon it. He told Peter that he liked to see a little life sometimes and added proudly that when people did come that way they generally stayed a day or two if they had the leisure, and sometimes came

again. "I have had artists more than once," he said, "and fishermen, but my little piece of water is too small to bring many of them. I wish there was more gentlemen like you who had the sense to walk through the country and take their time about it. This other gentleman seemed in too much of a hurry; didn't look like a walker, neither. A tall, thin man he was, with a face I wouldn't trust too far. I call him a gentleman, but he wasn't quite like one, although he spoke soft and was dressed,—well, rather too well for a walking holiday, I should say."

Peter did not pay much attention to him as he went rambling on. But something or other that he said caused him to ask how long the inn had been in the occupation of his family.

"Ah, you may well ask that," said the landlord. "You're asking more than I can tell you. There was a fire here once and it burnt all the old books and papers. But I've heard my grandfather tell of it, and you may believe that it's a tidy time ago since he died. I remember he always used to speak as if we had had the place long before that. Anyhow, everything most that you see round you was put in here new and has been here ever since. I've been offered a good deal of money for some of the things, but I wouldn't part with them. They

have always been here and belonged to us, and they'll stop here as long as I do."

"How far do your records go back?" Peter asked him. "Would they give the names of anybody who might have stayed here, say a hundred years ago?"

"No. The fire must have been a bit since then," said the landlord, "and we've kept a visitors' book. I was thinking more of accounts and things that had to do with the bit of land that's always gone with this place."

"It can't have altered much in a hundred years," said Peter.

"No, I doubt if it has. I should think if you could look into this room a hundred years ago, you might have seen my old grandfather standing talking to a gentleman staying here, just the same as I am talking to you. They'd be dressed different, of course, but there wouldn't be much changed in the room."

Then still in the same easy, droning voice he said a thing that caused Peter to stop eating and to stare at him with open mouth, asking himself if he could possibly believe his ears.

"Now I come to mention it, I remember my grandfather talking of a young gentleman, just the same as it might be you, who came here for a day or two and stopped on for most of the summer. I dare say they often used to

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talk together in this very room. There's a story about that, too, but it had almost gone out of my head, for it's many years ago since I thought of it. I'll sit down, if you'll excuse me, while I tell it you."

"I should like to hear that story," said Peter. "What was the name of the young man?"

"What was his name? Ah! there you've got me. I know his name—and yet I don't know it, if you understand. It'll come back to me when I'm not thinking of it. Well, whatever his name was, he used to go fishing and sailing on the Broad, just the same as you do. Well now, there's another thing that he done like you. He went courting at the very same house as you've been at."

This fresh instance of similarity rather disconcerted Peter. "What, at the cottage on the Broad?" he said, dropping his eyes for a moment. "But I have not exactly gone courting there, you know."

The old man chuckled. "No more did he at the first," he said. "There was a pretty young woman who lived at that house. Her name's gone from me, too. Whatever was it? It was a name I ought to know, for it belonged to folks about here—was it Barrett, or Parr, or what was it? I don't remember, but it will come

back to me. Anyhow, this young gentleman, who seemed to be pretty high up in the world, stayed here most of one summer a-courting of this young woman, who wasn't high up in the world herself, you'll understand; and there was a bit of a talk about it. Then one fine day, when my grandfather was thinking of anything but his going away, he told him he was off the next morning, and off he was. But when folks began to look about a bit, they found that the young woman had gone off, too."

"Yes," said Peter breathlessly, "but he had married her, hadn't he?"

The landlord's face fell. "Why, what ever made you think of that?" he asked. "I was just a-coming to it. Yes. He'd married her all right. He had got the parson to do it one morning, in the church, too, when nobody was thinking anything of the sort. I suppose you could do those sort of things in them days, and it's true that the church stands where anything might happen without folks knowing about it."

"And what was the end of the story?" asked Peter.

"Well, there wasn't any end of it, except what I told you. I don't know as they was ever heard of again. But I remember my grandfather laughing over it and saying that it was the only time he had heard of folks being

...ated in that way, thinking something
... had happened and making a mighty fuss
... it, and then finding that the young gen-
... what he had always stuck up for, had
... the right thing by the girl after all. It's
... story though, ain't it?"

"It's a very curious story," said Peter
... "and I'm much obliged to you for tell-
..."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH BY THE BROAD

PETER went to bed, but he could not sleep. The events of the day had been too exciting.

For a time even the thoughts of the girl who was sleeping not so far away from him were put out of his mind by the discoveries he had made. He had come to the end of his search; there could be very little doubt of it. The young man whose story the landlord had told him must have been his great-grandfather and no other. It was impossible to think otherwise. It was in Thaxted Church, the Church on the Broad, that he had been married. The next day he would ask permission to examine the registers, and get a certified copy of the entry he would surely find. His heart leapt with joy as he thought now of what he could offer to the girl whom he so ardently desired to make his own.

He rose and went to the window and leaned out to drink in some of the deep peace which lay all about him.

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It was past midnight. The earth was lying in a deep sleep. The only sound to be heard was the rush of the weir, which seemed to fill the whole purple vault of night with music. The sky was powdered with stars. There was no moon, but the dark masses of foliage and the misty white meadows could be plainly seen. A bed of night-scented stock in the little garden at the side of the inn sent up to him wafts of sweet perfume. It was such a night as seemed to be made for lovers, such a night as that on which sweet Juliet leaning out of her window had whispered her love to the stars, and young Romeo had breathed out his passion for her.

Peter stood for a long time at his window, and his thoughts were filled with the sweetness of his own love, which was so strong that it seemed to overflow his whole being, and to be part of all the warm-scented splendour of the night.

He turned from the window and put on his clothes. Then he stole downstairs and opened the door, which was not even locked, so little fear was there of any harm coming to this quiet, sheltered spot, and went out under the stars.

He walked down the path by the river, and presently quickened his footsteps. Almost without knowing it he had formed an intention. He would go and stand beneath the window of

his love, and ease the sweet pain in his breast by his nearness to her.

He made his way through the wood, and came out, treading softly through the wet grass, in front of the cottage. The window of the room in which he knew she slept was open. The thought thrilled him that if she were lying awake and he whispered her name, she would hear him. But it was a thought that brought him a certain amount of uneasiness, too. These secret adventures of the ardent lover must be kept even from the beloved one. It would have covered him with confusion if she had suddenly appeared at the window and caught him standing there gazing up at it.

He withdrew on tip-toe under the shade of a great tree, and stood there for a long time, feeding his mind on sweet thoughts, and stirred by deep emotion when he thought that to-morrow he would see her.

A long time passed, and then at last, with one more look at the open window, Peter moved softly away.

But he was not yet ready for bed. It seemed to him that he was more wakeful than he had ever been in his life. His mind was in a ferment, and the beauty of the summer night seemed to make his thoughts still more tender and to sink into his spirit in a way he would

never forget as long as he lived. He wandered on through the wood, hardly realizing that he was going in an opposite direction to Hollow Weir, but taking that path probably because the idea of going prosaically home to bed was distasteful to him.

By and by he came out on to the edge of the Broad, and stood awhile looking over the still water, in which the innumerable stars were mirrored almost as brightly as if they were shining there instead of up in the sky.

There was just the faintest hint of coming dawn in the east. It was hardly more than a gradation of light from deep, velvety purple to a fainter touch of grey. But it showed up the dark mass of trees at the end of the Broad, and the square tower of the church above them.

Peter had wandered a long way from his inn, and had just turned to retrace his steps through the wood, when he turned round again sharply and stood looking in the direction of the lonely church. He had thought he saw a point of light there; but after standing for some time, came to the conclusion that he must have been mistaken. Perhaps as he had turned away the reflection of some star brighter than the rest in the water just below the church had caught his eye. Again he turned away, and again he caught the glimmer of light and stood still.

This time there was no doubt about it. The light was not on the water; it was just where the dark bulk of the church itself would have been if it had been distinguishable from the trees by which it was surrounded. It was moving, too. Some one was there, carrying a light, and perhaps trying to find a way into the church itself; though what he could be doing in the very dead hours of the night in a place removed by a mile or more from any other building, it was difficult to imagine.

But Peter, as he had stood looking over the water towards the church, had found time to remove his mind for an instant from the subject that filled it, and to reflect that hidden somewhere in the dark recesses of that old building, was the key to a problem of the most momentous importance to him, and that before very long it would be in his possession. He was not, therefore, disinterested in what happened in and about this old church, and thought he might as well investigate the mysterious occurrence.

The church was at least half a mile from where he was standing, and considerably farther by the path round the shores of the Broad. He set off at a smart pace, and presently broke into a run. Supposing somebody should be trying to break into the church, to tamper with

that very record which was of such importance to him! But presently he slowed down again, laughing at himself over his fears. The record had lain hidden there, unknown to anybody concerned, for over a hundred years. It was absurd to suppose that any one should be taking just this opportunity of tampering with it. Besides, who was there who could possibly want to do so?

He walked on, however, at a quick pace. Something odd was going on that he ought to know about, because his interest in this particular church at the present moment was probably greater than that of anybody else in the world. It was even a sort of proprietary interest, and he must see that no harm came to it.

As he neared the church he came upon the road leading from the village down the river, but kept to the grass by its side, unwilling to run the risk of his footsteps being heard. Soon he was able to see the south wall of the church with its rows of tall windows; but there was no light in them.

He went into the churchyard under the old lych gate, and, keeping to the grass, tip-toed round the chancel end, to where the wall, jutting out on the north side, showed either a chapel or a vestry; and immediately he had

turned the corner he stopped abruptly and caught his breath, for the latticed window immediately in front of him was lighted up.

For a moment he felt a sensation of nervousness, to which he was almost a complete stranger. A dark churchyard in the dead of night, round a lonely church far from human habitation, was not the most soothing of spots in which to receive a sudden shock. Peter believed in ghosts as little as any man. But there is something in the human mind, however well balanced, that responds to superstition, and it was not until he had called himself to task that he crept on round the heavy masonry.

The window which had faced him was just too high for him to look through, without raising himself, and he would not do that for fear of being seen by whoever was inside. But another window, facing south, was lower, and as he came round the corner he ducked his head and then drew back to where he could see through it without fear of being seen himself. The glass was half opaque, and all he could see was a candle flame. But he heard sounds which seemed to show that whoever was inside had left open the door by which he had entered, and without losing time he went on round the farther corner and came upon a heavy oak door standing slightly ajar.

Again he stood a little way off and peered through the aperture, and was rewarded by seeing a man kneeling on the floor, engrossed in some task which there was neither light enough nor space enough for him to distinguish. But the man's back was towards him, and he crept closer up until he stood right on the threshold and could watch him as closely as if he had been inside.

He was kneeling in front of a great, old chest, closely bound with bands of iron, which stood up against the wall of the narrow chamber. By his side on the floor was spread an array of instruments, which it was not difficult to recognize as those of a locksmith, especially as he was working with one of them at an elaborate steel lock fixed to the lid of the chest. He did not look like a burglar. He was well-dressed, in dark clothes; his hat, which lay on the floor by the tools, was a new felt one; the soles of his boots, of which Peter had a good view, were almost new. But there was no doubt that he was busily intent on an act of sacrilege, if not of robbery, and Peter did not wait long before making up his mind to stop him.

Standing out of sight, he pushed gently at the door, prepared if it should creak, to step in boldly. But it did not creak. He opened it wide enough to admit his body, and then crept

in and stood right over the man, who had just impatiently thrown down one instrument and picked up another.

For a moment Peter stood there, so close to him that he could have touched him without taking another step forward. And still he worked on, and Peter watched him.

He rapped out an oath of disgust, and said aloud, "I don't believe it's to be shifted without dynamite!"

Peter waited, and then said quietly, "No, I don't believe it is. I should drop it if I were you."

There was a long drawn gasp of agonized terror. The man crouched away from him and looked up with his eyes starting out of his head and a face so contorted by fear that it seemed hardly human. Every one knows the painful shock occasioned by a human voice immediately beside one, when one thinks oneself quite alone. Imagine that shock increased a hundredfold, and it is small wonder that the man Peter had surprised should suddenly have fallen over sideways and collapsed in a swoon of terror.

"Here, I say," said Peter, "this won't do. Sorry to have disturbed you, but if you set out to rob a church, you ought to have a bit more nerve than that."

The man had not lost consciousness, and re-

covered himself quickly; but his face was still livid, his breath came in gasps, and he could only stare up at Peter with the face of a fox brought to bay.

Perhaps it would be nearer to say with the face of a wolf. The thin lips drawn back showed teeth like fangs; the eyes were blood-shot; the face seemed drawn to a point like that of a desperate animal.

“Well,” said Peter, “what have you got to say for yourself?”

The man still crouched at his feet and looked up at him panting. But his eyes insensibly changed, and his gasps seemed to come more regularly, but at the same time not so naturally. In the rough life of the Bush, Peter had not been altogether unused to desperate characters, and he held himself on the alert.

“Hadn’t you better get up?” he said at last. “You may catch cold sitting on those stones.”

Yes, this was what he wanted. There was no mistaking the glint in his eyes. Still without speaking, he raised himself slowly to his feet, and the moment he stood upright made a dash for the candle, which was standing on an oak table behind him. But Peter’s foot happened to be in the way, and he came down heavily, striking his head against the corner of the table with a sickening thud. But he was up

again in an instant, and now made a dash for the door. But Peter caught him by the shoulder, turned him about roughly and threw him against the wall, where he stood glaring ferociously.

“No good trying on that game,” said Peter. “I’ve got you, and I’m not going to let you go until I know what you’re up to.”

Now he had found his voice, and cursed Peter furiously, with a malevolence that was frightful to witness.

Peter took a step towards him. “Stow that,” he said roughly. “Remember where you are. What are you up to? What do you want to find in that chest?”

Again that blank stare of terror, real or simulated, which did not disguise the springing up of an idea behind it.

“I have done no harm to the chest,” he said. “You can see for yourself.”

He turned his eyes towards it, no doubt expecting Peter to do the same, as any one not on the alert would naturally have done, and his hand went quickly behind him.

Peter sprang forward and grappled with him. There was a furious struggle for an instant or two, Peter using his enormous strength with a will, and his opponent writhing and snarling with impotent passion. The struggle ended by

his being thrown once more forcibly against the wall, and Peter standing back holding in his hand a revolver, which he had torn out of the thief's hip pocket.

"Now I think that's about enough," he said. "I think you will have understood by this time that I'm a good deal stronger than you, and I've got my wits about me. You had better come with me without trying it on any more. Whatever you're after here, you're a dangerous character to have about a place, and I shall feel a good deal more comfortable when I see you locked up in the police station."

The man was quiet now and looked half-dazed. He had received some pretty rough treatment, and the blood was oozing down his face from a wound in his forehead where he had struck the table. He was not an attractive looking spectacle. But still he was surprisingly unlike what one would expect a man to be who broke into churches in the dead of night.

Peter cast an eye at the chest, which in spite of its great age and the clumsiness of its elaborate lock, had triumphantly resisted the attacks made upon it, and upon the tools which littered the floor.

"I think we'll leave things here as they are," he said. "Nobody is likely to disturb them, and they will show what you've been up to. Go

and stand at the door while I blow out the candle, and if you try to clear out—! Well, you had better *not* try to clear out!”

The man did as he was bid. He had apparently come to the end of his ideas for resistance or escape, and moved as if he were half-dazed.

Peter blew out the candle and followed him. “We’ll shut the door,” he said. “How did you open it, by-the-by?”

There was no reply and he repeated this question more sharply.

“I picked the lock,” said the man sulkily. He seemed to be recovering his wits, but his voice was not pleasant to listen to.

“Oh, I see,” said Peter. “Then we can’t lock it. But if we shut it tight, like this, I don’t suppose anybody who happens to come along, if anybody does come along, which is unlikely, will think of trying it.”

CHAPTER IX

A LET OFF

THE dawn had stolen on, even in the short time since Peter had approached the church, and it was now light enough to see everything outside without difficulty. The birds had already begun to sing loudly, and a light breeze was stroking the waters of the Broad, which was spread out in front of them.

In spite of his adventure, and the seriousness of the matter in hand, Peter experienced a thrill of pleasure at this dawning of a new day, a day which was to bring him so much happiness. The tree-crowned cape, upon the other side of which nestled the cottage on which his thoughts had been exclusively fixed, until his dealings with the man by his side had for the moment changed their current, could be seen from the churchyard path down which they were walking, and not even the necessity of keeping an eye on his companion prevented him from turning his face towards it, and letting his thoughts follow.

The pleasure he experienced from his look

even softened his mind a little towards the man whose evil intentions he had frustrated. He had fought him and he had got the better of him, and a man of Big Peter's character is apt to feel not ill-disposed towards another man whom he has beaten in fair fight, even if the fairness has only been one-sided, as in this case. Perhaps his late opponent, now walking dejectedly by his side, regarded him with less good will. But he did not show any rancour when Peter asked him in a pleasantly conversational tone, "Come now, what were you up to? You don't look like a fellow who is accustomed to robbing churches."

The man, perhaps encouraged by an enquiry made in a tone that was almost friendly, threw a look at him, and then said in a low voice, "You have got the better of me, sir. I am completely in your hands. It will be a terrible thing for me to face the punishment you are taking me to. You can see for yourself I am not a common thief, and I swear to you solemnly that I have never done a thing like this before, and never will again, if you will be merciful and let me go. You have handled me pretty roughly, and you have prevented me doing the slightest damage. Can't you let that be enough?"

If Peter had looked at him, he would again

have seen that look in his eyes which betokened an idea springing up. But he was not looking at him. "Well," he said pleasantly, "I can quite believe that it's going to be very awkward for you, and it's quite true that you don't look like an ordinary thief. Come now, what were you up to? I don't suppose you want money, and if you did you wouldn't be likely to find it where you were looking. What *do* they keep in a chest like that that's of any value?"

Then at last the idea suddenly struck him that this was just the place where the particular thing that was of value to him would be likely to be kept. He threw a suspicious glance at his companion. "It isn't papers you were after, is it?"

His glance was returned. "Papers?" repeated the man, with an air of bewilderment. "What papers should I be likely to find that would make me take the risk that I was fool enough to take?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Peter, rather sorry that he had mooted such an idea. "I was only wondering what there *could* be of any value. Come now, what was it?"

The other appeared to be ready to answer the question now. "Will you let me go if I tell you?" he asked.

"No, I won't," said Peter. "You seem to

be about as desperate a character as they make 'em. I am used to pretty strong language where I come from, but I shan't easily forget yours when I caught you. Besides, if I hadn't had my wits pretty well about me, you wouldn't have had any scruple in murdering me. That's not a thing a man forgets in a hurry, or forgives, either. You must have been up to some desperate game to come prepared in the way you did."

Suddenly as they were walking on side by side, the man reeled and fell against Peter. Peter sprang quickly away, fearing a sudden attack, and then as quickly seized hold of him, for if he had not done so, he would have fallen. No doubt the mingled emotion to which he had been subjected, the wound in his head and the rough handling he had received had been too much for him. He had not exactly fainted, but he had gone very near to it.

At the side of the road just here there was a stretch of grass bordering the waters of the Broad, and on it was a fallen tree-trunk. Peter led his captive to this and fetched water in his cap for his refreshment.

He soon came completely to himself once more and said in a sulky voice, "I don't know that I've ever fainted before in my life, but

what you're going to do is enough to make anybody lose control over himself."

"Well, it is certainly going to be pretty awkward for you," said Peter, regarding him with less aversion on account of the very natural weakness he had shown. "But there's no particular hurry. We'll sit down here for a bit, and you can tell me what you were up to; though you mustn't expect that you're going to persuade me not to give you up to the police."

The man's face was quickly turned away, and a gleam of satisfaction came into it. He answered at once.

"I don't know whether you've ever heard of the collector's mania," he said. "It is a thing that takes people strongly, and makes them do all sorts of foolish things. If I were to tell you who I was—but nothing will induce me to give up my name to the police—I dare say you would recognize me, if you know anything about such things, as a man who is known to have one of the finest collections of church plate of a certain date in the country. Well, there is an old silver cup belonging to that church. It isn't of much value in itself, but I would give anything to possess it; in fact, my desire for it is so strong that I have got myself into your

hands, and now I suppose the whole of my life will be spoilt, and I shall never be able to hold up my head again."

