BARR ROBERT

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Barr R.

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Содержание

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AN ALPINE DIVORCE

In some natures there are no half-tones; nothing but raw primary colours. John Bodman was a man who was always at one extreme or the other. This probably would have mattered little had he not married a wife whose nature was an exact duplicate of his own.

Doubtless there exists in this world precisely the right woman for any given man to marry and *vice versâ*; but when you consider that a human being has the opportunity of being acquainted with only a few hundred people, and out of the few hundred that there are but a dozen or less whom he knows intimately, and out of the dozen, one or two friends at most, it will easily be seen, when we remember the number of millions who inhabit this world, that probably, since the earth was created, the right man has never yet met the right woman. The mathematical chances are all against such a meeting, and this is the reason that divorce courts exist. Marriage at best is but a compromise, and if two people happen to be united who are of an uncompromising nature there is trouble.

In the lives of these two young people there was no middle distance. The result was bound to be either love or hate, and in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bodman it was hate of the most bitter and arrogant kind.

In some parts of the world incompatibility of temper is considered a just cause for obtaining a divorce, but in England no such subtle distinction is made, and so until the wife became criminal, or the man became both criminal and cruel, these two were linked together by a bond that only death could sever. Nothing can be worse than this state of things, and the matter was only made the more hopeless by the fact that Mrs. Bodman lived a blameless life, and her husband was no worse, but rather better, than the majority of men. Perhaps, however, that statement held only up to a certain point, for John Bodman had reached a state of mind in which he resolved to get rid of his wife at all hazards. If he had been a poor man he would probably have deserted her, but he was rich, and a man cannot freely leave a prospering business because his domestic life happens not to be happy.

When a man's mind dwells too much on any one subject, no one can tell just how far he will go. The mind is a delicate instrument, and even the law recognises that it is easily thrown from its balance. Bodman's friends—for he had friends—claim that his mind was unhinged; but neither his friends nor his enemies suspected the truth of the episode, which turned out to be the most important, as it was the most ominous, event in his life.

Whether John Bodman was sane or insane at the time he made up his mind to murder his wife, will never be known, but there was certainly craftiness in the method he devised to make the crime appear the result of an accident. Nevertheless, cunning is often a quality in a mind that has gone wrong.

Mrs. Bodman well knew how much her presence afflicted her husband, but her nature was as relentless as his, and her hatred of him was, if possible, more bitter than his hatred of her. Wherever he went she accompanied him, and perhaps the idea of murder would never have occurred to him if she had not been so persistent in forcing her presence upon him at all times and on all occasions. So, when he announced to her that he intended to spend the month of July in Switzerland, she said nothing, but made her preparations for the journey. On this occasion he did not protest, as was usual with him, and so to Switzerland this silent couple departed.

There is an hotel near the mountain-tops which stands on a ledge over one of the great glaciers. It is a mile and a half above the level of the sea, and it stands alone, reached by a toilsome road that zigzags up the mountain for six miles. There is a wonderful view of snow-peaks and glaciers from the verandahs of this hotel, and in the neighbourhood are many picturesque walks to points more or less dangerous.

John Bodman knew the hotel well, and in happier days he had been intimately acquainted with the vicinity. Now that the thought of murder arose in his mind, a certain spot two miles distant from this inn continually haunted him. It was a point of view overlooking everything, and its extremity was protected by a low and crumbling wall. He arose one morning at four o'clock, slipped unnoticed out of the hotel, and went to this point, which was locally named the Hanging Outlook. His memory had served him well. It was exactly the spot, he said to himself. The mountain which rose up behind it was wild and precipitous. There were no inhabitants near to overlook the place. The distant hotel was hidden by a shoulder of rock. The mountains on the other side of the valley were too far away to make it possible for any casual tourist or native to see what was going on on the Hanging Outlook. Far down in the valley the only town in view seemed like a collection of little toy houses.

One glance over the crumbling wall at the edge was generally sufficient for a visitor of even the strongest nerves. There was a sheer drop of more than a mile straight down, and at the distant bottom were jagged rocks and stunted trees that looked, in the blue haze, like shrubbery.

"This is the spot," said the man to himself, "and to-morrow morning is the time."

John Bodman had planned his crime as grimly and relentlessly, and as coolly, as ever he had concocted a deal on the Stock Exchange. There was no thought in his mind of mercy for his unconscious victim. His hatred had carried him far.

The next morning after breakfast, he said to his wife: "I intend to take a walk in the mountains. Do you wish to come with me?"

"Yes," she answered briefly.

"Very well, then," he said; "I shall be ready at nine o'clock."

"I shall be ready at nine o'clock," she repeated after him.

At that hour they left the hotel together, to which he was shortly to return alone. The spoke no word to each other on their way to the Hanging Outlook. The path was practically level, skirting the mountains, for the Hanging Outlook was not much higher above the sea than the hotel.

John Bodman had formed no fixed plan for his procedure when the place was reached. He resolved to be guided by circumstances. Now and then a strange fear arose in his mind that she might cling to him and possibly drag him over the precipice with her. He found himself wondering whether she had any premonition of her fate, and one of his reasons for not speaking was the fear that a tremor in his voice might possibly arouse her suspicions. He resolved that his action should be sharp and sudden, that she might have no chance either to help herself or to drag him with her. Of her screams in that desolate region he had no fear. No one could reach the spot except from the hotel, and no one that morning had left the house, even for an expedition to the glacier—one of the easiest and most popular trips from the place.

Curiously enough, when they came within sight of the Hanging Outlook, Mrs. Bodman stopped and shuddered. Bodman looked at her through the narrow slits of his veiled eyes, and wondered again if she had any suspicion. No one can tell, when two people walk closely together, what unconscious communication one mind may have with another.

"What is the matter?" he asked gruffly. "Are you tired?"

"John," she cried, with a gasp in her voice, calling him by his Christian name for the first time in years, "don't you think that if you had been kinder to me at first, things might have been different?"

"It seems to me," he answered, not looking at her, "that it is rather late in the day for discussing that question."

"I have much to regret," she said quaveringly. "Have you nothing?"

"No," he answered.

"Very well," replied his wife, with the usual hardness returning to her voice. "I was merely giving you a chance. Remember that."

Her husband looked at her suspiciously.

"What do you mean?" he asked, "giving me a chance? I want no chance nor anything else from you. A man accepts nothing from one he hates. My feeling towards you is, I imagine, no secret to you. We are tied together, and you have done your best to make the bondage insupportable."

"Yes," she answered, with her eyes on the ground, "we are tied together—we are tied together!"

She repeated these words under her breath as they walked the few remaining steps to the Outlook. Bodman sat down upon the crumbling wall. The woman dropped her alpenstock on the rock, and walked nervously to and fro, clasping and unclasping her hands. Her husband caught his breath as the terrible moment drew near.

"Why do you walk about like a wild animal?" he cried. "Come here and sit down beside me, and be still."

She faced him with a light he had never before seen in her eyes—a light of insanity and of hatred.

"I walk like a wild animal," she said, "because I am one. You spoke a moment ago of your hatred of me; but you are a man, and your hatred is nothing to mine. Bad as you are, much as you wish to break the bond which ties us together, there are still things which I know you would not stoop to. I know there is no thought of murder in your heart, but there is in mine. I will show you, John Bodman, how much I hate you."

The man nervously clutched the stone beside him, and gave a guilty start as she mentioned murder.

"Yes," she continued, "I have told all my friends in England that I believed you intended to murder me in Switzerland."

"Good God!" he cried. "How could you say such a thing?"

"I say it to show how much I hate you—how much I am prepared to give for revenge. I have warned the people at the hotel, and when we left two men followed us. The proprietor tried to persuade me not to accompany you. In a few moments those two men will come in sight of the Outlook. Tell them, if you think they will believe you, that it was an accident."

The mad woman tore from the front of her dress shreds of lace and scattered them around. Bodman started up to his feet, crying, "What are you about?" But before he could move toward her she precipitated herself over the wall, and went shrieking and whirling down the awful abyss.

The next moment two men came hurriedly round the edge of the rock, and found the man standing alone. Even in his bewilderment he realised that if he told the truth he would not be believed.

WHICH WAS THE MURDERER?