Peter was the most guileless of beings where anything was concerned that did not come within the scope of life as he had had experience of it, and this story explained, as far as it went, why a man of this appearance should have been found robbing a church. Still, he was not prepared to accept it entirely without further question. Little as he knew about such matters it did strike him that this man, although he did not look like a common thief, did not look, either, like a man whose passion in life was art in any form.

"Well, that's a pretty sort of thing to confess to," he said. "What were you going to do with it when you got it? If you had put it in your collection it would have been recognized."

The man turned to him eagerly. Peter had not spoken as if he entirely disbelieved the story. "Do with it?" he exclaimed. "Why, keep it locked away to gloat over it. You don't suppose that a collector who loves these sort of things for their own sake, wants to show them all about, do you? Haven't you heard of famous pictures being stolen that couldn't have been worth a farthing to the thieves—that

couldn't have been shown to a soul? That's the sort of risk people will run to have things of that sort in their possession. And I swear to you that that is what I wanted. I'll swear, too, although you may not believe me, that I should have sent the value of the cup secretly when I got hold of it. Look here, sir, you stopped me committing this crime—for, of course, I don't deny that it's a crime, whatever my motives may have been—and the cup is safe enough now; naturally, I've had enough of trying to get hold of it—can't you let me go? Just think what it will be to a man like me to be charged with robbing a church."

"Well, you *were* robbing a church, you know," said Peter. "If you like to run the risk of that sort of thing you must put up with the consequences. Besides, I don't know much about the sort of people who have a passion for church plate, but I shouldn't have thought they had quite such foul language ready to their lips as you had when you found yourself balked; and I don't forget that you wouldn't have stuck at murder as well as robbery if I hadn't been a bit too sharp for you."

Then the man began to plead with him with intense and painful eagerness. He had been almost mad, he said, with the fear of being caught and punished for this crime. He would

not deny that in his passion he would have shot Peter if he could, and would not have cared until afterwards if he had shot him dead. He had been saved from that crime, and he should never think of that afterwards without thankfulness.

He told Peter that he was a man of considerable wealth; that he had a wife and young children, and was looked up to in the place where he lived with respect. If he was sent to prison his name was bound to come out, and the lives of his wife and his children would be ruined.

“I love my wife,” he said pathetically, “and it would kill her if this were to become known. If you are married yourself,” he said, “you *must* have pity on me, for her sake if not for mine. You *can't* bring such disgrace and trouble upon an innocent woman.”

Peter was undoubtedly touched by this. He cast his eye over the Broad, to the place where that little thatched cottage was standing behind the trees, and thought what it would be to him if he were married to Margaret and had done something that would part them, and bring disgrace upon her.

He began to waver, and the man who was pleading with him, his eyes fixed earnestly on

his face, saw it—saw the soft look which came into Peter's eyes fixed upon the trees far down the Broad, and redoubled the earnestness of his plea for mercy.

At last Peter got up and said gruffly, "I oughtn't to let you off, but I suppose I shall have to."

The man covered him with unwelcome expressions of gratitude, which he cut short without much ado. "Oh, I am not doing it for your sake," he said. "You're a blackguard, whether your story's true or not. Will you swear me a solemn oath that you're not lying to me; that you have got a wife and children?"

He swore with such fervour that Peter cut him short again. "Well, all I can say is that I pity them," he said. "The more I look at you the less I like you. Come along with me now and I will think what's to be done as we walk along."

"But you won't give me up," pleaded the man. "You said you wouldn't."

"Oh, I'm not going to give you up. I dare say I'm a soft fool, but, after all, you haven't got what you wanted, and I shall be able to tell the parson here that he had better look after his treasures a little more carefully. I'll take your name and address, by the by, so that if I

ever hear of anything missing from this church I shall be able to tell them whom to suspect. Have you got a card on you?"

Yes, he had a card in his pocket and produced it, stipulating that it should not be used unless what Peter feared should come to pass, and assuring him that it wouldn't.

The card bore the name of J. W. Morgan, F.R.S., with an address in Hampstead, and it happened to be the only one he had about him.

Peter took it and looked at it. "I don't know what 'F.R.S.' means," he said, "but I suppose it's some honour you've had done to you. The people who gave it you would be pretty surprised if they knew what sort of a fellow you really were. Well, I'll keep this for my own interest, and it will rest with you whether it is ever used for any other purpose. I shouldn't advise you, Mr. Morgan, to let it be announced at any time that you have come into possession of something particularly valuable in the way of church plate. Now I'll see you on your way off the premises, so to speak, and then I'll go and inform the parson of this church that he had better send and see what's happened here. I take it that you'll go straight back to Hampstead and tell your wife and family that your little walking tour in Norfolk has come to an end. I suppose you're the man,

by the by, that was at the inn at Hollow Weir yesterday. The old landlord there would be rather surprised if I told him that I had come across you. He said you looked rather like a gentleman's servant, if I remember right. Gentlemen don't keep men-servants to any extent where I come from, and I don't know that I've ever seen one. But I think you *do* look rather more like that sort of thing than an 'F.R.S.' Here, what's up? You're not going to faint again, are you?"

"I'm all right," said the man, whose face had once more gone deadly pale. "It's only that I'm so relieved at having got off, which is much more than I could have hoped for. I won't say any more to thank you, but if you will leave me now I'll make my way to a station and get back home as soon as I can; and you can go and do what you said you were going to do."

Peter looked at him with a quizzical air, and his eyes dropped. "I think if you don't mind," he said, "I won't leave you alone in this particular spot. It is rather too early to call on the parson. I will set you a mile or two on your way. I suppose you're going to Heathside station. I'll take you as far as the high ground and see you well across the heath before I come back."

So any idea that Mr. Morgan may have had of being left alone, within a stone's throw of the church, either to take away the signs of his attempt, or perhaps even to carry it out, were destroyed.

As they set off along the road, Peter cast one look back at the church. "It doesn't look as if any one had been near it," he said, "since last Sunday, and I think we may safely leave it an hour or two longer."

Heathside Station was rather more than seven miles away. They trudged up out of the valley for three miles or so, and came to a high-lying heath, crossed by a ribbon of road that could plainly be seen for the greater part of its length. Neither of them had spoken a word since they had left Thaxted Church.

"Now," said Peter, "if you will go on, I will stay here, until I have seen you well out of sight; and you may thank your lucky stars that you are not safely lodged in gaol by this time."

Morgan walked away from him without a word. Peter stood watching him for a few minutes, and then threw himself down on the short grass by the roadside.

Morgan went on without looking back for about half a mile. Then he turned and stood in the middle of the road. Peter's figure must have been hidden from him at that distance,

but he probably remembered that he had announced his intention of staying there until he was out of sight, and if he had had any intention of returning made up his mind to relinquish it.

He turned round and pursued his way again, but not before he had passionately shaken his fist in the direction from which he had come.

Peter laughed at this display of feeling. "Now there's gratitude for you!" he said. "I'm not at all sure that I was right in letting you go, Mr. Morgan, F.R.S."

CHAPTER X

DISAPPOINTMENTS

PETER lay on the warm turf for the best part of an hour, busy with his thoughts, which were not entirely taken up by his late adventure. At the end of that time Mr. Morgan's figure was a black spot in the far distance, which only eyes as keen as Peter's could have distinguished at all. Whether he would go back to London at once, as he had promised, did not much matter now. He certainly would not be able to get back to Thaxted Church before Peter had warned those responsible; and it was pretty certain that he would not try to get back. But it was still only about half-past four in the morning.

However, Peter raised himself from the turf and set out for the village, where he had learnt that the Vicar lived. It was about two miles from Thaxted Church, which stood quite by itself. The Vicar served the two churches.

Arrived at the village he went into the church-yard to look about among the tombstones.

The Vicarage garden was divided at one place from the church-yard only by a low oak fence, and as he was busy peering about among the

headstones, he was suddenly startled by a voice: "Hallo, my man, what are you doing there?"

He looked up and saw a ruddy-faced gentleman in shirt sleeves and grey flannel trousers standing in front of some rose bushes, and looking over the fence at him. It was obviously the Vicar himself, no doubt an enthusiastic rose-grower, since he was up among his flowers before six o'clock in the morning.

"Well, if you're the parson of this place," he said, "I was hanging about till it was a bit later and I could come and see you. I've got something rather important to tell you."

The Vicar's face changed. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, "I didn't see you were a gentleman. Come in here," and he indicated a gate from the church-yard to the garden.

Peter recounted shortly his adventure of the night, and the parson's face became serious. "You've let him go?" he said, with an expression of disapproval.

"Well, yes, I did," said Peter. "The poor beggar pleaded so hard, and I had already given him a bit of a doing. Besides he hadn't done any harm, and he's not likely to try it on again."

"But what on earth was he trying to break open the old chest for?" exclaimed the parson. "If he wanted money he wouldn't expect to find it there."

"I haven't told you all yet," said Peter. "If he had been an ordinary burglar, perhaps I shouldn't have let him go, though I don't know that what he wanted to do wasn't really worse. He was after your famous old cup."

The Vicar looked at him in blank astonishment. "What famous old cup?" he asked.

"Well, he said he was a collector of church plate, and there was a famous silver cup belonging to that church which he had made up his mind to have. He was one of those collecting maniacs, and he ran all that risk for the sake of something that he could never have shown to a soul, and that must have made him feel jolly uncomfortable whenever he looked at it."

The Vicar's face was still completely puzzled. "But there's no cup there," he said.

Peter looked at him and then burst into his big laugh. "Oh! you don't keep it there!" he exclaimed. "Then if he had managed to break open that great old lock he would have found nothing after all. By Jove! I wish I had just stood by and seen his face when he got it open and found nothing there. Still, I think you're very wise, sir, not to keep such a treasure as that in that lonely place. I suppose you've got it safely locked up here."

"I don't know what you're talking about,"

said the Vicar. "There's no plate of any sort belongs to Thaxted Church, and none of any value that belongs to this church."

It was now Peter's turn to look serious. "By Jove!" he cried out, when he had stared for some time in blank amazement at the Vicar. "Then the blackguard cheated me after all! He told me lies from beginning to end, unless he was mistaken himself. Isn't there anything of value, sir, in that old chest?"

"There's something of considerable value to antiquarians," said the Vicar. "There's a register which goes back to the year 1660. But why that should tempt a thief, I don't know. I can't help wishing you hadn't let this man go."

The mention of the register aroused Peter at last to some activity of thought. Supposing after all that it was *that* that this man had been trying to get hold of!

"I wonder if we could catch him still!" he said. "I saw him out of sight on the road to Heathside station. When is the first train there that he could get away by?"

The clergyman looked at his watch. "There's one at six o'clock," he said, "to Norwich, and it's a quarter to, now. There's not much object in following him either, as you have fortunately been able to prevent him doing any harm.

Didn't you find out who he was, or anything about him?"

"He gave me his card," said Peter, taking it out of his pocket after a moment's hesitation. "I made him do that in case I heard anything further about him that would make me want to follow him up. I said I wouldn't let his name be known unless he gave me some reason. But I don't think I need be as particular as all that now. Here it is."

The parson took it and looked at it. "It's quite unlikely to be his own card," he said, "but we can easily find that out. If he's a Fellow of the Royal Society his name is very likely to be in 'Who's Who'; and we might be able to find out at once. Come inside, sir. I shall go down to Thaxted Church before breakfast, and you might like to come with me."

They went into the clergyman's study, where there was water already boiling over a spirit lamp. Evidently this parson did not insist that his servants should emulate his own zeal for early rising.

He took a red-covered book from his writing-table and turned over the leaves. "Here he is," he said. "How old did you say your man was?"

"Oh, about forty," said Peter, "more or less."

The parson laughed. "Mr. Morgan is—let

me see—seventy-eight,” he said. “He was— Oh! of course, I remember his name now—he is the famous Egyptian scholar. There’s a good deal about him here, but I don’t know that it’s of any particular interest to us. I don’t think we need trouble to enquire of Mr. Morgan what he was doing last night. It’s pretty obvious at his age he wasn’t breaking into Thaxted Church, and if he *had* done he wouldn’t have expected to find anything bearing on his particular line of research. No, I am afraid your friend was after the register, but what he wanted with it I don’t know. However, these old registers do sometimes contain entries that people would give a good deal to have expunged. It’s a curious thing that an antiquary stayed here for a few days, a year or so ago, and examined that one at Thaxted Church with great interest. He was writing a book about parish registers, and said he had got more curious information out of it than any he had seen. He also told me, now I remember it, that there was an entry in it of a marriage that had taken place about a hundred years ago, which might change the succession to a peerage, and he was going to investigate it when he got back to London. He wouldn’t tell me what the names were and I haven’t had the curiosity to look it up. As a matter of fact, he was rather a garrulous old

gentleman, and I didn't pay much attention to all that he said; but"—he broke off in his preparations over the stove, and looked at Peter. "I say," he said, "it's just occurred to me—perhaps that is what your friend wanted from the chest!"

Peter had come to that conclusion long ago. He was immensely chagrined at having let the pseudo-Morgan escape him, and greatly disturbed in his mind at the discovery that the facts about the Chandos marriage were known, and known apparently to people who would make no scruple in destroying them. He gave vent to an expression, customary enough in the society of the Australian Bush, but which made the Vicar exclaim in expostulation.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "I'm a rough sort of fellow and I was forgetting whose company I was in. But this is a very serious business for me. I have been in search of the record of that marriage for a good many weeks past. By Jove! if I had known how near I was to losing it last night! But who on earth can this man be?"

"*You* have been in search of it?" exclaimed the parson. His offence at Peter's language was done away with by the interest of this statement. "Then who are *you* may I ask?"

"Well, I hadn't meant to say who I was,"

said Peter, "until I had found out what I have been looking for; and there are particular reasons just now why I don't want it generally known. Would you mind keeping it to yourself if I tell you?"

"Certainly," said the Vicar, on whom Peter's frankness of speech and manner had made a favourable impression. "I'll keep it to myself until you give the word. Are we going to be the centre here of an exciting contest for a peerage, and are you going to be the claimant?"

"Well, I haven't quite made up my mind about it yet," said Peter. "It will depend upon a good many things, and therefore I want nothing known about it at present. At any rate, I want to get hold of the proofs first, if the proofs exist."

The Vicar was all eagerness. Peter hesitated for a moment, and then said, "My name is Peter Chandos. I have lived all my life in Australia, where my great-grandfather emigrated a great many years ago. He had always been supposed to be the natural son of the Earl of Cambray of those days, born before his marriage. But if my information is correct, the register in your church will show that his father *did* marry his mother, and in that case it was the next heir who was the natural son, by a bigamous marriage; and my great-grandfather was really the Earl of Cambray."

The Vicar was deeply interested. "Why, it's like a story out of a book," he said. "Drink your coffee and let's go down to the church at once, and see if we can find the record. Of course, that's what that man wanted to steal. I wonder who on earth he was? Certainly somebody who wants it hidden up. Why do you think the marriage took place at Thaxted, 'by the by?'"

Peter told him of the story that he had heard from the landlord the evening before.

"Holden!" exclaimed the Vicar. "Why, of course, that's a well-known name in this village. And do you know, now I come to look at you, you're extraordinarily like an old farmer who lives not far from here of that name. It has been puzzling me ever since I saw you to think who it was you reminded me of. He's a great deal older than you, but you might have been his son. Well, really, Mr. Chandos, this is very exciting. Would you like a wash or anything before we go off?"

Peter refused this offer. He was all eagerness to get back to Thaxted Church, and the Vicar seemed hardly less eager than he was.

They set off and walked quickly, and in half-an-hour came to the church. "It's a lonely spot, isn't it?" said the Vicar, as they approached it through the trees. "It was an extraordinarily

good piece of fortune that you happened to take a fancy for a midnight walk. Why, anybody might break into the church in the full light of day without running much risk of being seen!"

They went into the vestry, through the door which had been broken open. There were the locksmith's tools all scattered over the floor, and everything was just as Peter had left it after his struggle with the would-be thief.

The Vicar unlocked the chest with an unwieldy key, and took out of it an old parchment-covered book, carefully wrapped up in a waterproof cover. He laid it down on the table and turned the pages easily. The entries for each year were few, and it was not difficult to turn to the right one at once.

Suddenly he exclaimed, "Why, what's this! Here's a jump of two years, just about the time we want too. You haven't got the exact date, have you?"

Before Peter could reply he cried out again, "There's a page missing. See here—it has been cut out with a knife!"

The two men looked at one another in consternation. Peter's disappointment was acute.

"Then he got it after all," he said. "And he was fooling me all the time!"

But the Vicar said, "Didn't you tell me that

you interrupted him before he opened the chest?"

"Yes, I did," said Peter. "Certainly he hadn't opened the chest. He must have sneaked back and got it. But he couldn't have done that either. I'll take my oath I saw him three miles away, and he was pretty well done."

"Besides," said the Vicar, "if he had hurried back and managed by a miracle to pick the lock of the chest at once, he certainly wouldn't have taken the trouble to put the book back exactly as it was before, when he knew that every minute was of value."

"No," said Peter, "I am perfectly certain he couldn't have come back and done it in the time. You're quite sure, I suppose, that a page is missing?"

The Vicar showed him where it had been cut out, very neatly, close to the binding; and the dates of the two pages that now came together showed a break of just two years.

"Besides," said the Vicar again, "I remember this page that has gone quite well. Not many months ago I looked up all the entries that had to do with this family of Barrett—you see this entry here of a marriage. They are still in the village, and I remember quite well that the entry on the top of the next page was of the birth of a son, and on the page after there

was the death of the young mother. I remember it all as well as anything, and I've got the copies in my house. I can show them to you and prove that I am right. No, somebody has had the register and cut out that page since I saw it. What a wicked thing to do! If I find out who did it I'll prosecute him."

But there seemed no possible way of finding out who had done it. It was not even clear how the register had been got at. The lock was absolutely uninjured, and if it had been picked, it must have been by a far more expert hand than that of the thief of the night before. The whole thing was a mystery. Peter felt that he was wading in deep waters, since there were two people besides himself who wanted that register, and neither of them had apparently stuck at foul measures to get it.

His disappointment was almost sickening. The cup had seemed to be actually in his grasp; by a piece of good fortune almost unbelievable, he had seemed to have foiled one attempt to wrest it from him, and now came the discovery that that had been no piece of good fortune at all. If he had never chanced to be passing the church the night before, the man he had surprised would have broken open the chest at last and found himself disappointed, just as Peter himself was.

At present, however, there seemed nothing to be done. He could only go away to think it all over, and leave his friend, the parson, also to think it over, and see if any steps would suggest themselves to him of tracing the missing page.

Peter went back to Hollow Weir, and gave what explanations occurred to him of his nocturnal disappearance. He did not tell the landlord of anything that had happened. And presently he almost forgot about it himself. For now the time had come when he was once more to see Margaret, and nothing that had happened had altered his intention of telling her of his love and pleading for its acceptance.

He sailed down to the Broad in the boat in which he hoped she would come out with him. As he sat in the stern sheets with tiller and sheet in his hands, an idea came to him which encouraged him enormously. The register was gone—or at any rate that part of it that concerned him. But the man who had first come upon it—the antiquary—had almost certainly made a copy of it. He would have found him out long before if he had had any idea where to look for him. But his friend, the Vicar, would know; and he would be able to testify that the page had gone, but had certainly been there. And surely, with that and the antiquary's copy of the entry, his case would be as good as ever;

he would still have rank, as well as wealth, to offer to the girl who would become them both so well.

He came to the cottage. There was no one about, and it had an air almost deserted. He knocked at the door, and waited for some time without hearing any voices. Margaret and her aunt must be out somewhere he thought, although it was odd that they should be so, because it had been arranged that he should come at that hour. He knew that old Mrs. Geering was a little deaf, and after knocking several times went round to the back of the cottage, where he found her busy in her outside wash-house. When she saw him she threw up her hands, and he asked her with a strange sinking of heart where the ladies were.

“Oh! haven’t you heard, sir?” she said. “They’ve gone. They went off last night—all in a hurry, and I was so flummoxed about it I hardly knew what I was doing!”

Peter could only stare at her with his heart sinking lower and lower. Gone! They certainly had had no idea of going when he had seen them last! What could be the meaning of it?

“Didn’t they leave any word for me?” he asked.

No, they had left no word for him, and they had left no address.

Mrs. Geering became voluble about it. Miss

Margaret had gone out for a little stroll in the wood soon after he had left them the evening before. She had never gone out before without her aunt, but Mrs. Geering had heard her tell her that she didn't want her to come with her. She seemed to want to be alone-like.

Peter's heart contracted at this. Didn't it mean that she had wanted to be alone to think of him, just as he loved to be alone to think of her?

Well, she had come in looking frightened to death. Mrs. Geering had seen her, and she had been so white that the old woman had cried out that she must be ill, and Miss Parker had come running down, and they had gone away together and talked for a long time. Then to Mrs. Geering's intense surprise, Miss Parker had come to her and said that they must leave that evening; she was to get a cart to take them and their luggage to the station. She had given no explanation whatever, but had insisted upon paying her for the rooms for an extra fortnight. They had been gone out of the house within an hour of Miss Margaret's coming in. All Mrs. Geering could think of was that she must have met somebody who had frightened her like, though who it could be in that place she didn't know. None of the men about wouldn't have done such a

thing, and there was no strangers ever came near; it was such an out-of-the-way spot.

So she chattered on, and presently expanded still further and told Peter that she never wished to have two nicer ladies staying in her house, but she couldn't help feeling there was something queer about them. They had not had a single letter since they had been there, and neither of them had ever written one; they had never let out a word as to where they had come from, and as to telling her where they were going to when they left in such a hurry she knew no more than the man in the moon.

It was evident that the old lady was working up a mystery which would by and by reach alarming proportions. Without much hope that his intervention would be successful, Peter told her that he would make it worth her while to keep what she had told him to herself; and presented her with a sum of money that must at any rate have persuaded her that he was in earnest in his request.

Then he left her, sick at heart over the second disappointment that had befallen him that morning, for he did not believe in Mrs. Geering's theory that Margaret had seen anybody whom she must at all costs avoid;—unless it was himself.

CHAPTER XI

PETER IN LONDON

PETER went to see old Mr. Fearon directly he got to London. He wanted to take his advice about the surprising discoveries he had made, but he did not mean to tell him anything yet about his meeting with the girl in the picture and her sudden disappearance.

The old man looked grave when he heard his story.

“There’s only one man in the world,” he said, “to whose interest it is to have that record destroyed, and he is the last man you will be able to get information from.”

“You mean Lord Cambray?”

“I do. He has heard the story, and he has paid to have the leaf of the register stolen.”

“Who could he have heard it from?”

“From Walker. There is nobody else. You said that that antiquary who first made the discovery was dead, didn’t you?”

“Yes, the Vicar told me that. It was a very great disappointment. But who was the man I caught—the man who called himself Morgan?”

“We can find him, I think. He must have been somebody whom the real Morgan met and got into conversation with. I will make enquiries at once.”

Mr. Fearon did so. The old gentleman whose name had been used so unscrupulously told him that he had met an intelligent man travelling up in the train from the West country, had got into conversation with him and given him his card. The stranger had not returned the compliment. But the journey on which the two had met had been made from that part of the country in which Cambray Castle was situated.

“I thought so,” said Mr. Fearon. “You had better go down there, Peter, and make a few enquiries. You may come across the gentleman—probably will.”

But Peter was not ready to do that yet. He had another search to make. He would willingly let all chances of assuming his title go by if he could find Margaret by doing so.

His only clue was the picture, and he set about finding the paper from which it had been cut out in the way he had told her he should have done if he had not met her. He got a ticket for the British Museum and spent every day in looking through the illustrated papers of the past five years. When he should find the one he was looking for he would know who Mar-

garet was. Then he would have something to go upon.

He searched and searched, for days that ran into weeks, but could not find what he was looking for. He began to get sick at heart, and even to lose flesh. This was the unhappiest time in his life.

One Sunday afternoon he went to see Mrs. Saunders and little Tommy, whom he found making wonderful progress with his brush and pencil. But there seemed to be something wrong about Tommy's mother. She seemed unhappy; and yet she told Peter eagerly that she was doing well and wanted for nothing. There were signs of poverty about her too, which certainly ought not to have been there. She had no servant, and did all the work of the house herself as well as her dress-making.

Peter left her disappointed. His visit had seemed to cheer her, and she thanked him for coming. But she did not press him to come again, and he went away with the impression that she did not want him to come too often.

Peter dined that night in a restaurant, and walked home to his rooms in Bloomsbury.

As he was turning a corner, he almost ran into two men walking along arm in arm and both of them the worse for liquor.

"Steady on, now!" said Peter, and then in-

stantly recognized one of the roysterers as Walker.

Walker recognized him at the same time and his face showed the utmost horror at the meeting. He turned to run away, but Peter had him by the collar of his coat. His friend set up a drunken shout, and, immediately, a policeman came round the corner and wanted to know what it was all about.

Unfortunately, Peter could not tell him what it was all about without making his whole story public, which he was not yet prepared to do.

“I have reason to believe that this man is concerned in a felony,” he said, using language he had heard from Mr. Fearon, and speaking impressively. “I want him kept under observation, and his address taken.”

“It’s a lie,” said Walker, indignantly. “This man has assaulted me. You saw him do it, constable. Take *his* name and address.”

The policeman happened to be new to the force, and hardly knew how to act. But the taking of names and addresses he did understand, and produced his pocket-book for that purpose.

Walker’s companion, who was rather more under the influence of liquor than Walker himself, now took part in the proceedings. “Take the constable’s number,” he said, solemnly, and Walker produced his own pocket-book and did

so, with some difficulty, as the shock of meeting Peter, which had sobered him for the time, was beginning to wear off.

It was the only note that was made. The policeman, possibly outraged at the idea of his number being taken by a half-drunken man, put up his book and said, "Here, you all of you move along, or you'll get into trouble."

Walker instantly took advantage of the order and made off, his companion lurching after him. Peter expostulated and was for following them, but the policeman said, "You'd better go home, sir. I saw you catch him by the collar, and if he liked to have you up for assault I should be obliged to tell what I saw."

Peter turned on his heel and strode off, too angry to make any reply.

CHAPTER XII

A CONSPIRACY

ON the evening of the third day after his departure Lorrimer came back. Lord Cambray had rung the bell for the footman who had taken his place, and Lorrimer walked into the room, the same soft-footed, capable attendant that he had always been. But his face was pale; there were dark rings under his eyes, and on his forehead there was a livid mark.

“Oh! it’s you at last,” cried his master with an oath. “Why on earth didn’t you send me a telegram? You’ve bungled it I can see. Whatever made me put such an affair in the hands of a clumsy fool like you!”

Lorrimer was pretty well used to these insults, in regard to which he seldom showed any signs of resentment. But at this reception his face flushed a dull red and he said with subdued passion, “If I had been the fool you say I am, I should have been safely lodged in gaol by this time. It’s true that I have failed. There isn’t

a man in the world who wouldn't have done so under the circumstances, and there are precious few men who could have got away as I have."

"Oh, of course, I am vastly relieved at seeing you back," said the old lord, with an ugly sneer. "Nothing much matters as long as you've saved your skin. I've been in a terrible state of mind for fear that something might have happened to you."

Lorrimer kept his mouth doggedly closed, and busied himself over certain little duties that his keen eyes showed him that the footman who had taken his place had neglected. Presently Lord Cambray grew tired of girding at him and said, "Well, let's have your story. I don't say I shall believe all of it. You've failed, and of course you will put up the best excuse for yourself that you can."

Upon this not very encouraging invitation Lorrimer told his story. He had bought an ordnance map and studied the whereabouts of Thaxted Church carefully. He had approached it from a station twelve miles away, so as to cover his tracks if anything should go wrong. He had stopped for an hour in the evening to have a meal at the inn at Hollow Weir from which Mervyn Chandos had written those letters which had put them on the track.

"What on earth did you want to do that for?"

grumbled the old lord. "You take immense pains to put them off the track, and then you show yourself in the very place."

Lorrimer told him that Thaxted Church was some miles away from Hollow Weir, and that he had made enquiries of the landlord as to quite a different route. He had also got out of him without asking any questions about it, the fact that Thaxted Church stood in a lonely place quite by itself, and that nobody ever went near it, except on Sundays. He had thought himself quite safe. He had gone off and lain hidden in a wood until he knew that every one anywhere near would have been long since in bed and asleep. Then, with great difficulty, he had picked the lock of the vestry door, and had made up his mind that if the register was in the church at all it must be in an old chest that was in the vestry itself. He had worked at the lock of the chest for half an hour, without making the slightest impression upon it. It was a very old lock that had been well looked after, and nothing he could do would shift it.

"For half an hour!" exclaimed Lord Cambray. "Why didn't you break the chest open? I would have had the register out of it and been half way home by that time."

The chest was one of the strongest he had ever seen, said Lorrimer, of thick oak as hard

as iron, and bound everywhere with steel. It was just as strong as a modern safe.

Then he told him how he had been surprised by a man coming in and standing over him; how he had tried to escape, and how the man had thwarted his every attempt, and even torn his revolver out of his hip pocket. He told this story in such a way that even Lord Cambray, with a sneer always on his face, was convinced by it. Besides, there was no doubt about the ugly mark on his forehead, which so far corroborated him.

“Who was this man?” asked the old lord. “What was he doing there at that time of night?”

Lorrimer did not know. He looked like a gentleman on a holiday,—fishing or something. He did not belong to that country, because once he had said something about coming from another place. No doubt he was up to some mischief of his own, being about at that time of night, but what it was Lorrimer couldn't say, although he did not refrain from making some vile suggestion, with a curse at his ill-luck at being foiled in that way.

He described his assailant as a man of unusual strength, and Lord Cambray sneered again and said, “Oh! I've no doubt he was a sort of Samson, or he couldn't have got the better of you.”

Then Lorrimer went on to tell him how his captor had determined to give him up to the police, and how he had worked upon his feelings and told him a yarn which had persuaded him to let him go. Evidently he took great credit to himself for the story he had invented, and Lord Cambray did not deny that it was a smart trick.

Going up in the train Lorrimer had read in a snippety paper a story of a man who had stolen a valuable piece of plate out of a church, just for the sake of possessing a unique specimen, although he could never exhibit it in his collection; and he had appropriated that story and told it to the man who had caught him. He had also, some time before, during another journey, got into conversation with an old gentleman who had given him his card, and that card he fortunately had had with him, although he had got rid of all marks of his own identity.

He told how he had tried to get rid of his captor, so that he could go back to the church and finish his work; but it had been no use. He had watched him out of sight for miles and miles, and he was so done up by all he had been through that if he had had the opportunity he would not have been able to get back before the alarm was given and the tools he had left in the vestry had been removed.

When he had heard the story out, Lord Cambray instantly dismissed it as without importance at all. "The fact is you've failed," he said, "and now there's nothing to be done but to wait for that little brute to shoot at us, and then try and buy him off."

There did indeed seem nothing to be done. One piece of projected villainy was foiled for the time being, and the other, that had been discussed between this precious pair, was discussed no longer. Whether Lorrimer had given up all hopes of being able to get his way with his master's daughter there was nothing to show, but at any rate he made no mention of her, and Lord Cambray seemed to have forgotten altogether that she had left her home, and that nothing had been heard of her whereabouts. Perhaps he thought that she would turn up again in her own good time. Perhaps he did not care whether she turned up again or not. Her maid, who had been with her ever since she was a child, was with her now, wherever she was, and whatever paternal anxiety he might have felt on her behalf could not be acute since she was in the care of the invaluable Parker.

Two days after Lorrimer had returned to Cambray Castle, Lord Cambray, who was sitting on the terrace reading the morning paper, suddenly exclaimed forcibly at something which

caught his eye, and then rang his bell violently for Lorrimer. When the servant came he fixed him with a glare.

“Look here, what does this mean?” he cried. “You’ve been playing me false, you dog! You’ve got that register after all. By G——! if you play any of your games upon me I’ll punish you for it if it costs me everything I’ve got.”

Lorrimer’s blank stare of surprise was not without its effect upon the furious old man. “Here, read that,” he said, giving him the paper, “and tell me what it means.”

He pointed to an advertisement in the *Agony Column*, which was to the effect that a page of an ancient register, containing entries of such and such dates, had been cut out and stolen from Thaxted Church, Norfolk. A reward of five hundred pounds was offered for its return, and for information which would lead to the conviction of the thief. Application was to be made to Messrs. Fearon & Son, Solicitors, of Old Jewry.

Lord Cambray’s attention had been drawn to this advertisement by an article in the paper itself, pointing out how valuable some of these ancient parish registers were and how carelessly some of them were kept.

Lorrimer laid down the paper, still with an air of complete bewilderment.

“Don’t stand there looking like a fool!” said his master. “What is the meaning of it?”

Lorrimer had nothing to say. It was so plain that he did not know that even Lord Cambray relinquished his hastily formed idea that he had after all got it himself.

“Somebody must have stolen it,” said Lorrimer.

“Oh! you think that, do you?” sneered the old lord. “You’ve got an extraordinarily inventive brain. Did that fellow who gave you such a hiding steal it? Who was he? It has occurred to me once or twice that it’s just possible he may be that Australian fellow, who has come over here to claim the title. From what you have said of him, he sounds rather as if he might have been a colonial. Could he have taken it?”

Lorrimer gained a slight revenge for the insults with which any remark or suggestion of his was generally met. “Perhaps you will tell me,” he said quietly, “why he should want to steal the register. I may be a fool, but I should have thought that it would only have been of use to him if it was in the church.”

“H’m, ha!” said Lord Cambray. “No, I don’t suppose he could have taken it, whoever he was. I don’t suppose you have either, although I did think at first that you were playing

some game with me. But who would want to have it destroyed, except me? There's no doubt about its containing the very entry we want; the dates given here show that."

"If I may venture to say so," said Lorrimer, "the only person who is likely to have stolen it is Walker, and you will hear from him pretty soon I should think, with another offer."

This prophecy was fulfilled in a few days' time. A letter came from Walker which ran as follows:

"My Lord:

I have secured a certain document which was the subject of conversation between us, when I had the honour of waiting upon your lordship. I shall be pleased to hand it over on receipt of four thousand pounds, which is the lowest price I am prepared to accept.

I am your lordship's obedient servant,
ROBERT WALKER."

"Now we've got him!" exclaimed his lordship in fierce glee. "What we haven't got unfortunately is the modest price he demands; but as I am the only possible purchaser he can find, I dare say I can persuade him to let me have it at my own price, which is five hundred pounds, as I have told him. Write and tell him to come

and see me. I don't know why he hasn't done so: I told him not to write."

"I don't think it's in the least likely that he will let it go for that sum."

"Why not? What good is it to him if he doesn't sell it to me?"

"Well, there is a reward offered of five hundred pounds."

"He couldn't claim that without giving himself away."

"Don't you think he would be clever enough to make up some story which would clear himself and get him the money?"

Lord Cambray considered this. "He seems to be a pretty resourceful sort of rascal," he said. "Certainly he was clever enough to succeed in doing what you failed to do. Well then, what do you suggest?"

"I suggest," said Lorrimer quietly, "that you should leave me to deal with Mr. Walker. If I succeed in getting the paper off him the bargain we made is to hold as before."

This suggestion was received with a terrifying scowl, but was then discussed, Lorrimer sticking doggedly to his opinion that the only way of getting the paper out of Walker was either to pay him his price, or something pretty near it, which was out of the question, or else taking it by force.

“Oh! but you can’t do that here,” said Lord Cambray at last. “The fellow would kick up a hullabaloo, and everybody about the place would know that he had been robbed.”

Then Lorrimer disclosed his scheme.

It was one which showed the cold-blooded ingenuity of this resourceful villain. He was to write to Walker on behalf of Lord Cambray to say that he would not give the price that Walker demanded, but that he would give a sum very much larger than he had originally offered. But he would do nothing at all unless Walker came down to discuss it with him in person. Walker was to write making an appointment, and he was to return this letter as a guarantee that it would not be made use of. He was not to discuss the arrangement in his letter, or to write about it again under any circumstances.

Lorrimer was also to write in his own name, and tell Walker that he was in his master’s counsel, and thought he could persuade him to better the offer he was prepared to make. But, naturally, if he put Walker up to getting a great deal more money than he would be able to get by himself, he should expect to share it. He could not leave the castle for long without his lordship’s knowing of it; but if Walker would come up from the station, not by the main drive, where there was always a certain amount of

traffic, but by a footpath through the wood, which he gave him directions how to find, he would meet him somewhere near the house, where they could talk unobserved, and there was no reason why they should not come to an agreement after a few minutes' conversation. This letter Walker was also to return, as a guarantee of good faith. If he did not do so, Lorrimer would not meet him, and he might make the best bargain he could for himself without his help.

Lord Cambray grunted appreciatively over this precious effusion. "I am not sure though," he said, "that an invitation to meet you in a wood, where nobody is likely to disturb you, is calculated to give him much confidence. I know I should think twice before I met you in a wood, if I had once set eyes on you; especially if I were a little fellow like this Walker."

Lorrimer smiled with appreciation at this compliment, which had been made in a tone of good temper. "I think," he said, "that the touch about getting a bit for myself will persuade him that no harm's intended."

"Well," conceded Lord Cambray, "I dare say that may bring him. Being a rascal himself he will have a fellow feeling for another rascal. We can but try it on. I don't see in what way the invitation is to be bettered. It's

annoying having to write these things, but after all he can't do much against us without doing it against himself, and he will probably see the advisability of complying with our request that the letters shall be sent back."

In due time Walker's answers came back, together with the letters that had called them forth, and which were immediately destroyed. That to Lord Cambray was a short acceptance of his offer for a conference. That to Lorrimer was longer, and showed the kindly appreciation of a thief invited to enter into a deal with another thief. He should be pleased, he said, to hear of any way by which they might "diddle" the old man together, and he proposed a division into thirds of any extra sum he might be able to secure by Lorrimer's help; he to take two-thirds and Lorrimer one.

"I think you will say," he wrote, "that this is a generous offer, and I quite hope we shall be able to do business together."

"Very well then," said the old lord, whose brows had drawn together at the disrespectful reference to himself. "Now you have got your chance again, and don't miss it this time. Don't take a revolver—that's a fool's game—no one carries firearms in this country, and although the wood is lonely enough, if you had to use it you might be heard."

Lorrimer's shifty eyes dropped, as the black wicked ones of his master were bent on him.

"Get that paper," said the old man, leaning forward and glaring at him with evil intensity. "I'll give you five hundred pounds for it when it's put into my hand. You can hand that on to Walker, or do what you like with it. Make a bargain with him. I don't care. I shan't enquire any farther about Walker. *But—get—that—paper!*"

He sank back in his chair, overcome by the expression of his own eagerness. Lorrimer had to wait upon him with the skill and the attention of a trained nurse, and as he went about his duties his face bore something of the evil intensity of that of the wicked old man who had just incited him to—what!

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE WOOD

CAMBRAY CASTLE stood on a deeply wooded rise, and could be seen from the south over many miles of country. Behind it was level ground, over many acres of which stretched its beautiful gardens; and then the woods enclosed it once more.

The village was at the bottom of the hill, many hundred feet down, and the drive wound up through the trees, taking clever advantage of the inequalities of the steep hill. But if you entered the wood through a gate some way from the main entrance, you could go up by a steeper path, which was sometimes quite near the road, and sometimes at a considerable distance. It was shorter than the drive, but even then covered a distance of something like a mile.

About halfway down this wooded path was a rustic bridge, crossing a stream which had its rise in the springs of the lake that lay behind the castle at the top of the hill. And leaning over the parapet of this bridge, looking down

into the water, Lorrimer stood and waited for Walker.

He had some time to wait, and showed impatience—something like fear, too, for his lips were dry and his face was white, and he never remained long in one position.

But when at last he heard a footstep, and presently round a curve in the trees Walker came and caught sight of him, he was leaning over the bridge in a careless attitude, and his face was composed, as he straightened himself, and said in a careless tone, "Your train must be a bit late. I've been waiting here for some time."

"I don't think my train was late," said Walker. "I have been walking at a tremendous pace. Are we anywhere near the top? This path seems as if it would wind on for ever."

"Not far off now," said Lorrimer. "But we shall have time to have our talk. His lordship told me to see you first and prepare you for his offer. He's in a pretty bad state of health just now, and he doesn't want a very long interview with you."

"Sorry to hear he's indisposed," said Walker. "He's an amiable old gentleman and I should think you have a pretty easy job with him, don't you?"

Lorrimer smiled at this pleasantry. "Ah!

you take things lightly," he said. "It's well to be you, Mr. Walker, with all your time to yourself and a handsome deal in prospect, by which you will be able to make a small fortune."