Mrs. John Forder had no premonition of evil. When she heard the hall clock strike nine she was blithely singing about the house as she attended to her morning duties, and she little imagined that she was entering the darkest hour of her life, and that before the clock struck again overwhelming disaster would have fallen upon her. Her young husband was working in the garden, as was his habit each morning before going to his office. She expected him in every moment to make ready for his departure down town. She heard the click of the front gate, and a moment later some angry words. Alarmed, she was about to look through the parted curtains of the bay-window in front when the sharp crack of a revolver rang out, and she hastened to the door with a vague sinking fear at her heart. As she flung open the door she saw two things— first, her husband lying face downwards on the grass motionless, his right arm doubled under him; second, a man trying frantically to undo the fastening of the front gate, with a smoking pistol still in his hand.

Human lives often hang on trivialities. The murderer in his anxiety to be undisturbed had closed the front gate tightly. The wall was so high as to shut out observation from the street, but the height that made it difficult for an outsider to see over it also rendered escape impossible. If the man had left the gate open he might have got away unnoticed, but, as it was, Mrs. Forder's screams aroused the neighbourhood, and before the murderer succeeded in undoing the fastening, a crowd had collected with a policeman in its centre, and escape was out of the question. Only one shot had been fired, but at such close quarters that the bullet went through the body. John Forder was not dead, but lay on the grass insensible. He was carried into the house and the family physician summoned. The doctor sent for a specialist to assist him, and the two men consulted together. To the distracted woman they were able to give small comfort. The case at best was a doubtful one. There was some hope of ultimate recovery, but very little.

Meanwhile the murderer lay in custody, his own fate depending much on the fate of his victim. If Forder died, bail would be refused; if he showed signs of recovering, his assailant had a chance for, at least, temporary liberty. No one in the city, unless it were the wife herself, was more anxious for Forder's recovery than the man who had shot him.

The crime had its origin in a miserable political quarrel—mere wrangle about offices. Walter Radnor, the assassin, had 'claims' upon an office, and, rightly or wrongly, he attributed his defeat to the secret machinations of John Forder. He doubtless did not intend to murder his enemy that morning when he left home, but heated words had speedily followed the meeting, and the revolver was handy in his hip pocket.

Radnor had a strong, political backing, and, even after he stretched his victim on the grass, he had not expected to be so completely deserted when the news spread through the city. Life was not then so well protected as it has since become, and many a man who walked the streets free had, before that time, shot his victim. But in this case the code of assassination had been violated. Radnor had shot down an unarmed man in his own front garden and almost in sight of his wife. He gave his victim no chance. If Forder had had even an unloaded revolver in any of his pockets, things would not have looked so black for Radnor, because his friends could have held that he had fired in self-defence, as they would doubtless claim that the dying man had been the first to show a weapon. So Radnor, in the city prison, found that even the papers of his own political party were against him, and that the town was horrified at what it considered a cold-blooded crime.

As time went on Radnor and his few friends began once more to hope. Forder still lingered between life and death. That he would ultimately die from his wound was regarded as certain, but the law required that a man should die within a stated time after the assault had been committed upon him, otherwise the assailant could not be tried for murder. The limit provided by the law was almost reached and Forder still lived. Time also worked in Radnor's favour in another direction. The

sharp indignation that had followed the crime had become dulled. Other startling events occurred which usurped the place held by the Forder tragedy, and Radnor's friends received more and more encouragement.

Mrs. Forder nursed her husband assiduously, hoping against hope. They had been married less than a year, and their love for each other had increased as time went on. Her devotion to her husband had now become almost fanatical, and the physicians were afraid to tell her how utterly hopeless the case was, fearing that if the truth became known to her, she would break down both mentally and physically. Her hatred of the man who had wrought this misery was so deep and intense that once when she spoke of him to her brother, who was a leading lawyer in the place, he saw, with grave apprehension, the light of insanity in her eyes. Fearful for a breakdown in health, the physicians insisted that she should walk for a certain time each day, and as she refused to go outside of the gate, she took her lonely promenade up and down a long path in the deserted garden. One day she heard a conversation on the other side of the wall that startled her.

"That is the house," said a voice, "where Forder lives, who was shot by Walter Radnor. The murder took place just behind this wall."

"Did it really?" queried a second voice. "I suppose Radnor is rather an anxious man this week."

"Oh," said the first, "he has doubtless been anxious enough all along."

"True. But still if Forder lives the week out, Radnor will escape the gallows. If Forder were to die this week it would be rather rough on his murderer, for his case would come up before Judge Brent, who is known all over the State as a hanging judge. He has no patience with crimes growing out of politics, and he is certain to charge dead against Radnor, and carry the jury with him. I tell you that the man in jail will be the most joyous person in this city on Sunday morning if Forder is still alive, and I understand his friends have bail ready, and that he will be out of jail first thing Monday morning."

The two unseen persons, having now satisfied their curiosity by their scrutiny of the house, passed on and left Mrs. Forder standing looking into space, with her nervous hands clasped tightly together.

Coming to herself she walked quickly to the house and sent a messenger for her brother. He found her pacing up and down the room.

"How is John to-day?" he said.

"Still the same, still the same," was the answer. "It seems to me he is getting weaker and weaker. He does not recognise me any more."

"What do the doctors say?"

"Oh, how can I tell you? I don't suppose they speak the truth to me, but when they come again I shall insist upon knowing just what they think. But tell me this: is it true that if John lives through the week his murderer will escape?"

"How do you mean, escape?"

"Is it the law of the State that if my husband lives till the end of this week, the man who shot him will not be tried for murder?"

"He will not be tried for murder," said the lawyer, "but he may not be tried for murder even if John were to die now. His friends will doubtless try to make it out a case of manslaughter as it is; or perhaps they will try to get him off on the ground of self-defence. Still, I don't think they would have much of a chance, especially as his case will come before Judge Brent; but if John lives past twelve o'clock on Saturday night, it is the law of the State that Radnor cannot be tried for murder. Then, at most, he will get a term of years in a state prison, but that will not bother him to any great extent. He has a strong political backing, and if his party wins the next state election, which seems likely, the governor will doubtless pardon him out before a year is over."

"Is it possible," cried the wife, "that such an enormous miscarriage of justice can take place in a State that pretends to be civilised?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "I don't bank much on our civilisation," he said. "Such things occur every year, and many times a year."

The wife walked up and down the room, while her brother tried to calm and soothe her.

"It is terrible—it is awful!" she cried, "that such a dastardly crime may go unavenged!"

"My dear sister," said the lawyer, "do not let your mind dwell so much on vengeance. Remember that whatever happens to the villain who caused all this misery, it can neither help nor injure your husband."

"Revenge!" cried the woman, suddenly turning upon her brother; "I swear before God that if that man escapes, I will kill him with my own hand!"

The lawyer was too wise to say anything to his sister in her present frame of mind, and after doing what he could to comfort her he departed.

On Saturday morning Mrs. Forder confronted the physicians.

"I want to know," she said, "and I want to know definitely, whether there is the slightest chance of my husband's recovery or not. This suspense is slowly killing me, and I must know the truth, and I must know it now."

The physicians looked one at the other. "I think," said the elder, "that it is useless to keep you longer in suspense. There is not the slightest hope of your husband's recovery. He may live for a week or for a month perhaps, or he may die at any moment."

"I thank you, gentlemen," said Mrs. Forder, with a calmness that astonished the two men, who knew the state of excitement she had laboured under for a long time past. "I thank you. I think it is better that I should know."

All the afternoon she sat by the bedside of her insensible and scarcely breathing husband. His face was wasted to a shadow from his long contest with death. The nurse begged permission to leave the room for a few minutes, and the wife, who had been waiting for this, silently assented. When the woman had gone, Mrs. Forder, with tears streaming from her eyes, kissed her husband.

"John," she whispered, "you know and you will understand." She pressed his face to her bosom, and when his head fell back on the pillow her husband was smothered.

Mrs. Forder called for the nurse and sent for the doctors, but that which had happened was only what they had all expected.

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To a man in the city jail the news of Forder's death brought a wild thrill of fear. The terrible and deadly charge of Judge Brent against the murderer doomed the victim, as every listener in the courthouse realised as soon as it was finished. The jury were absent but ten minutes, and the hanging of Walter Radnor did more perhaps than anything that ever happened in the State to make life within that commonwealth more secure than it had been before.

A DYNAMITE EXPLOSION

Dupré sat at one of the round tables in the Café Vernon, with a glass of absinthe before him, which he sipped every now and again. He looked through the open door, out to the Boulevard, and saw passing back and forth with the regularity of a pendulum, a uniformed policeman. Dupré laughed silently as he noticed this evidence of law and order. The Café Vernon was under the protection of the Government. The class to which Dupré belonged had sworn that it would blow the café into the next world, therefore the military-looking policeman walked to and fro on the pavement to prevent this being done, so that all honest citizens might see that the Government protects its own. People were arrested now and then for lingering around the café: they were innocent, of course, and by-and-by the Government found that out and let them go. The real criminal seldom acts suspiciously. Most of the arrested persons were merely attracted by curiosity. "There," said one to another, "the notorious Hertzog was arrested."

The real criminal goes quietly into the café, and orders his absinthe, as Dupré had done. And the policeman marches up and down keeping an eye on the guiltless. So runs the world.

There were few customers in the café, for people feared the vengeance of Hertzog's friends. They expected some fine day that the café would be blown to atoms, and they preferred to be taking their coffee and cognac somewhere else when that time came. It was evident that M. Sonne, the proprietor of the café, had done a poor stroke of business for himself when he gave information to the police regarding the whereabouts of Hertzog, notwithstanding the fact that his café became suddenly the most noted one in the city, and that it now enjoyed the protection of the Government.

Dupré seldom looked at the proprietor, who sat at the desk, nor at the waiter, who had helped the week before to overpower Hertzog. He seemed more intent on watching the minion of the law who paced back and forth in front of the door, although he once glanced at the other minion who sat almost out of sight at the back of the café, scrutinising all who came in, especially those who had parcels of any kind. The café was well guarded, and M. Sonne, at the desk, appeared to be satisfied with the protection he was receiving.

When customers did come in they seldom sat at the round metal tables, but went direct to the zinc-covered bar, ordered their fluid and drank it standing, seeming in a hurry to get away. They nodded to M. Sonne and were evidently old frequenters of the café who did not wish him to think they had deserted him in this crisis, nevertheless they all had engagements that made prompt departure necessary. Dupré smiled grimly when he noticed this. He was the only man sitting at a table. He had no fears of being blown up. He knew that his comrades were more given to big talk than to action. He had not attended the last meeting, for he more than suspected the police had agents among them; besides, his friend and leader, Hertzog, had never attended meetings. That was why the police had had such difficulty in finding him. Hertzog had been a man of deeds not words. He had said to Dupré once, that a single determined man who kept his mouth shut, could do more against society than all the secret associations ever formed, and his own lurid career had proved the truth of this. But now he was in prison, and it was the treachery of M. Sonne that had sent him there. As he thought of this, Dupré cast a glance at the proprietor and gritted his teeth.

The policeman at the back of the hall, feeling lonely perhaps, walked to the door and nodded to his parading comrade. The other paused for a moment on his beat, and they spoke to each other. As the policeman returned to his place, Dupré said to him—

"Have a sip with me."

"Not while on duty," replied the officer with a wink.

"*Garçon*," said Dupré quietly, "bring me a caraffe of brandy. *Fin champagne*."

The *garçon* placed the little marked decanter on the table with two glasses. Dupré filled them both. The policeman, with a rapid glance over his shoulder, tossed one off, and smacked his lips. Dupré slowly sipped the other while he asked—

"Do you anticipate any trouble here?"

"Not in the least," answered the officer confidently. "Talk, that's all."

"I thought so," said Dupré.

"They had a meeting the other night—a secret meeting;" the policeman smiled a little as he said this. "They talked a good deal. They are going to do wonderful things. A man was detailed to carry out this job."

"And have you arrested him?" questioned Dupré.

"Oh dear, no. We watch him merely. He is the most frightened man in the city to-night. We expect him to come and tell us all about it, but we hope he won't. We know more about it than he does."

"I dare say; still it must have hurt M. Sonne's business a good deal."

"It has killed it for the present. People are such cowards. But the Government will make it all right with him out of the secret fund. He won't lose anything."

"Does he own the whole house, or only the café?"

"The whole house. He lets the upper rooms, but nearly all the tenants have left. Yet I call it the safest place in the city. They are all poltroons, the dynamiters, and they are certain to strike at some place not so well guarded. They are all well known to us, and the moment one is caught prowling about here he will be arrested. They are too cowardly to risk their liberty by coming near this place. It's a different thing from leaving a tin can and fuse in some dark corner when nobody is looking. Any fool can do that."

"Then you think this would be a good time to take a room here? I am looking for one in this neighbourhood," said Dupré.

"You couldn't do better than arrange with M. Sonne. You could make a good bargain with him now, and you would be perfectly safe."

"I am glad that you mentioned it; I will speak to M. Sonne to-night, and see the rooms to-morrow. Have another sip of brandy?"

"No, thank you, I must be getting back to my place. Just tell M. Sonne, if you take a room, that I spoke to you about it."

"I will. Good-night."

Dupré paid his bill and tipped the *garçon* liberally. The proprietor was glad to hear of any one wanting rooms. It showed the tide was turning, and an appointment was made for next day.

Dupré kept his appointment, and the *concierge* showed him over the house. The back rooms were too dark, the windows being but a few feet from the opposite wall. The lower front rooms were too noisy. Dupré said that he liked quiet, being a student. A front room on the third floor, however, pleased him, and he took it. He well knew the necessity of being on good terms with the *concierge*, who would spy on him anyhow, so he paid just a trifle more than requisite to that functionary, but not enough to arouse suspicion. Too much is as bad as too little, a fact that Dupré was well aware of.

He had taken pains to see that his window was directly over the front door of the café, but now that he was alone and the door locked, he scrutinised the position more closely. There was an awning over the front of the café that shut off his view of the pavement and the policeman marching below. That complicated matters. Still he remembered that when the sun went down the awning was rolled up. His first idea when he took the room was to drop the dynamite from the third story window to the pavement below, but the more he thought of that plan the less he liked it. It was the sort of thing any fool could do, as the policeman had said. It would take some thinking over. Besides, dynamite dropped on the pavement would, at most, but blow in the front of the shop, kill the perambulating

policeman perhaps, or some innocent passer-by, but it would not hurt old Sonne nor yet the *garçon* who had made himself so active in arresting Hertzog.

Dupré was a methodical man. He spoke quite truly when he said he was a student. He now turned his student training on the case as if it were a problem in mathematics.

First, the dynamite must be exploded inside the café. Second, the thing must be done so deftly that no suspicion could fall on the perpetrator. Third, revenge was no revenge when it (A) killed the man who fired the mine, or (B) left a trail that would lead to his arrest.

Dupré sat down at his table, thrust his hands in his pockets, stretched out his legs, knit his brows, and set himself to solve the conundrum. He could easily take a handbag filled with explosive material into the café. He was known there, but not as a friend of Hertzog's. He was a customer and a tenant, therefore doubly safe. But he could not leave the bag there, and if he stayed with it his revenge would rebound on himself. He could hand the bag to the waiter saying he would call for it again, but the waiter would naturally wonder why he did not give it to the *concierge*, and have it sent to his rooms; besides, the *garçon* was wildly suspicious. The waiter felt his unfortunate position. He dare not leave the Café Vernon, for he now knew that he was a marked man. At the Vernon he had police protection, while if he went anywhere else he would have no more safeguard than any other citizen; so he stayed on at the Vernon, such a course being, he thought, the least of two evils. But he watched every incomer much more sharply than did the policeman.

Dupré also realised that there was another difficulty about the handbag scheme. The dynamite must be set off either by a fuse or by clockwork machinery. A fuse caused smoke, and the moment a man touched a bag containing clockwork his hand felt the thrill of moving machinery. A man who hears for the first time the buzz of the rattlesnake's signal, like the shaking of dry peas in a pod, springs instinctively aside, even though he knows nothing of snakes. How much more, therefore, would a suspicious waiter, whose nerves were all alert for the soft, deadly purr of dynamite mechanism, spoil everything the moment his hand touched the bag? Yes, Dupré reluctantly admitted to himself, the handbag theory was not practical. It led to either self-destruction or prison.