Walker's eyes lit up with cupidity. "Is he prepared to come down handsomely?" he asked, and then looked rather suspiciously at Lorrimer. "I'd no idea," he said, "that he was going to let anybody else into the secret. I suppose you can be trusted to keep things to yourself."

"Well, considering he can't write a letter with his own hands," said Lorrimer coolly, "and I've been his right-hand man getting on for thirty years, you mustn't be surprised at my knowing as much about things as he does himself. If you've got any idea of holding back anything from me, Mr. Walker, you may as well put it out of your mind at once. I'm in this deal, and I propose to make something out of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Walker, as if at an excellent joke. "I thought you were the right sort from your letter. Come now—I don't know what your name is—"

Lorrimer told him.

"Well, Mr. Lorrimer," he said, "what are we going to make out of this? What's the old gentleman prepared to pay? He ought to come

down pretty handsomely, for I've run a great risk of getting myself locked up for a pretty long term of imprisonment, trusting to him to do the right thing when I brought him what he wanted."

"How did you get it?" asked Lorrimer, who seemed anxious to keep the conversation off the purpose for which they had come together as long as possible. "Did you get the whole book or only a piece of it?"

"Oh! we will talk about that when we've fixed up our little business," said Walker. "What's the old boy prepared to pay?"

"I say," said Lorrimer, suddenly showing anger, as if his nerves were on the stretch and he could not control his irritability, "that we will make certain about having what we're bargaining for first. I dare say you and I will get on all right together, but I may say at once that I don't trust you any farther than I can see you, Mr. Walker, and I would like some account of how you did the trick."

"Oh well," said Walker, hastily, showing some surprise at his change of tone, and probably anxious to keep him in a good humour, "I don't mind telling you how it was done if you want to know. The Church is quite a long way from everywhere, and nobody ever goes near it. I walked over from a place some miles away

and got there about three o'clock in the morning when nobody was likely to be about. I didn't go at night because I should have had to use a light, which might have brought somebody I didn't want, just to see what I was up to. I know a little about opening locks that I don't happen to have the keys of, and I got into the church quite easily and shut it up after me again when I left. There was an old chest where I judged the register would be, if it was kept in the church at all, and I got that open. But I can tell you it was a teaser. It took me longer than any lock I have ever tackled. Well, there was the register all right, wrapped carefully up in a nice little bit of mackintosh to keep it from the damp, and there was the entry. I didn't want to take the whole book, so I cut out the page, as neatly as ever I could, and put everything back as I found it; and unless anything quite unlikely happens it may be years before anybody discovers that there's a page missing in that old register at all."

Lorrimer had listened to this recital with his head turned away and a frown upon his face. This man was a cleverer villain than he was. It was just because he had not taken thought over that small matter of the light that he had brought upon himself the notice that Walker had escaped.

"You were quite wrong about its not being missed," he said shortly.

"What!" exclaimed Walker.

"It's been missed already, and there's a reward of five hundred pounds for the man who will find the thief."

"Well I never!" exclaimed Walker, in the utmost surprise. "And it's only a week ago that I got hold of it. Well, anyhow, I don't think there's much chance of the thief, as they call him, being found. There's not a soul who saw me within five miles of the place, and I don't suppose *you* want to give me up, Mr. Lorrimer, —eh? Well, now, we're wasting time here. What's the offer?"

"The offer," said Lorrimer, fixing him with a look that changed Mr. Walker's expression from one of self-satisfaction to one of surprise, not unmixed with alarm, "the offer is that you give up that sheet you stole to me now; then you can go back where you came from and nothing further will be said about it."

After a moment's pause Walker professed to treat this speech as a joke. He laughed, but without mirth, and said, "Is that the handsome advance that Lord Cambray is prepared to make on his original offer?"

"Lord Cambray has nothing to do with it," said Lorrimer. "This is a little enterprise of

my own. Lord Cambray is prepared to give five hundred pounds for that sheet of paper you stole, and if I bring it to him, he'll give me the five hundred pounds. I don't want to be hard on you, Mr. Walker; I am quite ready to divide that sum with you. We'll divide it into fifths—I to take four-fifths and you to take one."

Walker had somewhat recovered himself. He laughed again, rather more naturally. "I see," he said. "And if I'm not prepared to give up what I've risked so much for, for a hundred pounds—which isn't anything like what I'm already out of pocket over this deal—where shall you be then, Mr. Lorrimer?"

"Oh, then," said Lorrimer coolly, "I shall be better off by a hundred pounds, for I shall claim the reward offered on my own account, and of course you won't expect me to share any of that with you."

"I see," said Walker again. "And where does Lord Cambray come in?"

"Lord Cambray wouldn't come in at all," said Lorrimer. "As I said, it would be a little speculation entirely on my own account. I shouldn't mind leaving Lord Cambray's service if I could get five hundred pounds added to what I've been able to save."

"Well, it's a very pretty idea," said Walker.

“But there are a good many things you have forgotten. However, we needn’t discuss them. If you have really got some suggestion to make to me, of sticking the old man for a bit more, as I’ve said I’m quite willing to share. If not we’ll end this interesting conversation, for it’s quite time I went and kept my appointment with your master.”

Lorrimer’s aspect changed suddenly. “Yes, it’s quite time we ended this,” he said roughly. “Where’s the paper? Let me see it.”

Walker took a step backwards. Lorrimer had approached him threateningly with the big stick he was carrying gripped firmly in his hand.

“Here, don’t you go trying that sort of game on with me,” he said boldly. “You’ll get yourself into trouble, you know.” But his face was pasty white as he shrank back against the parapet of the bridge.

Lorrimer controlled himself and let his hand fall. “Look here,” he said, in a voice that was almost pleading. “Don’t play the fool. Take your hundred pounds—I’ll make it two hundred—no, two hundred and fifty; we’ll go halves—and go away in safety.”

“Not me!” said Walker with uneasy truculence. “I’ll have my four thousand.”

“You’d better, you know,” said Lorrimer,

still in a tone of appealing reasonableness. "I don't want to do you any harm, but I'm going to have that paper. I'm stronger than you, and I've got this stick. I'm going to have that paper, and if you don't give it up I'll take it from you."

Walker, now obviously terrified, gave a hoarse cackle of laughter. "You don't suppose I should be such a fool as to have the paper on me when I was going to trust myself in this den of thieves, do you?" he said. "Mr. Lorrimer!—Mr. Lorrimer!—what are you thinking of?"

He crouched down under the railing and held up his arm in defence, for Lorrimer had come towards him with his stick raised in his hand, and a murderous light in his eyes.

"What!" he cried in a fury. "You haven't got it with you!"

Then in uncontrollable passion, he raised the heavy stick high above his head and brought it down with all the force of which he was capable on the head of the defenceless man crouching before him.

Walker put up his arm to save his head, but the blow battered down his defence and struck his head. "Don't! Don't!" he cried. "I can get it for you. I swear I'll get it for you!"

Lorrimer was raining blows on him like a madman, frenzied with rage. His eyes were

starting out of his head, his hatchet-like face, pale as death, was as that of a savage beast fired with murderous lust for blood.

Walker, crouching lower and lower on the ground, tried to run in at him; but he sprang back, and changing the direction of his furious blows, struck at him sideways and found his face undefended. With a wailing cry that welled up through the silent wood, the wretched man turned and tried to run from him, and with his teeth bared like fangs, and his breath coming in horrid gasps, Lorrimer ran after him and dealt him one fierce blow after the other until he had felled him, and he lay writhing on his face on the ground. Then he struck at him again and again murderously, and his struggles to protect himself grew weaker and weaker.

At last they ceased. Lorrimer had always been a wicked man. Now he was a murderer.

CHAPTER XIV

A CHANGE IN THE SUCCESSION

LORRIMER crept up to the castle. Although the sun was shining brightly, the sky seemed to him quite grey, and he shivered as if with cold.

He went straight to the room where his master lay on his sofa by the window.

Lord Cambray received him with a curse. "What have you been doing all this time?" he asked. "Well, have you got it?"

Then his face changed as Lorrimer came forward into the light. He lay staring up at him; a look of horror came into his eyes, and his tongue refused to speak.

Then he seemed to bethink himself, and said in an unnatural voice, "I suppose you've had a fight to get it. I didn't tell you to do that. Where is it?"

Lorrimer's anger awoke at this speech. "You didn't tell me to do it?" he cried. "It was all your fault! You lie there and keep your hands clean and set me on; and then you curse and swear at me and treat me like a dog! I won't stand it! I tell you, I won't stand it!"

His voice broke in a sort of querulous wail

and Lord Cambray said sharply, "Lorrimer! Lorrimer! Look out what you're saying—somebody will hear you! Sit down and calm yourself. You had a fight with the fellow. All right. There's nothing so dreadful in that. You've got the paper and now you'll get your reward. Where is the paper? Let me see it."

Lorrimer sat down, his hysterical excitement quelled by his master's authoritative manner. He took no notice of the second part of his speech, but began in a high voice:

"He made me angry. God knows I didn't want to do him any harm. I'll swear to that. But he made me angry, and I lifted my stick to threaten him, and he looked such a coward that I hit him once with it and then he tried to run away—"

"Yes, yes," said Lord Cambray. "You had a fight. I don't want to hear all about that. You got the better of him. That's enough. Where's the paper?"

"Then he turned to run," Lorrimer went on as if he had not been interrupted at all, "and he looked just like a rat trying to get away, and I was so angry that I hit him again—"

Lord Cambray half raised himself on his cushions. His fierce old eyes flashed fire. "Be quiet, I tell you!" he shouted at him. "I won't hear any more!"

Lorrimer stopped and frowned darkly at him. "You've got to hear about it," he said. "I've got to tell somebody, or I shall go mad!"

It was the first time that he had ever shown himself entirely unaffected by his master's grim personality, although he had screwed up his courage to appear unmoved when he had made his demands on him. His indifference roused the old man to fury.

"I have *got* to listen to you!" he repeated. "I have *got* to do this and that! I won't hear a word more. Keep your tale to yourself."

But Lorrimer was quite beyond caring for him. The angry impatience, which was his habitual way of expressing himself, only aroused an answering fury in his own brain, and he sprang up from his chair and stood over him threateningly. "Don't you talk to me like that!" he said. "I have had enough of it, and I am never going to stand it again from you as long as I live. By G——! you had better look out for yourself. Do you want another murder done?"

No one had ever doubted the physical courage of Lord Cambray; but he cowered at these words. Whatever he may have guessed and tried to prevent the telling of, that terrible word "murder" broke down all pretences; and he was completely at the mercy of the man who was

standing over him with an almost insane light in his eyes; for he could hardly move without help, and could have offered no more resistance to an attack than if he had been bound hand and foot.

But his shrinking was only momentary. There was hardly a change in his voice as he said, "Sit down! And don't play the fool. Anybody may come in and hear you. Tell me about it, then."

Lorrimer told his story and found some relief in sharing his guilty knowledge. Lord Cambray's eyes were fixed upon him all the time, and showed disgust, but no particular horror. He even asked questions as to how he had disposed of the body, and where, and if he had covered up all his traces.

Then at last, when Lorrimer had unburdened himself, he said, "He was a mean little cur and nobody is likely to miss him. You're safe enough if you saw nobody going or coming, as you say. What you've got to do is to pull yourself together and behave as usual. You were a fool to do it, because you could probably have got hold of the paper without. Still, now it's done, there's no use crying about it. Put it out of your mind and never so much as mention it again."

"Oh! it's all very well for you to talk," said

Lorrimer, rudely. "You incite a man to commit murder and then tell him not to worry about it. I wish you had had the doing of it yourself! I wish I had never seen you! I was a good man before I came to you and got mixed up in all your vile schemes."

"Well, you're a good man now," said the old lord, encouragingly, "if you'll only show a little pluck. Quite natural you should be upset, but don't let it take hold of you, or you're done. You've talked enough about it—put it out of your mind. It's nothing so dreadful after all. You didn't kill the man in cold blood, and as far as I'm concerned, I respect you more for showing some devilry and being carried away by it, than if you'd been the cold-blooded fish I always thought you. Now leave it alone and show me the paper. You needn't give it up until I have done what I've promised to do. I'll keep to my bargain. You've already paid the price."

"I've told you," said Lorrimer impatiently, "that he hadn't got the paper and that's what made me so angry. And I don't want anything more said about that other business. I've got enough on my conscience now. I'll never do another wicked deed as long as I live. I'll go away somewhere and bury myself where they can't find me—somewhere a long way off; and

I'll change my name so that nobody will know who I am; and I'll live a good life and—"

He had spoken as if the purpose for which he had gone down into the wood to meet his victim was now of no importance at all and could be put on one side, and was startled by the voice in which his master cried, "What! You haven't got the paper after all! You mean to tell me that you've killed a man for nothing?"

Lorrimer looked up, annoyed at being aroused out of his dream of escape and future contentment. "Oh! am I to go on saying the same thing again and again!" he said irritably. "He told me how he cut the leaf out of the book, and I tried to bargain with him, and when he wouldn't I said I was going to take it from him. And then he told me that he hadn't got it. That was what made me go for him."

"Of course he had got it," said Lord Cambray. "That was only bluff, you drivelling fool! It's on him now, and you've left it there for anybody to find if they come across his body. What you've got to do is to go down as soon as it gets light enough to-morrow morning and get it. Do you hear?"

Lorrimer shuddered violently. "I wouldn't go there again," he said, "for anything in the world!"

Then the old man lost his temper and raged

at him with fierce imprecations, and called him a coward, with all the scorching opprobrium of which he was capable; and when Lorrimer, taking no offence at his words, only shook his head obstinately and repeated his refusal in the same words, he made a monstrous effort to rise from his couch, shaking his fist at him and threatening to kill him if he did not do as he was told.

Lorrimer's face grew dark again, and he was just about to retort with abuse in his turn, when the old man fell back on his pillows gasping; his face grew purple, and he was taken with one of those seizures which only the skilful and attentive Lorrimer could deal with.

But Lorrimer sat looking at him with a sneer on his lips, and as his master helplessly rolled his eyes at him in unspoken appeal, laughed savagely in his face and sat still in his chair.

The old man tried to say something, but he was on the point of unconsciousness and the sounds he made were quite unintelligible. But suddenly Lorrimer sprang up, and with a scared face busied himself over the remedies he knew so well how to use. Whether his master had meant to warn him against being responsible for another murder or no, that was what had come into his mind. How would it be with him if Lord Cambray should die, with his attendant in the room with him?

For the rest of the night he was in close attendance upon his master; and the next day, and for many days afterwards he hardly left him.

The doctor, who came constantly to the castle, praised him for his unremitting care, and told him that he would do himself an injury if he did not take rest.

As for the evil old man who lay silent and motionless hour after hour, day after day, night after night, on his great canopied bed of state—what thoughts must have passed through his mind, to which he would no more be able to give expression! Whatever they were, they were hidden even from his attendant. All except one; Lorrimer knew from his look whenever he went near him, that his pride and his courage had broken down. There was a look of fear and appeal in his eyes that had never been there before. He was afraid of the man who was nursing him in a way that no woman, not even one trained to wait on suffering mankind, could have excelled.

If Lorrimer had wanted revenge on a man who had set him on to commit the crime for which he now felt such bitter remorse, he could have devised none greater than this, that the wicked Earl of Cambray, who had been so bold in evil, so overbearing in his haughty insolence

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to all those dependent on him, should be living his last days in mortal and abject terror of a servant.

When it was seen that he would not recover from his last attack, there were those in the house who said that his daughter must be sent for. But no one knew where she was. Since the day when, accompanied by her maid, she had left the castle, no word had been heard from her. Lady Marlow was written to, and was greatly distressed at the news that her niece's whereabouts was still unknown, if she bore with equanimity the news that her brother-in-law could not be expected to live much longer.

She had a carefully worded advertisement put into the newspapers, but it brought no reply, and the household at Cambray Castle had another topic to discuss, besides their dreaded master's mortal illness. He had driven his daughter away from him, they said, and now he was going to die and she would not be with him.

The end came late one night, just at that time when nature seems to be most wearied and most sad.

Lorrimer was asleep on the sofa at the foot of the bed. Tired out with his continuous vigil, he was sleeping more peacefully than he had done ever since that dreadful day.

Suddenly he was startled, and sprang up,

sweating with fright, to see the white figure on the bed sitting up making horrible grimaces at him and striving to say something. The sounds that came from the blackened lips were horrible and meaningless, and had pierced even through his soothing dreams.

As he sprang up and then stopped, unable to move through terror at that awful sight of the figure that had lain so long helpless and speechless, now sitting up and uttering those horrid sounds and undergoing those grotesque contortions, Lord Cambray lifted a shrunken arm and pointed at him, and made a violent effort to say something, but only gibbered unmeaningly. Then, as if he had given up the attempt, he broke out into a screech of laughter, which rang fearfully through the sleeping house and woke some of those in rooms far distant. Those who heard the sound said afterwards that it was more terrifying than any sound they had ever heard.

With that unearthly mocking laugh on his lips, and his hand still stretched out with its pointing finger, Lord Cambray fell back upon his pillows, and there fell a silence never more to be broken by words or sounds from him.

The death of the Earl of Cambray did not call forth much comment in the public press. In all

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his long life he had done no public service, unless a few years in the Household Brigade can be counted as such. He had been a mean and grasping landlord; he had come into possession of wealth and rank in his early youth, and he had spent everything he had on the gratification of his own pleasures and vices. There was nothing good to say of such a man, and the bad that was known of him was allowed to rest.

One point of interest in his death was the succession to his ancient title of his daughter, Lady Margaret Chandos. The paragraphists all produced their little lists of peeresses in their own right, to whom the Countess of Cambray's name was now added, and then the subject dropped. Very little was known, even to the society journalists, of Lady Margaret. She had not been seen much in fashionable society, and it was not possible even to produce photographs of her in the illustrated papers. Applications to her ladyship for permission to do so were left unanswered, as were sundry other communications addressed to Cambray Castle to the new peeress.

For two days after Lord Cambray's death there was still no word from his daughter. The family solicitor came down to the castle and took in hand the arrangements for the funeral and the succession to the estates.

Then at last there came word from Lady Mar-

garet. She was with her aunt, Lady Marlow, in her house in the country. She wished to come down to the castle, but before she did so desired that certain instructions should be carried out. Amongst them were some relating to the household staff. All the servants who wished to do so, were to stay on for the present, with the exception of the late Earl's attendant, Lorrimer. He was to be dismissed at once. This order was peremptory.

Lorrimer did not seem to be surprised at this decision nor did he seem so averse to leaving the house where he had lived for so many years as might have been expected. On the day on which notice was given him he went away, and the same evening the Countess of Cambray arrived with her maid, and took up her residence in the castle which was now hers.

She paid one visit to the room in which her father's body lay, but it was a very short one, and she did not repeat it. Nor did she follow him to the grave in which he was laid with all the pomp that befitted his rank, and in the presence of a large concourse of people, among whom there was not one to shed a tear for him, or to feel anything but a sense of relief that his long bad reign was over, and hope that the new reign just begun would be a very different one.

CHAPTER XV

THE HOME OF HIS FATHERS

THE day after Lord Cambray's remains had been deposited with all pomp and ceremony in the family vault, Peter went down to the village of Tunsted, which was about two miles from Cambray castle. He did not go to Chartsedge, in which parish the castle was situated, because, always with the idea in his mind that some day he might come to reign over this property, he was unwilling to make his first appearance there as a stranger in the village inn. He wished as far as possible to keep quiet, and not to be recognized while he was making his investigations, and for that reason he called himself not Mr. Peter Chandos, but Mr. Peter, and felt absurdly pleased at being addressed by the name, because he had first been called by it sitting in that little paradise of an orchard by the Norfolk Broad.

The inn in which he took up his quarters was a pleasant, old-fashioned, rambling house that had seen better days. If it had not been for his experience at Hollow Weir, he would have

thought it as good a specimen of an English country inn as he could very well have come across. It was kept by a buxom widow, who was quite ready to gossip with him, and he learnt a good deal from her before he had been there an hour. She brought him in his tea herself and stayed to talk to him just as the old landlord at Hollow Weir had done.

She was, of course, full of the grand funeral that they had had at Chertsedge the day before. It had been a godsend to a neighbourhood where, as she told Peter, nothing ever happened. And as there had been no call to grieve for the person chiefly concerned in it, it had been taken frankly as a welcome entertainment, and enjoyed as such.

“There wasn’t a soul among the gentry all round who would have anything to do with his lordship when he was alive,” she said, “at least not latterly—for his goings on were something awful. But they all sent their carriages—I dare say more out of respect to her ladyship than anything—and as for the flowers, why, I never see anything like ’em, not even when the countess was buried, and lucky for her, poor lady, that she was took when she was; for he never brought her anything but sorrow, and he would have brought her more still if she’d lived. He was a thorough bad one, was the earl—

thought of nothing but spending money on his own pleasures,—and pretty awful pleasures they were, too,—and let his property get into a frightful state. When you go about this country, sir, just you look at the farm buildings and cottages. Why, some of them are a positive disgrace! Nobody could get anything done. It's my belief he'd just as soon see 'em tumble down as not, as long as he got some sort of a rent out of them, and didn't have to put his hand in his pocket for repairs. Well, it's to be hoped it will be different now, though where the money's to come from to do anything I don't know."

Then Peter asked her what the new countess was like.

"Well, it's a funny thing," said the landlady, "but although I have lived here for over ten years, I have never once set eyes on her. When I first came she was mostly abroad with her ladyship, who was in a decline—at least that's what they called it, but it's my belief she was just suffering from a broken heart. Then after the countess died, till she was grown up, she was living mostly with her aunt. They say she never wanted to come here at all, but his lordship made her; and I suppose she was so ashamed at the sort of things that used to go on at the castle that she wouldn't willingly let it

be known that she lived there. Besides, the people at Chartsedge are a rough lot; they can hardly get decent tenants to come to such a place. She wouldn't be likely to go about among them much. There are just one or two farms which have been in the same hands for many years that she's been used to go to occasionally, but not even that lately. I don't believe for a year or two she's been outside the castle gates when she's been down here, except just to go to church; and of course the grounds and the woods all about the castle are so big that she needn't ever have left them if she didn't want to be seen. Still, everybody as knows her speaks well of her, but they say she'll never be able to live here unless she marries somebody with a great deal of money; and if she does that he's likely to have a fine place of his own. They say there'll be next to nothing for her when everything is settled up, and she'll be almost as poor as if she were a simple farmer's daughter, instead of a lady with a title of her own and some of the proudest blood in the land."

"Ah! well," said Peter, "I hope it won't be as bad as all that. And if she is a nice lady, I dare say she will marry well and forget all her troubles. Do you know anything about the servants at the castle? I suppose the old man

had somebody to look after him all the time he was so broken up?"

"He was broken up with his bad ways," said the landlady severely, "and as for being looked after, he was looked after by a man who was just about as bad as he was. His name was Lorrimer, and any wicked prank that my lord wanted to play up with Mr. Lorrimer helped him. I could tell you some stories about that, only they're hardly fit for a woman to tell to a gentleman. Oh, yes, Mr. Lorrimer looked after his lordship all right, and after himself, too! They say that whatever money has been left he will very likely get his share of it. But it's a funny thing that though all the rest of the household was there at the church yesterday, he wasn't. I did hear that he's took himself off already, and I dare say it's quite true, because it isn't likely her ladyship would want him there."

Peter asked a good many questions about Mr. Lorrimer, and the landlady was able to give him a description which made him prick up his ears and consider whether it might not be as well to send a telegram to Mr. Fearon without delay.

For it seemed certain that this man, who had the reputation of being at his master's beck and call for any evil service that was required of

him, was the man he had surprised in Thaxted church, and had allowed to escape him.

It was rather disturbing to learn that he had already left the neighbourhood. It looked rather as if another opportunity might have been lost. It might be as well to get on to his track at once.

He thought, however, that he would find out a little more first. The landlady did not seem to be quite certain whether Lorrimer had actually left the castle. It was only that somebody had told her that he had, when she had remarked about his not being present at the funeral. He might be still there, and in that case he would get an unpleasant surprise, after Peter had paid a visit to the nearest police station. He wanted to make quite certain of his man first, and not let himself in for another fiasco.

When he had had his tea, Peter strolled out and took the road towards the hill upon which Cambray Castle stood. When the road got to the top of the hill it took a turn away from the castle and skirted a high wall, behind which must have been a good many acres of level ground, half park, half woodland. By and by he came to a gate flanked by a pair of stone-built lodges; but the gate was apparently never

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used, for grass was growing up against it, even on the roadway itself, and the lodges looked as if they were unoccupied.

He walked on a little farther, until suddenly, as is sometimes the case where a great park has begun to be elaborately enclosed, the high stone wall gave place to wooden fencing. This was everywhere in a ruinous condition, and looked as if it had not been touched for years; and the park, so completely shut in where the wall had been built, was open to any one who liked to enter it.

It was not a park here, though, except in name; it was a thick, close wood. With a glance around him, Peter crept in through a gap in the fence and began to wander through it.

By and by, the wilder growth of the wood gave place to more artificial planting, and presently he found himself in a well-defined shrubby walk. He followed this for some distance.

Suddenly he stopped. His keen ears had caught the sound of voices, some distance away, but audible in the still evening air. They were the voices of a man and a woman, and as he stood trying to locate them, his face grew puzzled, because somehow they did not sound like the voices of people in ordinary conversation. He stood still for some time, straining his ears

to listen. And by and by there could be no doubt that he had come upon something in the nature of a scene.

The man's voice grew louder and, as it seemed to him, threatening. He was much too far off to be able to distinguish any words. The woman's voice told him nothing; it was no more than a murmur at that distance, and probably ears less keen than his would not have heard it at all.

But with a suddenness that was positively startling, both voices were raised, the man's into anger, the woman's into terror, and before Peter could form any decision in his mind as to what to do, there was a loud shriek, and he sprang forward and ran down the shrubby path as fast as he had ever run in his life.

As he ran the commotion still continued and increased. Rhododendron bushes grew thick and tall between him and the place from which the voices came. He ran along beside them, expecting to find another path or an opening of some sort, and presently did so; and as he ran out on to a wide lawn at the head of a sheet of water, which he had not expected to find there, he heard the man's voice say threateningly, "You shall say yes before I let you go, or I'll let out everything."

Half facing him, backed by the dark green

of shrubs and trees, was the marble façade of a Grecian summer-house, and on the grass between him and it, was the white-robed figure of a girl, struggling in the arms of a man who had seized and was holding her, while she battled with him with all her strength and sent shriek after shriek into the air.

In a moment Peter had seized the man by the collar, had torn him away with such force that the girl, suddenly released, fell on the grass on her knees, and had flung him violently down on to the ground.

And then he stood staring, with all power to speak or move for the moment taken away from him. For the girl whom he had rescued was his own adored girl of the picture, and the man from whom he had saved her was the man whom he had already once treated with violence in Thaxted church.

CHAPTER XVI

BY THE LAKE

PETER had no time to take in all that this surprising discovery might mean. He was aware only of the girl on her knees on the ground, and of the man some little way off where he had violently thrown him. Suddenly the wild rage that sometimes seizes upon the mildest mannered of men, got hold of him, and with a sort of fierce snarl he sprang upon the man, seized him by the throat, lifted him up as easily as if he had been a small child, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

The man was powerless in that grip of iron. His eyes started out of his head; his teeth chattered as he was shaken furiously to and fro; the attempts he made with his hands to loosen the grip on him were of no more avail than those of a baby would have been. Peter would have killed him then and there, would have choked the life out of him before he had come to himself, and without knowing what he was doing in his blind fury.

There was only one voice in the world that could have pierced through to his brain at that moment, and it was the voice of the girl who now clung to him and implored him to desist.

"You will kill him! You will kill him!" she cried.

At last he threw him from him again, more violently than before, and he lay on the ground gasping and staring, utterly unable for the moment to move hand or foot.

"And I *will* kill him," cried Peter, turning to her with a terrible look in his eyes, from which she did not quail. She still clung to him and pleaded, with her eyes fixed upon his, and gradually his madness left him, and the realization of her touch stole into his brain.

"Let him go," she said. "You have saved me, and he will never trouble me any more."

But as for letting him go, not even she could persuade him to do that. She did not know everything.

"I have let him go once," said Peter, "and I shan't let him go again. I have been looking for him; and now I have found him, the swine! He shan't escape me again!"

But still she clung to him, while the man on the grass at their feet lay stupidly staring up at them. "Have you been looking for him?" she said. "Did you know that it was because

of him we had to leave that quiet place where you knew us?"

No, Peter did not know that. A flood of light came to him and brought with it a flood of joy. He looked at her with eyes more like those kind eyes which she already knew. But he said, "Did you know what he was up there for? Did you know I found him breaking into Thaxted Church in the middle of the night? And he told me a pack of lies and I let him go. I shan't let him go a second time, and if I don't handle him myself for what he has done to you, it is only because he'll be worse off when I get him punished!"

But she pleaded hard. "For my sake," she said. "Think what it would be to me to have all this come out! He is a servant. How can I bear to have it known that he dared to come and make love to me!"

She shuddered and turned away her head with a gesture of loathing.

Peter was shaken. "Made love to you!" he cried. "If I did let him go I would break every bone in his body first!"

The man on the grass had recovered himself a little. He raised himself on his elbow. He was a horrid spectacle. His face, pale and wild, wore a look almost like madness, and when he spoke, his voice was hoarse and cracked, and

full of fear. "If you will make him let me go," he said to the girl, "I'll never trouble you any more. If you let him take me I'll let out everything—for then I shan't care what happens."

Again she shuddered, and then turned on him passionately. "Oh! if you will go right away and I never see your horrible face any more," she cried, "I think I might know some happiness."

She turned to Peter and said, "If you keep him here and everything becomes known, I think I shall die of shame."

Then Peter, with a sigh, made a great renunciation. "For your sake," he said, "I will let him go."

He turned upon the man, who had risen unsteadily to his feet, and, with his teeth clenched, said, "You had better go before I can change my mind; and for your own sake you had better go right away, for if ever I come across you again anywhere in the world—!"

He did not finish his speech, for with furtive tread, like that of some cowardly wild beast, the man had disappeared among the thick trees, and they could hear his footsteps crunching on the dry leaves as he ran stumbling through the wood.

Then the girl went with unsteady steps towards the temple, and sinking down on the

marble seat, buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

Peter sat down by her side in the deepest distress and made rough efforts to console her. "Don't cry," he said, in a tone as if he were comforting a child. "You're safe now. I'll never let any harm come to you."

By and by he managed to get one of her little hands into his as she still sobbed uncontrollably, and she let it lie there until the storm of shame and bitterness that filled her soul had abated. Then she withdrew it gently and dried her eyes.

"I'm all right now," she said, "and oh! I'm so thankful that you came just when you did. It's so hateful to be weak and in the mercy of a horrible creature like that! If I had been strong enough I think I should have killed him, as you threatened to do. But it is so much better that he should have gone away, and that I shall never be troubled with him again."

"I don't think you need fear that," said Peter, grimly. "Whatever lies he may have told, he spoke the truth when he said he wouldn't run the risk of crossing my path again."

As she became more composed, Peter's curiosity began to awaken, and the realization came to him that again he had been marvellously blessed by fortune in finding her here.

The same thought seemed to have struck her at the same time; for she smiled shyly at him and said, "This is the second time that you have rescued me. Do you go about the world, Mr. Peter, looking out for girls in distress, and always coming to their help just at the right time?"

"I think if you were in trouble," said Peter, looking boldly and yet tenderly into her eyes, "and were to call out to me,—wherever you were in the whole world,—I should come."

Her delicate skin flushed a pale rose colour and she looked away from him, but immediately faced him again and asked, "How did you come to be here, of all places in the world?"

"I am afraid I was trespassing," said Peter. "I have come to stay near here for a bit, and I got into the wood and thought I would like to catch a glimpse of the gardens. You won't tell the Countess, will you?"

Again the rosy flush, and the head turned quickly away. "I might have to tell her," she said, "how you had to come to my rescue. But no, I don't think I will. I want never to tell any one how that man has persecuted me."

"Who is he?" asked Peter. "You said he was a servant. Is he Lorrimer, Lord Cambray's servant?"

She looked at him, as it seemed, with alarm in her eyes. "Yes," she said. "He is Lorimer. How did you know that?"

"I was hearing this evening," he said, "that there was such a man, and that he had gone away directly after his master's death."

"We thought he had gone away," she said quickly. "Lady Cambray sent him away. She hates him. Oh! how she hates him!"

She clenched her hand and spoke with deep passion. "Is Lady Cambray a friend of yours?" asked Peter. "Are you staying here with her, Miss Parker?"

She paused for a moment before replying, and then smiled at him. "You remember my aunt?" she said. "She was Lady Cambray's nurse. She would never leave her for long, although she need not remain in any sort of service if she did not wish to. I have known Lady Cambray all my life; we are great friends. We have the same name, and I have very often been with her."

The explanation seemed quite natural to Peter, and explained to his satisfaction things that had puzzled him about Miss Parker and her niece.

"Sometimes," she went on rather hurriedly, "I was here at Cambray Castle with her. But my aunt did not like it to be known; and I don't

want it known that I am here now. You will not tell any one, will you?"

Peter gave the promise easily enough. A delightful feeling of intimacy was beginning to steal over him. Everything else was forgotten, except that he was here alone with her, and she was content to be with him and to confide some secrets to him.

"I will tell you about this horrible man," she said, "because I owe you that; and then let us never mention his name again. The last time I was here he spoke to me, and I was so much ashamed that I made my aunt take me away for a time where he could not come near us. Some friends of hers had once stayed for a week or two in that cottage where you knew us, and we went there, meaning to stay there quietly for the whole of the summer. And then one evening, I was walking alone in the wood, and to my horror I saw this dreadful man, and I thought he had found us out. So we ran away, and I am afraid you must have thought us very ungrateful for leaving no word for you after all your kindness. But indeed, I was so upset that I could think of nothing."

"It is very extraordinary," said Peter, "that you should have gone just to that place. It was just a chance that you should have caught sight of him. He had not come there to find

you. It was a chance that I should have come across him, too."

"Oh! don't let's talk about him any more," she said, with the shudder without which she had not yet mentioned his name. "I want to forget him."

Peter had been going to tell her of his encounter with Lorrimer in Thaxted Church. But he now bethought himself. He would have to do a good deal of thinking before he told even her anything that had to do with his search for the register. Most surprisingly, she was a friend of the Countess of Cambray, whose title and property he was about to claim. That might help him, or it might not. He had had no time as yet to consider it. Besides, he had let Lorrimer go. It was possible that with that act he had finally done away with all his chances. That also would have to be considered. But no consideration that affected only the business of his claim could for a moment damp the always increasing joy with which he found himself once more seated at her side, talking to her, and sometimes raising his eyes to her sweet face.

He thought she looked pale and sad, and thinner than when he had last seen her. When she smiled at him, as she had done once or twice, his heart leapt. But it had never been the gay

smile that ought to have been on the face of a girl of her years. That was, of course, not to have been expected just now, after the shock she had received. But there was something about her smile which seemed to show that it was never gay. Even when they had been together up in Norfolk, and she had been for the moment free of the vile persecution which it even now enraged him to think of, there had been that note of sadness in her face and manner.

She was dressed in white, but all the ribbons about her simple dress were black, as they had not been when he had seen her before. No doubt it was merely complimentary mourning, which every one in Cambray Castle was now wearing, however little cause they might have had to show grief for the death of its lord.

But whatever she wore and however she looked, she was beautiful, more beautiful than any one Peter had ever seen. He had so hungered for her that, now he had found her, he could hardly take in his own happiness. He did not know what to say, and just at the moment he did not want to say anything, but just to sit there with her and drink in with his eyes the beauty of her face, and with his ears the music of her voice.

But the sun had long since set, and now the

dusk was coming on. She sprang up from the marble seat and said, "I must go in now. They will be wondering where I am."

Peter, recalled to himself, said, "Oh, but I can't let you go like this. I have been looking everywhere for you, and I haven't even begun to say all I want to say."

She looked at him with her little faint, rather melancholy smile. "It is getting dark," she said, "and I can't stay out here any longer; somebody will be coming to look for me,—perhaps my aunt, perhaps Lady Cambray herself,—and that would be terrible, for you know you are trespassing."

Certainly, thought Peter, he did not want Lady Cambray to appear and find him there. "But I *must* see you again," he said. "You can't mean that you want to say good-bye to me now!"

Still with the same faint smile, and with that flowerlike blush added to it, she said, "Perhaps if you were to trespass again to-morrow evening, you might find me here."

And then her flitting white figure disappeared behind the shrubs on the other side of the temple.

The next evening Peter made his way to the temple by the lake in a frame of mind that may be well imagined. He did not want to run any

risk of being last at the rendezvous, and consequently had a considerable time to wait in the company of the swans that sailed placidly on the lake, and the birds that were twittering good night to one another in the trees by which it was surrounded.

But presently she came from among the trees, and stood on the grass by his side. She had been so long coming that he had begun to feel she would not come at all, and now she *was* here he had nothing to say that seemed to fit the occasion. He could only look at her in a way that must have shown her at any rate that her presence was welcome.

"I can't stay very long," she said, giving him her hand, and smiling at him with a face far less troubled than she had worn the night before. "But I wanted to thank you again for all you have done for me."

He was just a little chilled, in spite of her smile. He did not reflect that she must want some little excuse to herself for coming out to meet him there in secret.

They sat down together on the marble seat, and Peter had the chance he had looked forward to up on the Broad, if he had been able to get her to come sailing alone with him.

But he did not realize that in these matters it is not exactly the things that a man may have

intended to say that get themselves said,—at least not unless the woman is ready to hear them. And apparently she was not ready this evening, for they talked about quite ordinary things, or things as ordinary as the somewhat unusual circumstances of their common experiences permitted.

She told him that she loved this retired spot in the gardens, and often came there when she wanted to be alone. Nobody else ever came there at all, except once in a way a gardener; but the gardeners had so much to do, and were short-handed besides, that it was very seldom any of them came to this part of the grounds at all.

Peter was pleased enough to hear this, and asked if Lady Cambay didn't come there sometimes.

"Why?" she smiled at him. "Are you afraid of her finding us here and ordering you off the premises? You needn't be alarmed."

"Tell me what she is like," said Peter. "I was hearing about her to-day. They say she is very proud, and that hardly anybody about here has ever seen her."

She looked down on the marble floor. "I don't think she is very proud," she said. "I am afraid she would say she had not much to be proud of. She is often very sad, and per-

haps that is why she has been so little seen when she has been here. She has very few friends."

"She has you," said Peter simply. "Since I have known you I have thought that you often looked sad, too. Is it because she is your friend and you are sorry for her? You ought not to be sad on your own account."

Once more she smiled at him and seemed to shake off her mood of melancholy. "I am not going to be sad now," she said. "I want you to tell me things, as you did up in Norfolk. Tell me all about the free, happy life you led out in Australia. I have often thought about it since. It has made me wish sometimes that I could be a man and get away from all the troubles of this old country, and live a life like that. Why did you ever leave it? Don't you like it better than being here?"

"No," said Peter stoutly, with his eyes fixed upon her.

She gave a little nervous laugh, but blushed, too, as she said hurriedly, "Well, I suppose you will go back some day. Now tell me some stories about the Bush, and give me something to think about."

He could have given her a good deal to think about if he had told her who he was, and answered her question as to what he was doing in England. But he had made up his mind that

he could not do so as yet, so he allowed himself to be drawn away from the sort of talk he would have preferred, and amused her with his yarns of adventure. And she sat with her chin in her hand, looking out over the water, or leant back against the marble with her hands clasped in her lap, listening to him, or perhaps thinking about something quite different, but at any rate content to be there with him, and, if her face showed anything, for this hour, at any rate, in peace. Then, just as on the night before, she sprang up suddenly and said she must be going, and again Peter remonstrated and said he had not begun to say to her what he wanted to say.

“Why, we have been talking for nearly an hour,” she said, “and you have been doing most of the talking.” And then, fearing perhaps that he would say something she was not ready to listen to, she put up her hand and said with that sweet smile he loved so much, “Perhaps we might have another talk to-morrow evening if you care to risk it,” and again she was gone, leaving him to stand there, with his heart fluttering like a bird in his great, strong body.

She came to him next night with a serious face, and when they had talked together for a little he asked her what was troubling her; for she did not seem to be attending to him much,

and he was fearful lest this time she had only come because she had promised to do so, and would soon want to leave him.

When he asked his question she looked at him searchingly, and then said some words that were as sweet to him as any he had ever heard from her lips: "You have been a very good friend to me. I think I will tell you, and ask your advice."

Then before he could speak, she added hurriedly, "It is not my own difficulty, it is Lady Cambray's. But I know you will tell nobody, and she has so few people to advise her."