What then was the next thing, as fuse or mechanism were unavailable? There was the bomb that exploded when it struck, and Dupré had himself made several. A man might stand in the middle of the street and shy it in through the open door. But then he might miss the doorway. Also until the hour the café closed the street was as light as day. Then the policeman was all alert for people in the middle of the street. His own safety depended upon it too. How was the man in the street to be dispensed with, yet the result attained? If the Boulevard was not so wide, a person on the opposite side in a front room might fire a dynamite bomb across, as they do from dynamite guns, but then there was—

"By God!" cried Dupré, "I have it!"

He drew in his outstretched legs, went to the window and threw it open, gazing down for a moment at the pavement below. He must measure the distance at night—and late at night too—he said to himself. He bought a ball of cord, as nearly the colour of the front of the building as possible. He left his window open, and after midnight ran the cord out till he estimated that it about reached the top of the café door. He stole quietly down and let himself out, leaving the door unlatched. The door to the apartments was at the extreme edge of the building, while the café doors were in the middle, with large windows on each side. As he came round to the front, his heart almost ceased to beat when a voice from the café door said—

"What do you want? What are you doing here at this hour?"

The policeman had become so much a part of the pavement in Dupré's mind that he had actually forgotten the officer was there night and day. Dupré allowed himself the luxury of one silent gasp, then his heart took up its work again.

"I was looking for you," he said quietly. By straining his eyes he noticed at the same moment that the cord dangled about a foot above the policeman's head, as he stood in the dark doorway.

"I was looking for you. I suppose you don't know of any—any chemist's shop open so late as this? I have a raging toothache and can't sleep, and I want to get something for it."

"Oh, the chemist's at the corner is open all night. Ring the bell at the right hand."

"I hate to disturb them for such a trifle."

"That's what they're there for," said the officer philosophically.

"Would you mind standing at the other door till I get back? I'll be as quick as I can. I don't wish to leave it open unprotected, and I don't want to close it, for the *concierge* knows I'm in and he is afraid to open it when any one rings late. You know me, of course; I'm in No. 16."

"Yes, I recognise you now, though I didn't at first. I will stand by the door until you return."

Dupré went to the corner shop and bought a bottle of toothache drops from the sleepy youth behind the counter. He roused him up however, and made him explain how the remedy was to be applied. He thanked the policeman, closed the door, and went up to his room. A second later the cord was cut at the window and quietly pulled in.

Dupré sat down and breathed hard for a few moments.

"You fool!" he said to himself; "a mistake or two like that and you are doomed. That's what comes of thinking too much on one branch of your subject. Another two feet and the string would have been down on his nose. I am certain he did not see it; I could hardly see it myself, looking for it. The guarding of the side door was an inspiration. But I must think well over every phase of the subject before acting again. This is a lesson."

As he went on with his preparations it astonished him to find how many various things had to be thought of in connexion with an apparently simple scheme, the neglect of any one of which would endanger the whole enterprise. His plan was a most uncomplicated one. All he had to do was to tie a canister of dynamite at the end of a string of suitable length, and at night, before the café doors were closed, fling it from his window so that the package would sweep in by the open door, strike against the ceiling of the café, and explode. First he thought of holding the end of the cord in his hand at the open window, but reflection showed him that if, in the natural excitement of the moment, he drew back or leant too far forward the package might strike the front of the house above the door, or perhaps hit the pavement. He therefore drove a stout nail in the window-sill and attached the end of the cord to that. Again, he had to render his canister of explosive so sensitive to any shock that he realised if he tied the cord around it and flung it out into the night the can might go off when the string was jerked tight and the explosion take place in mid-air above the street. So he arranged a spiral spring between can and cord to take up harmlessly the shock caused by the momentum of the package when the string became suddenly taut. He saw that the weak part of his project was the fact that everything would depend on his own nerve and accuracy of aim at the critical moment, and that a slight miscalculation to the right or to the left would cause the bomb, when falling down and in, to miss the door altogether. He would have but one chance, and there was no opportunity of practising. However, Dupré, who was a philosophical man, said to himself that if people allowed small technical difficulties to trouble them too much, nothing really worth doing would be accomplished in this world. He felt sure he was going to make some little mistake that would ruin all his plans, but he resolved to do the best he could and accept the consequences with all the composure at his command.

As he stood by the window on the fatal night with the canister in his hand he tried to recollect if there was anything left undone or any tracks remaining uncovered. There was no light in his room, but a fire burned in the grate, throwing flickering reflections on the opposite wall.

"There are four things I must do," he murmured: "first, pull up the string; second, throw it in the fire; third, draw out the nail; fourth, close the window."

He was pleased to notice that his heart was not beating faster than usual. "I think I have myself well in hand, yet I must not be too cool when I get downstairs. There are so many things to think of all at one time," he said to himself with a sigh. He looked up and down the street. The pavement was

clear. He waited until the policeman had passed the door. He would take ten steps before he turned on his beat. When his back was towards the café door Dupré launched his bomb out into the night.

He drew back instantly and watched the nail. It held when the jerk came. A moment later the whole building lurched like a drunken man, heaving its shoulders as it were. Dupré was startled by a great square of plaster coming down on his table with a crash. Below, there was a roar of muffled thunder. The floor trembled under him after the heave. The glass in the window clattered down, and he felt the air smite him on the breast as if some one had struck him a blow.

He looked out for a moment. The concussion had extinguished the street lamps opposite. All was dark in front of the café where a moment before the Boulevard was flooded with light. A cloud of smoke was rolling out from the lower part of the house.

"Four things," said Dupré, as he rapidly pulled in the cord. It was shrivelled at the end. Dupré did the other three things quickly.

Everything was strangely silent, although the deadened roar of the explosion still sounded dully in his ears. His boots crunched on the plaster as he walked across the room and groped for the door. He had some trouble in pulling it open. It stuck so fast that he thought it was locked; then he remembered with a cold shiver of fear that the door had been unlocked all the time he had stood at the window with the canister in his hand.

"I have certainly done some careless thing like that which will betray me yet; I wonder what it is?"

He wrenched the door open at last. The lights in the hall were out; he struck a match, and made his way down. He thought he heard groans. As he went down, he found it was the *concierge* huddled in a corner.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, my God, my God!" cried the *concierge*, "I knew they would do it. We are all blown to atoms!"

"Get up," said Dupré, "you're not hurt; come with me and see if we can be of any use."

"I'm afraid of another explosion," groaned the *concierge*.

"Nonsense! There's never a second. Come along."

They found some difficulty in getting outside, and then it was through a hole in the wall and not through the door. The lower hall was wrecked.

Dupré expected to find a crowd, but there was no one there. He did not realise how short a time had elapsed since the disaster. The policeman was on his hands and knees in the street, slowly getting up, like a man in a dream. Dupré ran to him, and helped him on his feet.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the policeman, rubbing his head in his bewilderment.

"How was it done?"

"Oh, don't ask me. All at once there was a clap of thunder, and the next thing I was on my face in the street."

"Is your comrade inside?"

"Yes; he and M. Sonne and two customers."

"And the *garçon*, wasn't he there?" cried Dupré, with a note of disappointment in his voice.

The policeman didn't notice the disappointed tone, but answered—

"Oh, the *garçon*, of course."

"Ah," said Dupré, in a satisfied voice, "let us go in, and help them." Now the people had begun to gather in crowds, but kept at some distance from the café. "Dynamite! dynamite!" they said, in awed voices among themselves.

A detachment of police came mysteriously from somewhere. They drove the crowd still further back.

"What is this man doing here?" asked the Chief.

The policeman answered, "He's a friend of ours; he lives in the house."

"Oh," said the Chief.

"I was going in," said Dupré, "to find my friend, the officer, on duty in the café."

"Very well, come with us."

They found the policeman insensible under the *débris*, with a leg and both arms broken. Dupré helped to carry him out to the ambulance. M. Sonne was breathing when they found him, but died on the way to the hospital. The *garçon* had been blown to pieces.

The Chief thanked Dupré for his assistance.

They arrested many persons, but never discovered who blew up the Café Vernon, although it was surmised that some miscreant had left a bag containing an infernal machine with either the waiter or the proprietor.

AN ELECTRICAL SLIP

Public opinion had been triumphantly vindicated. The insanity plea had broken down, and Albert Prior was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and might the Lord have mercy on his soul. Everybody agreed that it was a righteous verdict, but now that he was sentenced they added, "Poor fellow!"