Peter was a little disappointed that he was not to help her out of a trouble of her own, but only a little, because whoever difficulty it was, it was *her* confidence that she was giving to him. He hardly reflected that Lady Cambray was something more to him than he had admitted to the girl who was her friend, until she said, "The most extraordinary thing has happened. Lady Cambray's solicitor came down from London to see her this morning and told her that there was a claimant to her title and her property. He had not been given all the details, but he had been told on the authority of a man whose word he could trust that the claim was a good one, although there might be some difficulty in establishing it. He had been

told to ask her whether she would undertake not to resist it, if she could be satisfied about it, and if she were given very handsome compensation."

So Mr. Fearon had already begun to move. Peter hardly knew whether he was glad or sorry. But he did for the moment feel very uncomfortable at having this confidence thrust upon him. However, he reflected that whatever he might hear, no harm would be done to Lady Cambray, and that if he knew how she felt about it, it might even help him to take the steps that would be most advantageous to her.

"If she were to get a very handsome compensation," he said, when he seemed to be expected to speak, "and the claim is really a good one, she might be better off than if she fought it."

This matter-of-fact way of looking at it did not seem to please her. "But don't you think it's a most extraordinary thing," she said, "that this should happen? How can the claim be a good one? I don't know how it would be about the property, but surely nothing that any one could do could deprive her of the title which is hers by right."

"Is she very keen on the title?" asked Peter.

This did not seem to please her, either. "The title will be nothing by itself," she said, "but it

is hers by right. It means that she belongs to a very ancient family, and anybody has a right to be proud of that."

"Oh, yes," said Peter. "But she would still belong to it, wouldn't she, even if she wasn't head of it? Did they say anything about who it was that was claiming it?"

"They said it was a man whom she needn't be ashamed of recognizing as the head of her family; and a rich man who would act very generously towards her."

"Oh, I expect he's a decent fellow enough," said Peter, greatly pleased at this testimonial. "Of course he wouldn't want to be hard on her; no man would in his position."

"You seem to take it lightly enough," she said. "Don't they think anything of such things in Australia? She has looked upon this beautiful place as hers all her life—at least, as going to be hers when the time came for her to succeed to it all. Is she to give it up to a stranger without a word, and to go and live somewhere else where she will never see it again?"

"I did hear," said Peter, "that she wouldn't be able to live here, anyhow. I heard that her father had played such havoc with the property that there would be very little left for her."

“Ah!” she said with a deep sigh, “I am afraid that is only too true. She is only just beginning to find out how difficult everything will be for her.” She threw out her hands. “Oh!” she cried, “I think if I were she I should be content to give it up for the sake of a little peace and contentment in life. It isn’t much to ask. I have thought of her while you have been telling me of the freedom of that country where you come from. I have thought perhaps that out there, away from all the trouble that seems to come to those whose families have grown so old and perhaps worn out, living for so many generations in one place here, she might begin a new life altogether, and never for a moment regret the old one. She might have to work with her hands perhaps, but no woman minds that if—”

She broke off in confusion. If Peter had only known what was being said to him! But all he could find for an answer was, “From what you say I am afraid she has been very unhappy. I have heard a good deal about her father, and I don’t wonder at her being sick of it all. He must have been a terrible kind of man to live with.”

She sprang up from the seat and said to him with cold displeasure, “Her father is dead. You must not speak of him in that way. Now

I must be going; I have stayed here too long.”

He saw that he had displeased her, but had no idea why. It could not be because she had any affection for her friend's father. That can only have been an excuse. But he could not let her go like this.

“No, no,” he said, putting up his hand to keep her back. “If you go away now you won't come back to me. I can't do without you. It is not only your friend who is sad. I am sure you have your sorrows, too, although you are brave about them. You are disturbed about something to-night, and I haven't said anything to comfort you, because I didn't know what to say. But I'd give everything I have to save you from the least little bit of trouble. I know I'm a rough fellow, not worthy to tread the same ground as you do. But I believe I love you more than any man ever loved a woman yet. Come to me and let me take care of you. I'll spend my life in trying to make you happy. Oh! I can't say it as I ought to say it, but you must know how much I love you. Oh! how I love you! I couldn't tell you how much if I talked till midnight.”

His words had poured out in a passionate stream. Once or twice she had tried to stop him, but she had not tried to go away, and at the end she stood looking at him, her face

flushed and her eyes shining, because even in his deep emotion he looked magnificently strong and sincere, and he was offering her the best that a man has to offer to a woman—himself and his whole devotion.

Now she said softly, "I am glad you have said that to me. Thank you very much. I shall never forget it. But I can't say what you want. You don't know everything about me; and besides—"

She did not finish her sentence, and Peter began to plead with her again. But she cut him short and spoke with more determination. "No," she said, "I cannot listen to you. You mustn't ask me to. And I must go now."

"Then you must come back," he said. "You went away from me once before, and I thought I had lost you. I have found you twice by chance. I can't let you go again unless you promise to come back. Will you come here again to-morrow? Oh! but why can't you say what I want you to say now? Why must you go at all? If you go, let me come with you, and tell them that you belong to me and that I am going to take care of you. I can, you know. I am strong enough, and I can give you more than you think, perhaps."

She stopped him again, or he might have blurted out everything. "If I can," she said,

“I will come here again to-morrow. I can’t be quite certain, but I will promise you this, I *will* come to you again. I won’t promise that I will say what you want me to say, but I won’t try to stop you from saying it if you will let me go now. I want to go—you won’t try and keep me here against my will.”

This was just the plea that would prevail upon Peter,—the plea of weakness to strength. He looked at her closely and longingly. “If you make me a promise,” he said, “I know that you will keep it.”

And then she left him to wonder whether he had prevailed with her at all.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ARREST

PETER stayed some time longer by the lake. And then instead of going back by the way he had come, he followed the path which the girl had taken. It was already getting dark. There was small fear of his being seen if he should explore a little farther into the privacies of these spacious gardens. He had no idea at all of following her up. He was sure that she had gone back to the house. But he wanted to know more of the ground that was so familiar to her; and so far he had not penetrated closer to the castle than the spot on which they had been together.

The path led on a long way through the shrubberies, and then suddenly came out on to a wide, open space and skirted something like an acre of lawn, at the other end of which loomed the great bulk of the castle itself.

Peter drew back into the shade of the trees, because some of the windows in front of him were lighted up, and although it was getting

dusk, it was not too dark for him to be seen if he had followed this path.

He went back a little way and found another, which ran behind the trees, and followed it until it began to descend the hill on the opposite side of the castle to that by which he had entered the grounds. Presently he came to a little bridge over a leaping stream and leant over it for a moment contemplatively, drawn by the fascination of the running water, which sang musically under his feet.

But a vague uneasiness seized him. The air was close and unpleasant here, and seemed to be full of flies, which buzzed about him horribly, and reminded him of unpleasant experiences in the Australian Bush.

Just as he was about to move on again he thought he heard voices, and stopping to listen realized that somebody was coming up the path towards him. So he stepped off it and went down among the trees by the river. He went on a few yards and got behind a thick bush, until the men whose voices he had heard had passed on. They came up the path and passed over the bridge quite close to him.

“There must be a dead rabbit or something about here,” said one of them. “It gets worse and worse.”

They seemed to pause for a moment, and

Peter drew back farther into the bush against which he was standing. Something heavy fell out of it at his feet, and when the men, who seemed to be grooms or indoor servants from the house, had passed on again, he picked it up and found it was a thick walking stick almost as heavy as a cudgel.

“Now I wonder how that got here,” he said to himself. “As nobody seems to want it I may as well take it with me.”

The next day the rain came down heavily and Peter's spirits sank accordingly. He could hardly hope for a meeting in the temple by the lake, but he went there nevertheless and stayed until it was dark. But she did not come.

And this evening, to add to his discomfort, he was caught by a keeper getting out of the wood on to the road, and questioned as to his intentions. He did not want to have any trouble of that sort, and gave the man a sovereign, which may or may not have quieted any suspicions he may have had, but sent him away touching his hat.

The next day it was fine again, and Peter went for a long walk into the country, wishing all the time that the hours would fly away and bring him to that quiet evening hour of which he now hoped so much. But in spite of the sun and the blue sky and the exhilaration that ought

to have come from brisk movement, depression hung about him heavily, and he could not tell why.

He had his superstitions, and it seemed to him that, just as before, he had had astounding luck which was turning into disappointment. He buoyed himself with the memory of her promise. She would certainly come to him again, in the tree-shaded temple by the still water. But do what he would he could not recover the lightness of his spirits, although he had many moving memories on which to feed his thoughts.

When he got back to his inn in the afternoon, he was met with the news of a gruesome excitement that had taken place during his absence. A dead body had been discovered in the woods below Cambray Castle. It was unrecognizable, but all the signs pointed to a terrible murder. The whole neighbourhood was buzzing with it.

The news chiefly concerned Peter because of the effect it would be likely to have on the inhabitants of Cambray Castle itself. He went again to the temple by the lake and again was disappointed.

The next morning he heard that Lady Cambray had left the castle. It was the centre now of disagreeable talk, and there could be no pri-

vacy anywhere about it, with everybody for miles round coming to see the place where the murder had been committed, and all the police in the countryside, and some from London besides, searching for clues.

The next morning it was rumoured that a clue had been discovered and the murdered man identified.

Peter went out for another long country walk. When he got back to the inn in the afternoon he saw two or three policemen standing outside it talking to the landlady, and as he came striding up they drew together with all their faces turned towards him. He heard one of the policemen say, "Yes, that's the man," and the next moment one of them stepped forward and said, "John Peter, I arrest you for the murder of Robert Walker, and I warn you that anything you say now will be used in evidence against you."

Peter drew back, startled out of his five wits. "Robert Walker!" he exclaimed. "Is *he* the murdered man? What have I got to do with it?"

Then his eyes fell upon the policeman who had pointed him out. It was the young man new to the force whom he had run against in London that night on which he had met Walker.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" he said angrily. "The

man who saw me with Walker. Didn't I tell you I wanted him kept under observation?"

"You was assaulting Walker when I come up," said the policeman quickly.

The whole set of incriminating circumstances presented themselves in a flash to Peter's mind and roused him to a frenzy of anger. He had been fighting his depression all day. Nothing had gone right with him, and now in this place of all others in which he most wished to stand well in the eyes of everybody, he was to be absurdly accused of foul murder. His face grew dark, and he half-raised the thick stick in his hand.

But the police were all on the alert, and the moment he exhibited these signs they were on to him with one accord. There were three of them, and the concerted attack just put the spark to his fury. He dropped his stick and fought them with both hands. One of them went flat down with a blow straight from the shoulder. With the other two clinging on to him he struggled fiercely, while the woman standing in the doorway shrieked, and people came running up to watch the unequal contest.

But unequal as it was, if it had only been a question of that fight, of one man against three, Peter would have won. It lasted no more than a few seconds, but at the end of them he had

broken free and could have got away from his captors.

But flight was not in his mind. It was only blind rage that had seized him, and that was dissipated as suddenly as it had sprung up by the realization that his victory was of no use to him. He stood where he was, and began to expostulate. But the men whom he had treated so roughly were in no mood to listen to him. In a trice he was handcuffed and at their mercy; and then he doggedly shut his mouth and would say nothing.

Fortunately for him the inn was on the outskirts of the village, and the police station was the next building to it. He had not to suffer the indignity of being led through a crowd of people to his incarceration.

As they led him off one of the policemen picked up the stick he had dropped, and pointed to the end of it.

“Look here,” he said in a shocked voice, “this is what he did it with.”

CHAPTER XVIII

PRISON

PETER was sitting in his prison cell in Carchester gaol, committed to take his trial at the next Assizes for wilful murder.

The police court proceedings had been short enough. The murdered man had been identified from his pocket-book, which had been found on the body; and the man who had been in his company on the night Peter had met him in London had testified to Peter's attack on him then. The policeman had been found through the number written in this same pocket-book, and had also given evidence of the murderous threats Peter had used. The very stick with which he had attacked the police had been shown to have had sticking to it traces of blood and hair, which was no doubt that of the murdered man.

Peter had listened to the evidence as to a sort of horrible dream. But he had said nothing. He would give no account of himself at all, nor would he summon legal help. One de-

termination he kept all through. By no word of his would he make it possible for his name to come out to be seared with this shame.

It was a determination not very closely reasoned. For if it was possible for him to withhold his real name now, it would not be possible to keep it secret when he should come to stand his trial.

But he seemed incapable of logical thought. The shock had been too great. He could only stand there and suffer, as the dreadful evidence was piled up against him; and unless he was prepared to tell everything nothing that he could say would avail him. He would not say what he was there for at all, and the evidence of the keeper who had found him lurking about in the woods behind Cambray Castle was only one of the lesser circumstances that went strongly against him. As he said nothing, but simply pleaded "Not Guilty" and reserved his defence, the police court proceedings were very short, and he was lodged in Carchester gaol almost before he had awoke to the full realization of what had happened to him.

He was sitting on the edge of his plank bed when his door was unlocked and a warder came into his cell followed by a tall man in the dress of a country gentleman, who held out his hand

and said quietly, "Well, Peter, you seem to have got yourself into an awkward mess."

The light was so dim that Peter could not at first recognize his visitor, but the voice seemed familiar, and in a moment he found himself grasping the hand of his late partner on the goldfields, the man whom he had always known as the Swell.

"I can leave you here for a quarter of an hour, Sir Lawrence," said the warder. "My orders is not for longer, so you must say what you've got to say without wasting time." Then he went out and locked the door behind him.

"How did you come here?" exclaimed Peter. "By Jove, though, I'm glad to see you. There isn't a man in the world I would rather see than you!"

The Swell, who now looked indeed like a swell, and no longer in the least like a gold-miner, took his seat by Peter's side on the plank. "They don't offer you much accommodation here," he said coolly. "Well, we won't waste time by talking about me. I happened to be here when you were brought to this not very satisfactory place of residence, and I recognized you. The Governor of the prison served in my regiment, and I found out all about you from him, and got him to stretch a point and let me see you for a bit. What's it

all about, Peter? Did you come across that scoundrel and lose your temper with him?"

Peter stared at him. "What, Walker!" he exclaimed. "You don't think I murdered Walker, do you?"

The Swell looked a trifle uncomfortable, which was unusual with him, and murmured something about manslaughter.

Then Peter told him the whole story and at the end of it he drew a deep breath of relief.

"Well," he said, "you have taken a weight off my mind. I was going to stand by you, anyhow, but there's no use denying that I didn't think it was an entire mistake your being where you are. I have seen you lose your wool once or twice 'out there,' and I know you don't think much of consequences when that happens. I thought he might have gone for you, perhaps with a gun or something, and that you had gone for him in return. However, I never thought it was really like you to attack a man with a stick, and in fact, old fellow, I apologize for thinking anything about it at all. And now let's leave that and think what's to be done."

"It's what I have been thinking of all the time," said Peter. "I know who murdered Walker. I have had him in my power twice and I have let him go. Now I have given my

word; if I had him here now I couldn't do anything."

"Well, if it's only the understanding you gave to that charming young lady," said the Swell, "I should think the last thing in the world that she would wish would be to keep you to it."

"My word is my word," said Peter, "and unless she releases me from it I will say nothing." And then he broke out fiercely, "Think of her knowing that I am here in prison!—charged with a brutal murder! What must she think of me! Perhaps she thinks as you did, that I killed him, though I didn't mean to, and that all the time I was talking to her I had his blood on my hands, and his dead body was lying within a mile of us. Oh! I believe it's the end of everything. I don't care what happens to me. I have almost made up my mind to put up no defence at all, and let the law end it in its own way."

"Well," said the Swell coolly, "I suppose absurd ideas of that sort do come into a man's head when he's shut up in a beastly place like this, without anybody to talk to. Haven't you sent for your solicitor or anything? You ought to have legal advice. Some circumstances are against you in a most extraordinary way. But the case is much weaker than it looks at first sight. I found out all about it that I could. The

man had been dead at least a fortnight, according to the medical evidence, and I suppose you can show where you were all that time?"

"Yes, I can show where I was if I let out who I am," said Peter.

"Well, my dear fellow, you've got to do that. It's no good putting your head in a bush and trying to keep it there. If you don't tell them who you are, they will find it out for themselves. Very likely they are trying to do so now; and it won't be so difficult. You have given a false name down here, like a fool, and of course that will go against you until you tell your reasons for it; but you have hidden your true one up in London or wherever else you have been, and of course you will be identified."

"I am not so sure," said Peter. "I know very few people in England, and lately I have changed my rooms in London; or rather I have left my rooms and put my things in store until I went back again and took others. I don't believe there's a soul that will miss me, except my lawyer, Mr. Fearon."

"Well, that's the very man you ought to have had with you," said the Swell. "He will advise you better than I can. Why haven't you sent for him?"

"I will," said Peter after a pause. "He'll find me out for himself if I don't, for he knows

I came down to these parts and will be wondering why he hasn't heard from me. The fact is I have been ashamed to do it before. I could hardly believe that this has really happened to me, and I don't seem to be able to think straight about anything."

"Give me his address," said the Swell, "and I will go up to London and see him. And pull yourself together, Peter, my boy. Fate has played a dirty trick on you, but you'll pull through in the end. You have found your girl and you've got your pile; and you'll get your title and your castle very soon. We shan't be far off each other when you do. For I've come to live in this part of the world. Why, we shall be shooting with each other next autumn."

Peter looked at him with interest. "Who are you, Swell?" he asked him. "You've never told me, although we've been good friends. What did the man call you when you came in—Sir Lawrence?"

"Towers," added the Swell,—“Lawrence Towers. I was that when we were digging together, but I played the fool when I was a young fellow, Peter. Got rid of everything. Well, there was a woman in the case. But I am cured now. Australia cured me, and now it has given me back what I lost, and more besides.”

The sound of a key in the door showed that

the permitted time had come to an end. The two men parted with a warm grip of the hand, and when the door was once more locked upon him, Peter felt that everything might not be lost after all.

Mr. Fearon came to see him the next day. The old man was scandalized, and rebuked Peter severely for not having sent for him. But his severity could not last long under the circumstances, and he soon applied himself to the consideration of Peter's defence.

But first of all he had a piece of news to give him.

"A most surprising piece of news!" he said. "If only you had not come down here—! However it is too late to think of that now, unfortunately. I have the missing leaf of the register."

"What!" cried Peter. "*You* have it! Then what was Walker murdered for? He hadn't got it after all?"

"Yes, he had," said the old man, "and that's the most surprising thing about it. A fortnight ago he left it in charge of his wife, not telling her what it was. It was in a sealed envelope. But she opened it, and when she saw what it contained she brought it to me. The sheet contains, of course, what we have always thought it would contain, and with her affidavit as to

how it came into her hands I don't think we shall have any difficulty now in proving our case."

"I didn't know Walker had a wife," said Peter. "Why did she give him away?"

"Because," said Mr. Fearon, with his eyes fixed on him, "she hated her husband, and wanted to do a good turn to you."

"Why should she want to do a good turn to me?" asked Peter. "I don't know anything about the poor woman."

"Yes, you do," said the old lawyer. "You have known her under the name of Mrs. Saunders, which was her name before she married that rascal."

"What!" Peter again exclaimed, in utter astonishment.

"You did a very good turn for yourself when you befriended that lady," said Mr. Fearon. "And she has shown her gratitude. Poor woman! We needn't waste much time over her story. Her husband was a brute to her, and when they lived in Australia hardly came near her except to sponge on her. For the sake of her boy, she scraped hard to get enough money to leave him and come over to England, where she thought he would never find her. You know that part of her story. Unfortunately, he met her by chance, and began to sponge on her again,

though he never lived with her over here, and she managed to keep all knowledge of him from her boy.

“She knew he was up to some rascality, but he never told her what it was. Then one evening he came to her and put this envelope in her hands, and threatened her with all sorts of things if she should say a word of it to anybody. He said he might come for it at any day. Well, I suppose her woman’s curiosity got the better of her, and she found a way of opening the envelope; and when she found out what his game was she came straight to me. She guessed from the name and from something Walker had once let drop about you, that you were concerned in it.”

“Well, that’s a most surprising coincidence,” said Peter. “Poor woman! Fancy her being the wife of that rascal! And she must have run some risk, too, in bringing it to you. Was it before she heard that he had been murdered?”

“She doesn’t know that yet,” said Mr. Fearon.