Albert Prior was a young man who had had more of his own way than was good for him. His own family—father, mother, brother, and sisters—had given way to him so much, that he appeared to think the world at large should do the same. The world differed with him. Unfortunately, the first to oppose his violent will was a woman—a girl almost. She would have nothing to do with him, and told him so. He stormed, of course, but did not look upon her opposition as serious. No girl in her senses could continue to refuse a young man with his prospects in life. But when he heard that she had become engaged to young Bowen, the telegraph operator, Prior's rage passed all bounds. He determined to frighten Bowen out of the place, and called at the telegraph office for that laudable purpose; but Bowen was the night operator, and was absent. The day man, with a smile, not knowing what he did, said Bowen would likely be found at the Parker Place, where Miss Johnson lived with her aunt, her parents being dead.

Prior ground his teeth and departed. He found Miss Johnson at home, but alone. There was a stormy scene, ending with the tragedy. He fired four times at her, keeping the other two bullets for himself. But he was a coward and a cur at heart, and when it came to the point of putting the two bullets in himself he quailed, and thought it best to escape. Then electricity did him its first disservice. It sent his description far and wide, capturing him twenty-five miles from his home. He was taken back to the county town where he lived, and lodged in gaol.

Public opinion, ever right and all-powerful, now asserted itself. The outward and visible sign of its action was an ominous gathering of dark-browed citizens outside the gaol. There were determined mutterings among the crowd rather than outspoken anger, but the mob was the more dangerous on that account. One man in its midst thrust his closed hand towards the sky, and from his fist dangled a rope. A cry like the growling of a pack of wolves went up as the mob saw the rope, and they clamoured at the gates of the gaol. "Lynch him! Gaoler, give up the keys!" was the cry.

The agitated sheriff knew his duty, but he hesitated to perform it. Technically, this was a mob—a mob of outlaws; but in reality it was composed of his fellow-townsmen, his neighbours, his friends—justly indignant at the commission of an atrocious crime. He might order them to be fired upon, and the order perhaps would be obeyed. One, two, a dozen might be killed, and technically again they would have deserved their fate; yet all that perfectly legal slaughter would be—for what? To save, for a time only, the worthless life of a wretch who rightly merited any doom the future might have in store for him. So the sheriff wrung his hands, bewailed the fact that such a crisis should have arisen during his term of office, and did nothing; while the clamours of the mob grew so loud that the trembling prisoner in his cell heard it, and broke out into a cold sweat when he quickly realised what it meant. He was to have a dose of justice in the raw.

"What shall I do?" asked the gaoler. "Give up the keys?"

"I don't know what to do," cried the sheriff, despairingly. "Would there be any use in speaking to them, do you think?"

"Not the slightest."

"I ought to call on them to disperse, and if they refused I suppose I should have them fired on."

"That is the law," answered the gaoler, grimly.

"What would you do if you were in my place?" appealed the sheriff. It was evident the stern Roman Father was not elected by popular vote in *that* county.

"Me?" said the gaoler. "Oh, I'd give 'em the keys, and let 'em hang him. It'll save you the trouble. If you have 'em fired on, you're sure to kill the very men who are at this moment urging 'em to go home. There's always an innocent man in a mob, and he's the one to get hurt every time."

"Well then, Perkins, you give them the keys; but for Heaven's sake don't say I told you. They'll be sorry for this to-morrow. You know I'm elected, but you're appointed, so you don't need to mind what people say."

"That's all right," said the gaoler, "I'll stand the brunt."

But the keys were not given up. The clamour had ceased. A young man with pale face and red eyes stood on the top of the stone wall that surrounded the gaol. He held up his hand and there was instant silence. They all recognised him as Bowen, the night operator, to whom *she* had been engaged.

"Gentlemen," he cried—and his clear voice reached the outskirts of the crowd—"don't do it. Don't put an everlasting stain on the fair name of our town. No one has ever been lynched in this county and none in this State, so far as I know. Don't let us begin it. If I thought the miserable scoundrel inside would escape—if I thought his money would buy him off—I'd be the man to lead you to batter down those doors and hang him on the nearest tree—and you know it." There were cheers at this. "But he won't escape. His money can't buy him off. He will be hanged by the law. Don't think it's mercy I'm preaching; it's vengeance!" Bowen shook his clenched fist at the gaol. "That wretch there has been in hell ever since he heard your shouts. He'll be in hell, for he's a dastard, until the time his trembling legs carry him to the scaffold. I want him to *stay* in this hell till he drops through into the other, if there is one. I want him to suffer some of the misery he has caused. Lynching is over in a moment. I want that murderer to die by the slow merciless cruelty of the law."

Even the worst in the crowd shuddered as they heard these words and realised as they looked at Bowen's face, almost inhuman in its rage, that his thirst for revenge made their own seem almost innocent. The speech broke up the crowd. The man with the rope threw it over into the gaol-yard, shouting to the sheriff, "Take care of it, old man, you'll need it."

The crowd dispersed, and the sheriff, overtaking Bowen, brought his hand down affectionately on his shoulder.

"Bowen, my boy," he said, "you're a brick. I'm everlastingly obliged to you. You got me out of an awful hole. If you ever get into a tight place, Bowen, come to me, and if money or influence will help you, you can have all I've got of either."

"Thanks," said Bowen, shortly. He was not in a mood for congratulations.

And so it came about, just as Bowen knew it would, that all the money and influence of the Prior family could not help the murderer, and he was sentenced to be hanged on September 21, at 6 A.M. And thus public opinion was satisfied.

But the moment the sentence was announced, and the fate of the young man settled, a curious change began to be noticed in public opinion. It seemed to have veered round. There was much sympathy for the family of course. Then there came to be much sympathy for the criminal himself. People quoted the phrase about the worst use a man can be put to. Ladies sent flowers to the condemned man's cell. After all, hanging him, poor fellow, would not bring Miss Johnson back to life. However, few spoke of Miss Johnson, she was forgotten by all but one man, who ground his teeth when he realised the instability of public opinion.

Petitions were got up, headed by the local clergy. Women begged for signatures, and got them. Every man and woman signed them. All except one; and even he was urged to sign by a tearful lady, who asked him to remember that vengeance was the Lord's.

"But the Lord has his instruments," said Bowen, grimly; "and I swear to you, madam, that if you succeed in getting that murderer reprieved, I will be the instrument of the Lord's vengeance."

"Oh, don't say that," pleaded the lady. "Your signature would have *such* an effect. You were noble once and saved him from lynching; be noble again and save him from the gallows."

"I shall certainly not sign. It is, if you will pardon me, an insult to ask me. If you reprieve him you will make a murderer of me, for I will kill him when he comes out, if it is twenty years from now. You talk of lynching; it is such work as you are doing that makes lynching possible. The people seem all with you now, more shame to them, but the next murder that is committed will be followed by a lynching just because you are successful to-day."

The lady left Bowen with a sigh, depressed because of the depravity of human nature; as indeed she had every right to be.

The Prior family was a rich and influential one. The person who is alive has many to help; the one in the grave has few to cry for justice. Petitions calling for mercy poured in on the governor from all parts of the State. The good man, whose eye was entirely on his own re- election, did not know what to do. If any one could have shown him mathematically that this action or the other would gain or lose him exactly so many votes, his course would have been clear, but his own advisers were uncertain about the matter. A mistake in a little thing like this might easily lose him the election. Sometimes it was rumoured that the governor was going to commute the sentence to imprisonment for life; then the rumour was contradicted.

People claimed, apparently with justice, that surely imprisonment for life was a sufficient punishment for a young man; but every one knew in his own heart that the commutation was only the beginning of the fight, and that a future governor would have sufficient pressure brought to bear upon him to let the young man go.

Up to September 20 the governor made no sign. When Bowen went to his duties on the night of the 20th he met the sheriff.

"Has any reprieve arrived yet?" asked Bowen. The sheriff shook his head sadly. He had never yet hanged a man, and did not wish to begin.

"No," said the sheriff. "And from what I heard this afternoon none is likely to arrive. The governor has made up his mind at last that the law must take its course."

"I'm glad of that," said Bowen.

"Well, I'm not."

After nine o'clock messages almost ceased coming in, and Bowen sat reading the evening paper. Suddenly there came a call for the office, and the operator answered. As the message came over the wire, Bowen wrote it down mechanically from the clicking instrument, not understanding its purport; but when he read it, he jumped to his feet, with an oath. He looked wildly around the room, then realised with a sigh of relief that he was alone, except for the messenger boy who sat dozing in a corner, with his cap over his eyes. He took up the telegram again, and read it with set teeth.

"*Sheriff of Brenting County, Brentingville.*

"Do not proceed further with execution of Prior. Sentence commuted. Documents sent off by to-night's mail registered. Answer that you understand this message.

"JOHN DAY, *Governor*."

Bowen walked up and down the room with knitted brow. He was in no doubt as to what he would do, but he wanted to think over it. The telegraph instrument called to him and he turned to it, giving the answering click. The message was to himself from the operator at the capital, and it told him he was to forward the sheriff's telegram without delay, and report to the office at the capital—a man's life depended on it, the message concluded. Bowen answered that the telegram to the sheriff would be immediately sent.

Taking another telegraph blank, he wrote:—

"*Sheriff of Brenting County, Brentingville.*

"Proceed with execution of Prior. No reprieve will be sent. Reply if you understand this message.

"JOHN DAY, *Governor*."

It is a pity it cannot be written that Bowen felt some compunction at what he was doing. We like to think that, when a man deliberately commits a crime, he should hesitate and pay enough deference to the proprieties as to feel at least a temporary regret, even if he goes on with his crime afterward. Bowen's thoughts were upon the dead girl, not on the living man. He roused the dozing telegraph messenger.

"Here," he said, "take this to the gaol and find the sheriff. If he is not there, go to his residence. If he is asleep, wake him up. Tell him this wants an answer. Give him a blank, and when he has filled it up, bring it to me; give the message to no one else, mind."

The boy said "Yes, sir," and departed into the night. He returned so quickly that Bowen knew without asking that he had found the sleepless sheriff at the gaol. The message to the governor, written in a trembling hand by the sheriff, was: "I understand that the execution is to take place. If you should change your mind, for God's sake telegraph as soon as possible. I shall delay execution until last moment allowed by law."

Bowen did not send that message, but another. He laughed—and then checked himself in alarm, for his laugh sounded strange. "I wonder if I am quite sane," he said to himself. "I doubt it."

The night wore slowly on. A man representing a Press association came in after twelve and sent a long dispatch. Bowen telegraphed it, taking the chances that the receiver would not communicate with the sender of the reprieve at the capital. He knew how mechanically news of the greatest importance was taken off the wire by men who have automatically been doing that for years. Anyhow all the copper and zinc in the world could not get a message into Brentingville, except through him, until the day operator came on, and then it would be too late.

The newspaper man, lingering, asked if there would be only one telegrapher on hand after the execution.

"I shall have a lot of stuff to send over and I want it rushed. Some of the papers may get out specials. I would have brought an operator with me but we thought there was going to be a reprieve —although the sheriff didn't seem to think so," he added.

"The day operator will be here at six, I will return as soon as I have had a cup of coffee, and we'll handle all you can write," answered Bowen, without looking up from his instrument.

"Thanks. Grim business, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I thought the governor would cave; didn't you?"

"I didn't know."

"He's a shrewd old villain. He'd have lost next election if he'd reprieved this man. People don't want to see lynching introduced, and a weak-kneed governor is Judge Lynch's friend. Well, good-night, see you in the morning."

"Good-night," said Bowen.

Daylight gradually dimmed the lamps in the telegraph room, and Bowen started and caught his breath as the church bell began to toll.

It was ten minutes after six when Bowen's partner, the day man, came in.

"Well, they've hanged him," he said.

Bowen was fumbling among some papers on his table. He folded two of them and put them in his inside pocket. Then he spoke:

"There will be a newspaper man here in a few moments with a good deal of copy to telegraph. Rush it off as fast as you can and I'll be back to help before you are tired."

As Bowen walked towards the gaol he met the scattered group of those who had been privileged to see the execution. They were discussing capital punishment, and some were yawningly complaining about the unearthly hour chosen for the function they had just beheld. Between the outside gate and the gaol door Bowen met the sheriff, who was looking ghastly and sallow in the fresh morning light.

"I have come to give myself up," said Bowen, before the official could greet him.

"To give yourself up? What for?"

"For murder, I suppose."

"This is no time for joking, young man," said the sheriff, severely.

"Do I look like a humourist? Read that."

First incredulity, then horror, overspread the haggard face of the sheriff as he read and re-read the dispatch. He staggered back against the wall, putting up his arm to keep himself from falling.

"Bowen," he gasped: "Do you—do you mean to—to tell me—that this message came for me last night?"

"I do."

"And you—you suppressed it?"

"I did—and sent you a false one."

"And I have hanged—a reprieved man?"

"You have hanged a murderer—yes."

"My God! My God!" cried the sheriff. He turned his face on his arm against the wall and wept. His nerves were gone. He had been up all night and had never hanged a man before.

Bowen stood there until the spasm was over. The sheriff turned indignantly to him, trying to hide the feeling of shame he felt at giving way, in anger at the witness of it.

"And you come to me, you villain, because I said I would help you if you ever got into a tight place?"

"Damn your tight place," cried the young man, "I come to you to give myself up. I stand by what I do. I don't squeal. There will be no petitions got up for *me*. What are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know, Bowen, I don't know," faltered the official, on the point of breaking down again. He did not wish to have to hang another man, and a friend at that. "I'll have to see the governor. I'll leave by the first train. I don't suppose you'll try to escape."

"I'll be here when you want me."

So Bowen went back to help the day operator, and the sheriff left by the first train for the capital.

Now a strange thing happened. For the first time within human recollection the newspapers were unanimous in commending the conduct of the head of the State, the organs of the governor's own party lavishly praising him; the opposition sheets grudgingly admitting that he had more backbone than they had given him credit for. Public opinion, like the cat of the simile, had jumped, and that unmistakably.

"In the name of all that's wonderful, sheriff," said the bewildered governor, "who signed all those petitions? If the papers wanted the man hanged, why, in the fiend's name, did they not say so before, and save me all this worry? Now how many know of this suppressed dispatch?"

"Well, there's you and your subordinates here and–"

"*We'll* say nothing about it."

"And then there is me and Bowen in Brentingville. That's all."

"Well, Bowen will keep quiet for his own sake, and you won't mention it."

"Certainly not."

"Then let's *all* keep quiet. The thing's safe if some of those newspaper fellows don't get after it. It's not on record in the books, and I'll burn all the documents."

And thus it was. Public opinion was once more vindicated. The governor was triumphantly re-elected as a man with some stamina about him.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE DEAD

It is a bad thing for a man to die with an unsatisfied thirst for revenge parching his soul. David Allen died, cursing Bernard Heaton and lawyer Grey; hating the lawyer who had won the case even more than the man who was to gain by the winning. Yet if cursing were to be done, David should rather have cursed his own stubbornness and stupidity.

To go back for some years, this is what had happened. Squire Heaton's only son went wrong. The Squire raged, as was natural. He was one of a long line of hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-swearing squires, and it was maddening to think that his only son should deliberately take to books and cold water, when there was manly sport on the country side and old wine in the cellar. Yet before now such blows have descended upon deserving men, and they have to be borne as best they may. Squire Heaton bore it badly, and when his son went off on a government scientific expedition around the world the Squire drank harder, and swore harder than ever, but never mentioned the boy's name.

Two years after, young Heaton returned, but the doors of the Hall were closed against him. He had no mother to plead for him, although it was not likely that would have made any difference, for the Squire was not a man to be appealed to and swayed this way or that. He took his hedges, his drinks, and his course in life straight. The young man went to India, where he was drowned. As there is no mystery in this matter, it may as well be stated here that young Heaton ultimately returned to England, as drowned men have ever been in the habit of doing, when their return will mightily inconvenience innocent persons who have taken their places. It is a disputed question whether the sudden disappearance of a man, or his reappearance after a lapse of years, is the more annoying.

If the old Squire felt remorse at the supposed death of his only son he did not show it. The hatred which had been directed against his unnatural offspring re-doubled itself and was bestowed on his nephew David Allen, who was now the legal heir to the estate and its income. Allen was the impecunious son of the Squire's sister who had married badly. It is hard to starve when one is heir to a fine property, but that is what David did, and it soured him. The Jews would not lend on the security —the son might return—so David Allen waited for a dead man's shoes, impoverished and embittered.