“Doesn’t *know* it!” exclaimed Peter. “Isn’t it generally known?”

“When she gave me the paper,” said Mr. Fearon, “she made certain stipulations. She was, as you say, running a great risk in giving away her husband, and she had come to the con-

clusion that there was no possibility of her any longer continuing to live in comfort in England. She is on her way back to Australia now. I promised not to tell you anything about it until she was out of reach. I wish now very much that I hadn't made the promise. But of course I had no idea then how important it would be to have her evidence. I made her take the reward. I knew you would wish that. Unfortunately she chose to go out round the Cape in a sailing ship for the sake of the child's health, and there will be no means of getting at her for some months."

"Well, it is just like everything else," said Peter with a sigh. "One has a surprising piece of luck, and then something happens to spoil it all. But anyhow, now that I have had time to think of everything, it seems to me that it will be a very dangerous thing to mix up the claim with whatever defence we can put up against this charge. It's like this: Walker is proved to have had the stolen register, and I am proved to be the man most concerned in getting it from him. Won't that go against me more than anything else would?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Fearon. "I should think not, if all the story comes to be known. But I have thought of it, of course, and I am quite prepared, as long as it is possible, to hold

back what you don't want known. I tell you frankly that I don't think it *will* be possible, because the extraordinary circumstances which have mixed you up with Walker want an explanation, and I doubt if we can get an acquittal without them. But we'll try. Except locally, the murder has not aroused much attention. Nobody knows anything about Walker, and nobody knows anything about John Peter. So far, there has not been anything to connect him with Peter Chandos; and there has been nothing to connect the murder with Peter Chandos's claim to the earldom. We will keep the two things apart as long as we can, and in the meantime we will try and find Lorrimer, who seems to have disappeared entirely. Sir Lawrence Towers has told me everything, and of course you are quite right in thinking that Lorrimer is the murderer."

"But he ought to have told you," said Peter, "that I won't have anything to do with bringing it home to him; and if he has told you why, perhaps he has told you something else, which explains what I was doing down here, and why I didn't write to you."

Mr. Fearon did not seem to want to discuss that subject, and, indeed, during the whole of his interview with Peter, he seemed to be keeping something back, to know more than he talked

about, and to have formed decisions which he had no intention of submitting to his client.

"You will put yourself entirely into my hands," he said a little stiffly, and then melted again into kindness as he added, "As for any fear that you will be found guilty of this crime, you must not let yourself think that, even in moments of depression. You will most certainly be acquitted. The only thing we have to think about is as to whether it is possible to get an acquittal without letting out what we want to keep to ourselves."

Soon afterwards Mr. Fearon left him, with a great deal to think over.

So Mrs. Saunders was really Mrs. Walker; and another of those astounding coincidences had come about of which his life latterly had seemed so full. Once more a piece of good fortune which could never have been looked for, had been followed immediately by a stroke of fate that had robbed it of all its value.

But he found time to think with gratitude about the woman who had paid him back so fully and unselfishly for all that he had done for her. He remembered how she had once, in thanking him, said that he had cast his bread upon the waters. She had spoken more truly than he had known.

Mr. Fearon had told him that she had refused

to receive any more of the money he was entrusted to expend on her behalf, and had gone back with her child to take up the struggle once more in the country where she had known such unhappiness. Peter could not quite make out why she had done this, and put it down to a mistaken sense of pride. But that at any rate could be altered. When she reached Australia she should, if she wished to do so, come straight back to England again, now that all fear of molestation was removed by her husband's death. Peter was not going to be robbed of the pleasure of watching over young Tommy's fortunes; and surely now that his mother had done him such a good turn, she could not refuse to let him continue the help that she had already accepted from him.

But, alas! these thoughts belonged to the future. Poor Peter, languishing in his prison cell, was hardly in a position to make plans for the benefit of his friends, and he soon turned his attention again to his own troubles.

When the night fell, he had not succeeded in thinking of a way out of them; nor was he able to encourage himself overmuch with the memory of Mr. Fearon's assurance that they would soon be over.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRIAL

THROUGHOUT the long day Peter had been standing in the dock listening to the evidence which tried to show that he was a cruel and cold-blooded murderer.

But he was not alone in the dock. Separated from him by the stalwart form of a police constable there stood—Lorrimer.

Surprising things had happened, and he had known very little about them until this morning, when he had stepped out of his prison cell into the shameful publicity of the court. Mr. Fearon had kept away from him. Another solicitor had been entrusted with his case, who had briefed Counsel on his behalf, and had had one or two perfunctory conversations with him, but had told him little more than that Lorrimer had been caught and had been committed for trial along with him.

He had, however, told Peter to be of good heart. "We shall bring you through," he had said confidently. And because Peter had not wished to discuss with him matters that he had

disclosed to Mr. Fearon, not knowing how much he knew of them already, he had not pressed him to be more explicit.

When he had entered the dock, he had thrown one look at his fellow prisoner, a look of scorn and utter detestation; and Lorrimer had tried to meet his look with an answering one, but had failed, and cast his eyes down on the ground.

Lorrimer looked frightful. His face was deadly pale, aged and lined; his eyes were blood-shot and staring, and seemed as he gazed wildly round him to have the light of madness in them. Peter never looked at him again as long as they stood there together, with the watchful policeman between them, to see that no sudden outburst of rage from one or the other should break in upon the orderliness of the court.

But Lorrimer looked at him sometimes with a furtive look full of malevolence. Accomplices they might have been in the view of those responsible for placing them in the dock together, but no one marking that look could have thought that there was anything but deadly hatred on the part, at least, of one of them; and the whole court buzzed with subdued excitement to hear the story unfolded of how those two men, so different in appearance, came to be standing there together, both charged with the same foul crime.

Certainly the proximity of this haggard,

hunted-looking creature did nothing but good to Peter, who stood upright and unmoved, a magnificent figure of a man, though paler than one of his open-air look should have been, from his confinement.

Mr. Fearon had told Peter that public interest had not been greatly aroused over this case. Little was known of the murdered man and nothing of him who was charged with having murdered him.

But all that had been changed. A story such as the public loves,—a story of mystery, in which the names of those high in the land were concerned,—had been added to this story of common and apparently motiveless crime. And now the whole country was talking about it, and as many people as could possibly find a way of getting into the court, and following its development, had done so.

For with the discovery and arrest of Lorri-mer it had come to be known that this was no motiveless crime, but that the murdered man had held possession of a secret on account of which he had met his death.

A mysterious claimant had sprung up for the Cambray earldom and estates. No one knew anything about him, no one had ever seen him; but his claim had been founded on an old marriage register which this man Walker had got

hold of, and which others had tried to get from him. Who those others were it was not difficult to imagine. The last holder of the title was well known by reputation as a man who would have stuck at nothing, and this Lorrimer had been for years his attendant spirit of evil. The question was whether the proof of what everybody had made up their minds had happened would be strong enough to condemn him.

As for the other prisoner, there was very little interest in him. Most probably he had been Lorrimer's accomplice, possibly his dupe. It was not unlikely that his had been the hand which had actually dealt the blow. Speculation with regard to him rested itself mainly upon whether, on the chance of saving his own skin, he would give away any of the secret which would identify his accomplice with the crime.

To Peter, listening through the long hours, there seemed to be a sense of unreality over the whole proceedings, as far as they applied to him. The evidence already produced at the police court had been repeated, but it had not been pressed unduly, and his own Counsel, for a man of his eminence, had appeared to cross-examine the witnesses almost perfunctorily.

A sense of weariness came over him. Was it then so hopeless as that? Was there nothing to be said in his favour? Were all these unreal

coincidences to be left to carry their weight with the minds of the jury, and send him to his shameful doom?

The only point at which Peter's Counsel seemed to wake up and cross-examine a witness as if he meant to make something out of his admissions, was when he pinned the doctor who had made a post-mortem examination down to the date at which the murder must have been committed. But having got his clear statement that it could not have been less than a fortnight before the discovery of the body, which agreed with the time at which the murdered man had been proved to have left his lodgings in London, he seemed again to lose interest in what the witnesses were saying, and to relax once again into an attitude almost of indifference.

But where Peter's Counsel was almost sleepily dignified, it was very different with his learned brother who was there in defence of Lorrimer. He was a little man, with a sandy-coloured beard, and limbs that seemed to be strung on live wires. He was forever jumping up and expostulating, and when it came his turn to cross-examine the witnesses he seemed to pounce on them like a fierce little terrier, ready to worry them with voice and teeth.

From information received, Lorrimer had been arrested at Liverpool, as he was just about

to set sail for America. When warned that anything he might say would be used in evidence against him, he had said at once, "That man Peter murdered him, and he's in custody. What have I got to do with it?"

After that he had kept silence, and at the police court had reserved his defence.

The whole court had remained in breathless silence when the story had been outlined upon which the prosecution rested to identify Lorrimer with the case. Lorrimer listened to it himself with a face like that of a trapped animal; and Peter listened to it with the same air of bewilderment that he had worn throughout the case. How could it have come to be known that Lorrimer had written to Walker proposing an interview in the wood. How could it have been known that Lorrimer had been ready to go behind the back of whoever was inciting him, and to agree upon a sum of money, out of which he was to get his share, for the delivery of a certain secret?

What that secret was was also unfolded by the prosecution, and aroused a thrill of excitement that was presently echoed throughout the country.

Walker had had in his possession and had evidently stolen, a page of an old parish register which seemed to show that the possession of

the Cambray title and estates should not have been in the hands of their then holder. And it was plainly indicated that this was the secret which Walker was trying to sell, and which the prisoner Lorrimer was endeavouring to get hold of, partly—as it must unfortunately be admitted,—on behalf of one who was no longer alive to answer for his deeds, and partly so that he might disloyally profit by it himself.

Later on, old Mr. Fearon had gone into the witness box. He was a solicitor acting for the Claimant to the Cambray title and estates. He had offered a large reward for the recovery of the missing register, and it had been brought to him by Walker's wife, to whom he had paid the reward after he had taken down her affidavit as to the circumstances under which the stolen page had come into her hands. This had happened before it had become known that her husband was murdered, and because she was afraid of him she had immediately sailed for Australia, where she had originally come from.

In the same envelope as contained the register there had been copies of sundry letters, which included those last two written by Lorrimer that Walker had sent back to be destroyed. But he had been far too astute to destroy all record of them.

And now, if Lorrimer's Counsel had only

known a little more than he did, or had happened to ask some question which would have put him on the scent, it would no longer have been possible to have kept from the knowledge of the court Peter's connection with the register.

Probably old Mr. Fearon was quite ready to tell everything about him if those questions had been asked. He had claimed a free hand, and had promised only to keep the secret as long as it should be safe to do so. But his cross-examination brought forth none of these facts. He was known to be acting for the Cambray Claimant; it was he who had offered the reward for the recovery of the register. He was pressed by Lorrimer's Counsel to disclose something as to that mysterious personage, but blandly refused to do so, and his refusal was upheld by the judge. There was nothing to show that he had ever had anything to do with the other prisoner, who seemed to be almost forgotten while these revelations about Lorrimer were being brought up. It certainly ought to have been known to the Counsel for the prosecution that when Peter had been first committed to prison Mr. Fearon had come down to see him as his legal adviser. But if it was so known, the knowledge was not made use of, and Mr. Fearon left the witness box quite unruffled by

the attacks of Lorrimer's Counsel, and with the effect of his evidence very little damaged. Peter's Counsel did not cross-examine him at all. He sat by as if he had nothing whatever to do with all this evidence.

A footman from Cambray Castle was called to prove that the stick which had been found in Peter's possession when he was arrested had belonged to Lorrimer. But he was so severely dealt with in cross-examination, that the net effect of his evidence was that it was something like one he had seen Lorrimer use, but not very like it.

This was the case against Lorrimer.

Peter's Counsel got up with extreme deliberation, swung his eye-glasses by their cord and looked at his papers. Every eye in the court was upon him. He had not so far acquitted himself in a way to enhance his reputation. Apparently he had not taken much trouble about the case, and had left his client very much to himself, to stand or fall by the rather damning weight of evidence brought against him. But now the listeners expected to hear him say something that would indicate whether he had any defence to put up at all.

What he did say made the profoundest impression that had so far affected the court. Without a word of preliminary address he

looked up at the usher of the court and said, "Call the Countess of Cambray."

There was a slight pause; even the judge looked up over his spectacles in surprise. And then Lorrimer's Counsel jumped up in indignant expostulation. His learned friend ought to have given him notice of the line his defence would take. If this lady who had been called had been a witness of the prosecution they would have given him warning, and been able to meet any evidence she might give that was detrimental to his client. Surely, Counsel joined with him in defence should have done no less. It was most irregular.

His learned brother was quite unmoved by this plea. He explained shortly to the judge that they had been trying for weeks past to find Lady Cambray, who had been travelling from one place to another abroad. They had only succeeded in finding her at the last moment. She had known nothing of the charge brought against the prisoner, Peter, but directly she had heard of it she had hurried home to give her evidence, and had arrived in England only that morning.

While this passage of arms and subsequent explanation was going on Peter had stood with his air of bewilderment more marked than ever. What could the Countess of Cambray have to do

with the case, unless everything had been let out that had so far been concealed? And why should she be coming here to testify on his behalf?

A slight figure, dressed in deep mourning, stepped into the witness box and raised her veil to take the oath. The warder at Peter's side sprang to attention as he made a sudden sound and movement of surprise. And again the unpermitted buzz of voices filled the court, as his attitude was observed.

Peter was standing like a man in a trance; but there was a light in his eyes not wholly of surprise, which transformed him from the dejected, almost callous-looking prisoner he had been all the day long, into a handsome eager man, whom it was difficult to think of as having committed the crime with which he was charged.

For if this was the Countess of Cambray, then anything might happen. And nothing that had happened hitherto did Peter understand in the least. For she was also the girl whom he had enshrined in his heart, long before he had ever set eyes on her; the girl he had saved from drowning on the Norfolk Broad; the girl he had saved from the insults of a scoundrel; the girl he had made love to in the temple by the lake.

And now it was her turn. She had come here

to brave all those curious eyes and gossiping tongues to save him.

For one moment her eyes met his steadily, and with a look that set his heart beating with such happiness as not even the knowledge of where he stood and what he might have to suffer could lessen. What matter now if the whole world thought him guilty of this crime! That look had changed everything for him. For it meant, as certainly as if she had spoken the words, that she loved him, and was not ashamed to send him that message of the eyes which would tell him so, even in the place of shame in which he stood.

Her voice, as she began to tell her story, was music in Peter's ears, and, low as it was until she gained some confidence, it was listened to with hardly less eagerness than his by every one else in the crowded court.

On the evening of a certain date she had been walking alone in a retired part of the gardens at Cambray Castle, when she had been frightened by the prisoner Lorrimer springing out from among the bushes and addressing her. She had had reason to dismiss him immediately after her father's death, and at first refused to listen to anything he had to say. But she was all alone in a lonely part of the grounds, and he

was so wild in his demeanour that she was forced to listen to him.

She had been too frightened at the time to take in all that he had said. She now remembered it perfectly well because she had afterwards found corroboration of it.

He had told her that an enemy of her father had got hold of a secret against him contained in some paper that Lorrimer had undertaken to get from him. He had hinted that this had been done, and by violence. But he had become so violent himself, and his manner towards her was so terrifying that she had not understood what he had plainly been hinting at. She had been bending all her mind towards getting away from him. She had cried out, and fortunately there was some one near who had come to her rescue.

She hesitated for a moment and Counsel asked her to tell the court who it was that had come to her rescue.

When she mentioned the name of the man who stood in the dock, beside the man whom she was accusing, there was an immense sensation; but any fresh interest that was aroused in the prisoner Peter had to be left ungratified because, after she had told shortly how he had dealt with her assailant, she was taken on to another part of her story, which disclosed a fact

so startling that every other feature of the case was forgotten for the time being.

A few nights later, she had been looking through an old escritoire in the room mostly used by her father; in it she knew that he kept his most private papers. It had borne evident signs of having been completely ransacked, and this had aroused her suspicion.

Many years ago, when she was a child, her father had shown her an ingenious secret receptacle in this escritoire, and had told her that only he and she knew the secret, and she was on no account ever to tell it to any one else. But if he wanted to leave her a secret message to be read after his death he should put it there.

She had almost forgotten the whole episode, because latterly there had been little confidence between her and her father. But it had come to her mind when she had seen all the papers in disorder. She had opened the secret receptacle and there found a paper addressed to her in her father's hand.

Counsel passed her a paper, and she identified it as the one she had found.

Then she stood with her eyes downcast and the colour coming and going on her cheeks, as the contents of this extraordinary document were read out.

It was written in large sprawling characters, and bore the date upon which Walker had been murdered. It began without any preamble:—

“If Lorrimer annoys you after my death you can hold this over him. He has gone out at this moment to meet Robert Walker at the little bridge in the wood and get from him the paper he tried to steal, but Walker stole first. Very likely he will murder Walker.”

That was all. But if instead of five lines, traced with difficulty by a hand half-paralyzed, there had been as many pages, it would have been impossible for the effect of this brutally cynical statement to be increased.

When Counsel had read it in a slow clear voice, and had laid it down in front of him, a gasp of horrified astonishment went up from the whole court, which instantly swelled into audible confusion as Lorrimer, who had listened to it with eyes nearly starting out of his head, reeled and fell on the floor of the dock in a dead faint.

It was some time before the wretched man was brought to, and the court had to be adjourned.

When he was brought into the dock again his face was that of a man deprived of all hope.

Already he must have felt the dreadful shadow of the gallows; and in nothing that followed did he take any more interest than if he had been already dead and beyond the reach of the condemnation of man.

So the wicked old lord had wreaked his vengeance on him even from beyond the grave. The man whom he had betrayed had committed crimes for him. If he had ever had in his composition qualities which might have led him to choose the good rather than the evil, it was his master who had destroyed them. Even as those very words were being painfully traced, the crime was being committed to which he himself had undoubtedly incited him. But he had had no mercy and no pity. His dupe had dared to cross him once in his long life of service, and to deal a wound to his pride. And this was his revenge, surely a fearful one even for a man of such a character as Lord Cambray.

And what must it have meant to Lord Cambray's daughter to stand up in that crowded court and to hear those words read out which must cover with perpetual shame the old name she bore? Small wonder that, as she proceeded to tell in a faltering voice when she had read that dreadful message from the tomb, and when the very next morning the news came of the discovery of the dead body in just that spot so

plainly indicated, she had fled to hide her head where no news could reach her that would compel her to come forward and publish to the world the story of her father's shame.

She had told her story; but she must have known that her ordeal would by no means end there.

Counsel for the prosecution asked her a few questions, tending only to strengthen her story, and asked them in a sympathetic manner, as if anxious to spare her as much as possible. But when Counsel who was defending Lorrimer arose to cross-examine her, every one knew that her trial had only just begun.

Nevertheless she faced him steadily. Her face was very pale, but her eyes were bright and her mouth was firm.

If he felt, as he adjusted his gown over his shoulders, and paused for a moment before putting his first question, that he was fighting a forlorn hope, and that in extracting from the witness further details which it could only pain her to disclose, he would be playing a part which would remove from him the sympathy of those before whom he stood, there was nothing to show it in his manner. He had to do the best he could for his client, even where his client by his demeanour seemed to publish to all beholders the fact that his guilt had at last found him out.

His first question came short and sharp. "What was it that the prisoner, Lorrimer, confessed to you?"

She answered the question as well as she was able, giving as many of his wild words as she could remember, and Counsel did not interrupt her, but let her struggle on, and then said sharply, "In fact you ask the jury to believe that he came to you and confessed to having committed a murder?"

"He seemed to hint," she said steadily, "at some crime of violence, to which he had been incited."

"Incited by whom?"

The answer came as steadily as before: "By my father."

"And you now believe that crime of violence to have been this brutal murder?"

"Yes."

"And did you not hesitate before you came here to tell us that your father, who has been dead so short a time, was morally guilty of the very crime that the prisoners are charged with?"

"Yes," she said simply.

Her answer and the tone in which she gave it seemed to make the question stand out in all its brutality. The judge leant forward and said, "I think it must be plain to everybody that

the witness has come here under a very strong sense of duty to tell the truth at all costs to herself; and I think she should be spared all unnecessary pain in doing so."

"Oh, I know, my lord," said the Counsel, irritably. "My duty is also a very hard one, and no question I shall put to the witness will be put with the idea of causing her pain."

The judge leant back again and Counsel continued.