At last the shoes were ready for him to step into. The old Squire died as a gentleman should, of apoplexy, in his armchair, with a decanter at his elbow. David Allen entered into his belated inheritance, and his first act was to discharge every servant, male and female, about the place and engage others who owed their situations to him alone. Then were the Jews sorry they had not trusted him.

He was now rich but broken in health, with bent shoulders, without a friend on the earth. He was a man suspicious of all the world, and he had a furtive look over his shoulder as if he expected Fate to deal him a sudden blow—as indeed it did.

It was a beautiful June day, when there passed the porter's lodge and walked up the avenue to the main entrance of the Hall a man whose face was bronzed by a torrid sun. He requested speech with the master and was asked into a room to wait.

At length David Allen shuffled in, with his bent shoulders, glaring at the intruder from under his bushy eyebrows. The stranger rose as he entered and extended his hand.

"You don't know me, of course. I believe we have never met before. I am your cousin."

Allen ignored the outstretched hand.

"I have no cousin," he said.

"I am Bernard Heaton, the son of your uncle."

"Bernard Heaton is dead."

"I beg your pardon, he is not. I ought to know, for I tell you I am he."

"You lie!"

Heaton, who had been standing since his cousin's entrance, now sat down again, Allen remaining on his feet.

"Look here," said the new-comer. "Civility costs nothing and–"

"I cannot be civil to an impostor."

"Quite so. It *is* difficult. Still, if I am an impostor, civility can do no harm, while if it should turn out that I am not an impostor, then your present tone may make after arrangements all the harder upon you. Now will you oblige me by sitting down? I dislike, while sitting myself, talking to a standing man."

"Will you oblige me by stating what you want before I order my servants to turn you out?"

"I see you are going to be hard on yourself. I will endeavour to keep my temper, and if I succeed it will be a triumph for a member of our family. I am to state what I want? I will. I want as my own the three rooms on the first floor of the south wing—the rooms communicating with each other. You perceive I at least know the house. I want my meals served there, and I wish to be undisturbed at all hours. Next I desire that you settle upon me say five hundred a year—or six hundred —out of the revenues of the estate. I am engaged in scientific research of a peculiar kind. I can make money, of course, but I wish my mind left entirely free from financial worry. I shall not interfere with your enjoyment of the estate in the least."

"I'll wager you will not. So you think I am fool enough to harbour and feed the first idle vagabond that comes along and claims to be my dead cousin. Go to the courts with your story and be imprisoned as similar perjurers have been."

"Of course I don't expect you to take my word for it. If you were any judge of human nature you would see I am not a vagabond. Still that's neither here nor there. Choose three of your own friends. I will lay my proofs before them and abide by their decision. Come, nothing could be fairer than that, now could it?"

"Go to the courts, I tell you."

"Oh, certainly. But only as a last resort. No wise man goes to law if there is another course open. But what is the use of taking such an absurd position? You *know* I'm your cousin. I'll take you blindfold into every room in the place."

"Any discharged servant could do that. I have had enough of you. I am not a man to be black-mailed. Will you leave the house yourself, or shall I call the servants to put you out?"

"I should be sorry to trouble you," said Heaton, rising. "That is your last word, I take it?"

"Absolutely."

"Then good-bye. We shall meet at Philippi."

Allen watched him disappear down the avenue, and it dimly occurred to him that he had not acted diplomatically.

Heaton went directly to lawyer Grey, and laid the case before him. He told the lawyer what his modest demands were, and gave instructions that if, at any time before the suit came off, his cousin would compromise, an arrangement avoiding publicity should be arrived at.

"Excuse me for saying that looks like weakness," remarked the lawyer.

"I know it does," answered Heaton. "But my case is so strong that I can afford to have it appear weak."

The lawyer shook his head. He knew how uncertain the law was. But he soon discovered that no compromise was possible.

The case came to trial, and the verdict was entirely in favour of Bernard Heaton.

The pallor of death spread over the sallow face of David Allen, as he realised that he was once again a man without a penny or a foot of land. He left the court with bowed head, speaking no word to those who had defended him. Heaton hurried after him, overtaking him on the pavement.

"I knew this had to be the result," he said to the defeated man. "No other outcome was possible. I have no desire to cast you penniless into the street. What you refused to me I shall be glad to offer you. I will make the annuity a thousand pounds."

Allen, trembling, darted one look of malignant hate at his cousin.

"You successful scoundrel!" he cried. "You and your villainous confederate Grey. I tell you–"

The blood rushed to his mouth; he fell upon the pavement and died. One and the same day had robbed him of his land and his life.

Bernard Heaton deeply regretted the tragic issue, but went on with his researches at the Hall, keeping much to himself. Lawyer Grey, who had won renown by his conduct of the celebrated case, was almost his only friend. To him Heaton partially disclosed his hopes, told what he had learned during those years he had been lost to the world in India, and claimed that if he succeeded in combining the occultism of the East with the science of the West, he would make for himself a name of imperishable renown.

The lawyer, a practical man of the world, tried to persuade Heaton to abandon his particular line of research, but without success.

"No good can come of it," said Grey. "India has spoiled you. Men who dabble too much in that sort of thing go mad. The brain is a delicate instrument. Do not trifle with it."

"Nevertheless," persisted Heaton, "the great discoveries of the twentieth century are going to be in that line, just as the great discoveries of the nineteenth century have been in the direction of electricity."

"The cases are not parallel. Electricity is a tangible substance."

"Is it? Then tell me what it is composed of? We all know how it is generated, and we know partly what it will do, but what *is* it?"

"I shall have to charge you six-and-eightpence for answering that question," the lawyer had said with a laugh. "At any rate there is a good deal to be discovered about electricity yet. Turn your attention to that and leave this Indian nonsense alone."

Yet, astonishing as it may seem, Bernard Heaton, to his undoing, succeeded, after many futile attempts, several times narrowly escaping death. Inventors and discoverers have to risk their lives as often as soldiers, with less chance of worldly glory.

First his invisible excursions were confined to the house and his own grounds, then he went further afield, and to his intense astonishment one day he met the spirit of the man who hated him.

"Ah," said David Allen, "you did not live long to enjoy your ill-gotten gains."

"You are as wrong in this sphere of existence as you were in the other.

I am not dead."

"Then why are you here and in this shape?"

"I suppose there is no harm in telling *you*. What I wanted to discover, at the time you would not give me a hearing, was how to separate the spirit from its servant, the body—that is, temporarily and not finally. My body is at this moment lying apparently asleep in a locked room in my house—one of the rooms I begged from you. In an hour or two I shall return and take possession of it."

"And how do you take possession of it and quit it?"

Heaton, pleased to notice the absence of that rancour which had formerly been Allen's most prominent characteristic, and feeling that any information given to a disembodied spirit was safe as far as the world was concerned, launched out on the subject that possessed his whole mind.

"It is very interesting," said Allen, when he had finished.

And so they parted.

David Allen at once proceeded to the Hall, which he had not seen since the day he left it to attend the trial. He passed quickly through the familiar apartments until he entered the locked room on the first floor of the south wing. There on the bed lay the body of Heaton, most of the colour gone from the face, but breathing regularly, if almost imperceptibly, like a mechanical wax-figure.

If a watcher had been in the room, he would have seen the colour slowly return to the face and the sleeper gradually awaken, at last rising from the bed.

Allen, in the body of Heaton, at first felt very uncomfortable, as a man does who puts on an ill-fitting suit of clothes. The limitations caused by the wearing of a body also discommoded him. He looked carefully around the room. It was plainly furnished. A desk in the corner he found contained the MS. of a book prepared for the printer, all executed with the neat accuracy of a scientific man. Above the desk, pasted against the wall, was a sheet of paper headed:

"What to do if I am found here apparently dead." Underneath were plainly written instructions. It was evident that Heaton had taken no one into his confidence.

It is well if you go in for revenge to make it as complete as possible. Allen gathered up the MS., placed it in the grate, and set a match to it. Thus he at once destroyed his enemy's chances of posthumous renown, and also removed evidence that might, in certain contingencies, prove Heaton's insanity.