"We have it from you that the prisoner Lorimer made this confession which implicated your father, who at that time had been dead only a week. What reason did he give you for coming to you, of all people, with such a story at such a time?"

She did not shrink from it for a moment. She must have known that it would come; but her face was paler than ever, and her voice broke once or twice with a little gasp as she replied, "My father's servant wanted me to marry him. He threatened that if I would not listen to his suit he would make public what my father had done."

There was a gasp of astonishment at the words, and at the splendid courage with which they had been uttered.

When she had said them she seemed to break down for a moment, but recovered herself

quickly; and there was no one who did not feel that in acknowledging the odious blow to her pride, not only of rank but of womanhood, she had for ever robbed it of its sting. Perhaps Counsel felt it too, for he accepted the statement without comment. He must have felt, at any rate, that with such a witness it was impossible to make any effect by discrediting motives. Nevertheless his next question seemed to be designed to that end.

“When the prisoner Peter came to your rescue, was he in the castle grounds at your invitation?”

There was a murmur of indignation at this question, to which she simply answered, “No.”

But Counsel tried again, and this time got an answer that probably surprised him.

“Had you any acquaintance with him before he suddenly appeared on the scene that evening?”

“Yes, I had known him before.”

Then followed a long cross-examination as to where she had known him. She gave her answers quite simply and straightforwardly. He had been staying at a place where she also had been staying during the early summer, and had rescued her when the boat she had been sailing in had been capsized. Thus their acquaintance had sprung up.

Her answers aroused extraordinary interest. A romance was scented, and a very remarkable one, between a lady of title and a mysterious man apparently known to nobody, who was standing there in the dock accused of murder.

But whatever interest this new conjecture may have aroused, there was absolutely nothing in her answers to connect Peter either with the murder or with the affair of the register that had led up to the murder. Perhaps Counsel took pity on her; perhaps he felt that in every answer she gave him she was only creating the opposite effect to any he may have wished made. For suddenly he desisted and sat down, and her ordeal was over.

That it had been a terrible one nobody could doubt, in spite of her brave demeanour. Whatever might be said of her evidence, it had undoubtedly the effect of fixing the memory of her own father with the conception, if not with the carrying out, of the crime which had been committed. As she turned to leave the box, she put her hand to her brow, stumbled and would have fallen if she had not been saved by a middle-aged woman, dressed in the sober clothes of a confidential maid, who had stood just by the witness box all the time she had been under examination.

Lady Cambray and her maid left the court at

once, and immediately the door closed behind them there arose a wild commotion, which startled and terrified every one.

The prisoner Lorrimer, who had kept his eyes fixed upon her all the time she had been giving evidence against him, with a frightful look which had seemed to be mixed up of hunger and despair and all terrible passions, suddenly shrieked out unintelligible words, and then fell heavily on to the floor of the dock, where he lay writhing and shrieking, while the attendants of the court knelt about him and a doctor hurried up and joined them.

He seemed to have been seized with some awful kind of a fit. Those who saw his face shuddered at it. Fortunately they were only few, but every one could hear the words that came from those tortured lips; and before he had been borne out of the court he had shrieked out a wild confession of his own guilt.

Once more the court was adjourned, but not for long. There was a breathless silence as the judge once more took his seat with a very grave face and said to the jury: "Gentlemen, I have to tell you that the prisoner Lorrimer is beyond the reach either of your acquittal or condemnation. He has died from the illness which seized him in your presence. We now have to go on with the case against the prisoner Peter."

CHAPTER XX

THE VERDICT

THE Counsel for the prosecution now intimated that his instructions were not to press the case against the prisoner Peter. He said shortly that circumstances at first sight had been against Peter, and he had himself to thank for the position in which he had been placed. He seemed to have come from nowhere, and the investigations that the police had been making had failed to elicit any information about him. If he had given the information that he ought to have given when he was first put on trial for this murder he would probably have made it plain that he was innocent, and would have been spared the ordeal which he had already undergone. He had not chosen to do so and no blame could be attached to any one but himself for the belief that he had been concerned in the crime.

Then Peter's Counsel stood up, and for the first time seemed to have something of interest to say. The signs of indifference which he had

worn throughout the trial had disappeared, and he spoke quickly and directly.

There had been no intention, he said, of keeping his client's identity secret longer than was necessary in his own interests. But it had so happened that until they had been successful in procuring the evidence of Lady Cambray, the very fact of his identity, if it had been known, must have gone against him.

"Gentlemen of the Jury," said Counsel, "my client's name is not John Peter simply. It is John Peter Chandos. It is he whom you have read about, and no doubt talked about, as the mysterious Cambray Claimant—mysterious no longer. He has been the victim of a set of circumstances hardly credible, and he must not leave this court without the truth being placed before you and his name cleared from every trace of suspicion.

"If my learned friend, who addressed you on behalf of the prisoner Lorrimer, who has now gone to his account, had pushed his enquiries farther with certain witnesses, he might have got near to the truth. But if he had done so I fear it would have had a bad effect upon your minds, unless you knew all that he could not have known."

He then shortly told the story of Peter's discovery of Lorrimer in Thaxted Church, and

touched upon his generosity in letting Lorrimer go after he had rescued Lady Cambray from him, because she had pleaded with him to do so, although at that time he knew that Lorrimer had lied to him in Thaxted Church and must have thought that, even if he had not the register himself, he knew where it was.

“So you see, gentlemen,” he ended up, “that if these facts had been placed before you, before you had known their real significance, they would undoubtedly have appealed to you as implicating my client far more seriously than he was implicated already. You would have thought, and you would have been justified in thinking, that he had a motive for getting hold of the register, at least as strong as those of others who were trying to get hold of it. You would have known that Lorrimer and he had met before, as you already knew that Walker and he had met before; and the impression on your minds would have been that, whereas there was some evidence to show that he had murdered Walker, but his motive for such a deed could not be guessed at, now that you know all about him the motive was plainly to be seen, as well as the suspicious circumstances of which you knew already.

“I have only to add that yet another remarkable coincidence has come to light, which would

also, if it had been known to you before, have prejudiced you against my client. Walker's wife, through whom the facts came to light which implicated Lorrimer, had been befriended by my client in the most generous fashion, he not knowing that she was Walker's wife, but having travelled home with her from Australia when she had gone by another name. That fact also it was necessary to keep back so long as it might appear that he was in some way in league with those to whom this extraordinary set of circumstances pointed as the guilty parties. My client's advisers have now thought it well that all the facts should be laid before you, so that you may know that you have before you a man who has been in a remarkable way the sport of fortune, but whose troubles we now hope are at an end."

This story had been listened to with breathless attention. Peter had made no sign while it was going on, but had stood with his eyes sometimes on the ground and sometimes fixed, almost indifferently, upon Counsel's face.

His thoughts were far away. He saw in his mind's eye, not the crowded court, with its row upon row of eager interested faces; but a cool green lawn, shaded by tall trees and lapped by the waters of a still lake, with a gleam of white marble, and beside it the figure of one who had

braved all for his sake, and would be waiting there for his words of gratitude and never-ending love.

The proceedings lasted very little longer. The Judge said a few words of direction to the jury and the jury brought in their formal verdict of acquittal.

And then, in spite of the attempts of officials to stop them, in spite of the possibly outraged majesty of the law, cheer after cheer rang through the court as Peter stepped out of the dock, a free man, and found his hand grasped by that of Sir Lawrence Towers, his old friend and partner, whom he had always known as the Swell.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST

THE Swell hustled Peter out of the court as quickly as possible. "Car waiting," he said shortly, as they pushed their way through the crowds of people, so many of whom wished to shake hands with and congratulate the man whom an hour before they had quite expected to see condemned to death.

In a side street was waiting a long rakish-looking car, the engines of which were already started. The Swell jumped into the driving seat and Peter into the one next to him. The liveried chauffeur, having received his instructions, touched his hat, and stood back, while the car started off noiselessly, and slid down the street. But not before it had been seen. Men with notebooks came running round the corner, and one of them actually sprang on to the footboard and asked Peter to give him a short message for the benefit of the readers of his paper.

"Tell them not to believe everything they see there," said Peter, and gave him a little push

which landed him comfortably in the street just as the car began to gather way.

But another reporter had hopped into another waiting car and was following them.

“Wait till I get clear of the streets,” said the Swell, looking back over his shoulder.

They drove through the town, with the other car still close behind them, and came to a long straight hill between rows of villas.

“Now we can get on,” said the Swell; “and damn the speed limit!”

The car shot forward and raced up the hill. Peter looked back and saw the pursuing car toiling along in their wake and being left farther behind every moment. At the top of the hill there was a mile stretch of straight road running out into the country. When they had reached the end of it the smaller car had been left far behind.

“We don’t often get a chance of using sixty horsepower in this country,” said the Swell, “but I don’t think we need bother about those gentlemen any more. They will probably turn up at my house by and by; but they won’t find us there.”

“Look here, old chap,” said Peter, “I am very much obliged to you for getting me clear, but I want to go—”

“I know where you want to go all right,” said

the Swell, "and we're going there, a good deal faster than we're supposed to. She's expecting you," he added, in further explanation.

"Isn't it a most astounding thing," exclaimed Peter. "She of all people to turn out to be the Countess of Cambray! I can hardly believe it even now. When did you first know?"

"Well, I guessed pretty quick," said the Swell, "when I began to make a few enquiries. And then came the business of finding her. That wasn't quite so easy. I have covered a few miles during the last week or two, Peter."

"What! *you* found her!" exclaimed Peter.

"Oh! yes. I thought I'd do what I could for you, and I have given a very good account of you to the lady. You're a lucky fellow, Peter. You might not have had it all your own way with her if you hadn't staked out your claim first. However, you're the only fellow who seems to count with her, and by Jove! she's shown it to some tune. Peter, you were right about that girl from the very first. She's one in a thousand."

The look in Peter's eyes showed that to him she was one in all the millions that compose the inhabitants of the world. His heart was too full to speak for a time.

Presently he asked: "What did she say when you told her who I was?"

“I haven’t told her who you are. That’s left for you.”

“What! then she doesn’t know that I am the Cambray claimant!”

“No. We thought it would only complicate matters.”

“But she’ll know it now, because it was let out in court.”

“I think not before you have a chance of telling her yourself. She left the court directly she had given her own evidence, and didn’t hear what your counsel said. I arranged with her to telephone directly everything was over, but I didn’t give her that news. You’ll find her waiting for you, and you can tell her yourself.”

They drove along the unfrequented road at the back of the castle woods, and stopped before the gap at which Peter had first made his way into them.

“I shall be back here in an hour’s time,” said the Swell. “I shan’t mind waiting a bit if you haven’t quite finished, and I’ll take you home to my house, where you will put up for the present. Good-bye, old fellow—best of luck!”

Peter gripped his hand and jumped out of the car.

The Swell watched him until he was lost to sight among the trees, and then with a quizzical

look on his face, touched his levers and slid away.

Peter hurried through the wood and along the shrubby path, and came out on to the temple lawn.

She was waiting for him, standing by one of the marble pillars, with her hands clasped to her breast. She was dressed in white. All traces of mourning and sorrow were put away from her.

With a cry Peter ran forward, and she came to meet him. He took her in his arms, and she nestled there as if it were a refuge from all the ills of life, which would never more fail her.

By and by they moved to the marble seat in the shade of the temple, and sat there with clasped hands and eyes which hardly ever left each other's, talking in low tones of the new story of their love, which was not new at all, but as old as the earth itself, and still more abiding.

The happy birds twittered their good-night amongst the leaves of the trees, which seemed to shut them in in this quiet spot, away from all the rest of the world, to brood only upon the sweetness of the hour, and their own deep happiness. All their troubles were forgotten. They were together, and nothing could ever part them.

Presently, when the hour which had been allowed to Peter was nearly up, they descended a little from the heights in which they had been moving.

“Shall we go away and live in your country, dear?” she asked him. “Don’t you remember that I once told you that if I were Lady Cambridge I might like to do that as a refuge from all my sorrows? And I was rather cross with you because you didn’t take my bold hint, although of course you couldn’t have known.”

“Margaret!” said Peter in a low voice. “Do you mean that when you said that you wanted me to ask you then?”

She smiled at him. “How dense men are!” she said. “And how foolish women are! I didn’t know what I wanted; but I think I loved you all the time, Peter. If you had taken me then, I shouldn’t have been able to resist you.”

“Darling!” said the enraptured Peter. “Did you love me when we were together in the orchard by the Broad?”

Again she smiled at him. “I thought you were magnificently strong, and very handsome,” she said. “And I thought you were so good, and so kind. To be with you was like being in a peaceful refuge where no harm could come to me. And oh, I want love and protection. I have had so little of it in my life.”

He held her in his arms again, and she made no effort to leave their shelter. She must have felt that at last she had a strong, loving, tender heart to lean on, which would never let her fall again into the depths of which she had had such unhappy experience.

After a time Peter said to her: "Do you want to go away from this beautiful place? For ever, I mean?"

"I am afraid I cannot help myself," she said, a little sadly. "I should like to have offered you Cambray Castle, dear, as a wedding gift, for it has belonged to my family for hundreds of years, and with all the shadows that have lain over it lately, I still love it, and would like to be happy here with you. But it must go;—there is no help for it."

"It needn't go from *us*," said Peter. "I told you about the mine out in Australia, but I didn't tell you how rich it had made me. If Cambray Castle has to be sold because it is so encumbered, I can afford to buy it ten times over. My darling, we will live here together, and there will be more happiness in your old castle than there has ever been there before."

"So you are rich," she said, "and you never told me. Well, riches will be the least part of our happiness. I want you and you only, rich or poor. But I am afraid that we cannot have

Cambray Castle. It will not be mine to sell. It has been proved to me that I have no claim either to my home or to my title. You won't mind that, will you? They don't think much of titles out in Australia. I shan't come to you as the Countess of Cambray. I have no right to call myself that now."

"Yes, you have, my dear," he said.

She smiled at his contradiction of her. "Perhaps I have," she said, "until it is taken away from me. But you know there is some one who has a better right to it than I have—some mysterious personage whom I have never seen; and my lawyers tell me it will be better not to fight him. I shall come to you as Margaret Chandos—I am that at any rate—and when I have come to you I shall be content to call myself Mrs. John Peter. I shall want no better name. Perhaps it will have to be Lady Margaret Peter; but if we go and live in Australia, I think I should prefer to drop that. I want to forget my past life and begin a new one. Mrs. Peter! I shall like that. What am I to call you, my dearest? I have never called you by your Christian name. Do they call you John or Jack?"

"They call me Peter—sometimes Big Peter."

"I will call you Big Peter too sometimes. But I can't always call you by your surname. You wouldn't like it, would you?"

"No, I shouldn't. But Peter isn't my surname, although I have been known by that lately. My Christian names are John Peter."

"Peter isn't your surname! Then what is?" She looked surprised and puzzled.

"It is Chandos," he said with his eyes on her face.

"Chandos!" Still she was far from understanding.

"Yes, Chandos. The same as yours."

"But how can that be? The Cambray Chandoses are the only Chandoses there are."

"Yes. We are cousins. We come of the same stock, though you are a fashionable English lady, and I am a rough fellow out of the bush."

"Do you mean that?" she asked with a smile. "Then why didn't you tell me? I thought I was the only one left of all the Chandoses."

"Did you? Didn't you know that there was another—the man who is claiming your title and these estates?"

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten him for the moment. But—"

Then at last she understood, and looked at him with her eyes wide. "You don't mean that *you* are the Cambray Claimant!"

"I am John Peter Chandos. It is I who am claiming your title, and, my darling, I am going to give it back to you. You will have everything

that you have always had—your title and this beautiful home of yours too.”

She looked into his eyes, and then said softly, “And I shall have you, without whom I should want none of it at all.”

It was not until half an hour later that they stood together by the motor car, whose owner regarded them with his usual expression of dry criticism, to which on this occasion was added a certain hint of tenderness.

“Well, if you’ve both had enough of one another for the present,” he said, “it’s about time we were moving on. I’ll look after him, my lady, and bring him back to you when you want him.”

She put her hand in his and looked at him with a smile out of which all the sadness had departed. “I shall always want him, Sir Lawrence,” she said, “and it is you who have given him to me. I can never thank you enough, so I won’t try to begin. I had to come and say good-bye to you, and now I am going back by the way he came to me.”

She stepped into the wood through the gap in the fence and was lost among the trees.

“When you come into your own, Peter,” said the Swell, as he pressed down the lever, “and begin to repair your property, I should shift the old gateway to that spot.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Peter, as they ran past the deserted lodges and the grass-grown gate. “I shall always like that way into Cambray Castle best.”

The Earl and Countess of Cambray are not always to be found at Cambray Castle, their English home, which great wealth and loving care have made one of the most beautiful places in the country, as for many years it has been one of the happiest. They have another home, also called Cambray, a long, low deep-verandahed house that Peter built on the great cattle station which he bought in Australia a few years after his succession to the title.

It is not in one of the more settled parts of that great country. The nearest neighbours are twenty miles away, which is considered almost on the doorstep, and the next nearest something like fifty. But there are something like a hundred people employed on and about the station, who live for the most part clustered around the big house, in unusual comfort. There are cottages and stores, a church and a school; and the whole settlement makes up what would be quite a respectable village in England. The house itself, although, alas! roofed with galvanized iron to catch the rare rains, is beautiful with the rich almost tropical growth of the

creepers that grow about it; and "my lady's garden" is considered a wonder by all who see it.

Here they come for a month or two every few years and live the free happy life which Peter will never be quite contented without, in spite of the duties as a great English landlord which he so satisfactorily fulfills. Here he is apt to forget that he is the Earl of Cambray, as he throws himself into the manifold activities of a great station-holder, revelling in the active adventurous life of the Bush, and going back after hours or perhaps days in the saddle to a home whose spacious simplicity is a welcome change from that other splendid home in which he lives the greater part of his life. It has the same gracious presence to sweeten it, and as the years go on it is coming to be enlivened at each visit with the voices and laughter of the children who are growing up to enjoy this strange new life as eagerly as they enjoy the happy life in their older home.

In spite of its remoteness the Australian Cambray is seldom without visitors. Of course all the important "globe-trotters" are entertained there royally, and any of the unimportant ones who are within hail as well, for Big Peter, in spite of his wealth and his title, is an ardent democrat, as are most good Australians.

In the great cool hall of the house hang two fine portraits of the Earl and Countess of Cambray, by the well-known artist Thomas Saunders, already, young as he is, well on the road to fame. His mother, after the dreadful events which we have described, came back to England, and settled down in the country, not far from the English Cambray, where she is always an honoured guest, when she can be prevailed upon to accept the hospitality of her noble neighbours. After all her troubles she is now completely happy, in the brilliant career of her son, in the gratitude of Big Peter and his wife, who but for her might never have known the happiness that *they* enjoy, and in her own quiet but contented life.

Sir Lawrence Towers has also visited his English neighbours in their Australian house, more than once. He has never married, though he often talks about doing so some day, and is of a somewhat roving disposition besides. He thought he had done with Australia when he made his pile at Kampurli; but he finds that it still has a summons for him. He is godfather to Peter's eldest son, and is beginning now to say that he is so interested in all his friend's children that he can very well do without any of his own, and may, after all, live and die a bachelor.

Another old acquaintance of ours is also to be found at the Australian Cambray. This is none other than MacDonal, still known as "Scotty." After attaining riches he went home to Scotland and married a comely Scottish wife. Then he found that a life of leisure did not suit him at all, and that Australia had got into his blood. So just at the time Peter was building his house, he turned up in Sydney and said that he wanted the post of Manager; and of course he got it at once. He lives in a very pleasant house not far from Peter's. When Peter is in England he is in charge of everything, and the station is as good as his own. He must be enormously wealthy, for he spends nothing of his large income, and even saves out of his salary. But he has a considerable family growing up, and probably in the near future he will save rather less.

Peter is "the Boss" to all that large company that clusters around the Australian Cambray; and to many of those who come from time to time to enjoy its warm hospitality he is still Big Peter.

Some of these hardy men of the Bush are apt to be somewhat abashed at first in finding themselves in the presence of the beautiful lady whom most of them call "the Countess," whatever they may choose to call her husband.

But it is never long before she sets them at

their ease. She is never tired of hearing them talk, and those who have come to Cambray more than once have got to know that the surest way of bringing to her face that tender smile, which no longer has in it the least little tinge of sadness, is to tell her some yarn about the early days and the strong prowess of "Big Peter."

THE END