Unlocking the door, he proceeded down the stairs, where he met a servant who told him luncheon was ready. He noticed that the servant was one whom he had discharged, so he came to the conclusion that Heaton had taken back all the old retainers who had applied to him when the result of the trial became public. Before lunch was over he saw that some of his own servants were also there still.

"Send the gamekeeper to me," said Allen to the servant.

Brown came in, who had been on the estate for twenty years continuously, with the exception of the few months after Allen had packed him off.

"What pistols have I, Brown?"

"Well, sir, there's the old Squire's duelling pistols, rather out of date, sir; then your own pair and that American revolver."

"Is the revolver in working order?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Then bring it to me and some cartridges."

When Brown returned with the revolver his master took it and examined it.

"Be careful, sir," said Brown, anxiously. "You know it's a self-cocker, sir."

"A what?"

"A self-cocking revolver, sir"—trying to repress his astonishment at the question his master asked about a weapon with which he should have been familiar.

"Show me what you mean," said Allen, handing back the revolver.

Brown explained that the mere pulling of the trigger fired the weapon.

"Now shoot at the end window—never mind the glass. Don't stand gaping at me, do as I tell you."

Brown fired the revolver, and a diamond pane snapped out of the window.

"How many times will that shoot without reloading?"

"Seven times, sir."

"Very good. Put in a cartridge for the one you fired and leave the revolver with me. Find out when there is a train to town, and let me know."

It will be remembered that the dining-room incident was used at the trial, but without effect, as going to show that Bernard Heaton was insane. Brown also testified that there was something queer about his master that day.

David Allen found all the money he needed in the pockets of Bernard Heaton. He caught his train, and took a cab from the station directly to the law offices of Messrs. Grey, Leason and Grey, anxious to catch the lawyer before he left for the day.

The clerk sent up word that Mr. Heaton wished to see the senior Mr.

Grey for a few moments. Allen was asked to walk up.

"You know the way, sir," said the clerk.

Allen hesitated.

"Announce me, if you please."

The clerk, being well trained, showed no surprise, but led the visitor to Mr. Grey's door.

"How are you, Heaton?" said the lawyer, cordially. "Take a chair. Where have you been keeping yourself this long time? How are the Indian experiments coming on?"

"Admirably, admirably," answered Allen.

At the sound of his voice the lawyer looked up quickly, then apparently reassured he said—

"You're not looking quite the same. Been keeping yourself too much indoors, I imagine. You ought to quit research and do some shooting this autumn."

"I intend to, and I hope then to have your company."

"I shall be pleased to run down, although I am no great hand at a gun."

"I want to speak with you a few moments in private. Would you mind locking the door so that we may not be interrupted?"

"We are quite safe from interruption here," said the lawyer, as he turned the key in the lock; then resuming his seat he added, "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It is rather serious. Do you mind my sitting here?" asked Allen, as he drew up his chair so that he was between Grey and the door, with the table separating them. The lawyer was watching him with anxious face, but without, as yet, serious apprehension.

"Now," said Allen, "will you answer me a simple question? To whom are you talking?"

"To whom—?" The lawyer in his amazement could get no further.

"Yes. To whom are you talking? Name him."

"Heaton, what is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Well, you have mentioned a name, but, being a villain and a lawyer, you cannot give a direct answer to a very simple question. You think you are talking to that poor fool Bernard Heaton. It is true that the body you are staring at is Heaton's body, but the man you are talking to is—David Allen—the man you swindled and then murdered. Sit down. If you move you are a dead man. Don't try to edge to the door. There are seven deaths in this revolver and the whole seven can be let loose in less than that many seconds, for this is a self-cocking instrument. Now it will take you at least ten seconds to get to the door, so remain exactly where you are. That advice will strike you as wise, even if, as you think, you have to do with a madman. You asked me a minute ago how the Indian experiments were coming on, and I answered admirably. Bernard Heaton left his body this morning, and I, David Allen, am now in possession of it. Do you understand? I admit it is a little difficult for the legal mind to grasp such a situation."

"Ah, not at all," said Grey, airily. "I comprehend it perfectly. The man I see before me is the spirit, life, soul, whatever you like to call it—of David Allen in the body of my friend Bernard Heaton. The— ah—essence of my friend is at this moment fruitlessly searching for his missing body. Perhaps he is in this room now, not knowing how to get out a spiritual writ of ejectment against you."

"You show more quickness than I expected of you," said Allen.

"Thanks," rejoined Grey, although he said to himself, "Heaton has gone mad! stark staring mad, as I expected he would. He is armed. The situation is becoming dangerous. I must humour him."

"Thanks. And now may I ask what you propose to do? You have not come here for legal advice. You never, unluckily for me, were a client of mine."

"No. I did not come either to give or take advice. I am here, alone with you—you gave orders that we were not to be disturbed, remember— for the sole purpose of revenging myself on you and on Heaton. Now listen, for the scheme will commend itself to your ingenious mind. I shall murder you in this room. I shall then give myself up. I shall vacate this body in Newgate prison and your friend may then resume his tenancy or not as he chooses. He may allow the unoccupied body to die in the

cell or he may take possession of it and be hanged for murder. Do you appreciate the completeness of my vengeance on you both? Do you think your friend will care to put on his body again?"

"It is a nice question," said the lawyer, as he edged his chair imperceptibly along and tried to grope behind himself, unperceived by his visitor, for the electric button, placed against the wall. "It is a nice question, and I would like to have time to consider it in all its bearings before I gave an answer."

"You shall have all the time you care to allow yourself. I am in no hurry, and I wish you to realise your situation as completely as possible. Allow me to say that the electric button is a little to the left and slightly above where you are feeling for it. I merely mention this because I must add, in fairness to you, that the moment you touch it, time ends as far as you are concerned. When you press the ivory button, I fire."

The lawyer rested his arms on the table before him, and for the first time a hunted look of alarm came into his eyes, which died out of them when, after a moment or two of intense fear, he regained possession of himself.

"I would like to ask you a question or two," he said at last.

"As many as you choose. I am in no hurry, as I said before."

"I am thankful for your reiteration of that. The first question is then: has a temporary residence in another sphere interfered in any way with your reasoning powers?"

"I think not."

"Ah, I had hoped that your appreciation of logic might have improved during your—well, let us say absence; you were not very logical—not very amenable to reason, formerly."

"I know you thought so."

"I did; so did your own legal adviser, by the way. Well, now let me ask why you are so bitter against me? Why not murder the judge who charged against you, or the jury that unanimously gave a verdict in our favour? I was merely an instrument, as were they."

"It was your devilish trickiness that won the case."

"That statement is flattering but untrue. The case was its own best advocate. But you haven't answered the question. Why not murder judge and jury?"

"I would gladly do so if I had them in my power. You see, I am perfectly logical."

"Quite, quite," said the lawyer. "I am encouraged to proceed. Now of what did my devilish trickiness rob you?"

"Of my property, and then of my life."

"I deny both allegations, but will for the sake of the argument admit them for the moment. First, as to your property. It was a possession that might at any moment be jeopardised by the return of Bernard Heaton."

"By the *real* Bernard Heaton—yes."

"Very well then. As you are now repossessed of the property, and as you have the outward semblance of Heaton, your rights cannot be questioned. As far as property is concerned you are now in an unassailable position where formerly you were in an assailable one. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"We come (second) to the question of life. You then occupied a body frail, bent, and diseased, a body which, as events showed, gave way under exceptional excitement. You are now in a body strong and healthy, with apparently a long life before it. You admit the truth of all I have said on these two points?"

"I quite admit it."

"Then to sum up, you are now in a better position—infinitely—both as regards life and property, than the one from which my malignity— ingenuity I think was your word—ah, yes—trickiness—thanks—removed you. Now why cut your career short? Why murder *me?* Why not live out your life, under better conditions, in luxury and health, and thus be completely revenged on Bernard Heaton? If you are logical, now is the time to show it."

Allen rose slowly, holding the pistol in his right hand.

"You miserable scoundrel!" he cried. "You pettifogging lawyer—tricky to the last! How gladly you would throw over your friend to prolong your own wretched existence! Do you think you are now talking to a biased judge and a susceptible, brainless jury? Revenged on Heaton? I *am* revenged on him already. But part of my vengeance involves your death. Are you ready for it?"

Allen pointed the revolver at Grey, who had now also risen, his face ashen. He kept his eyes fastened on the man he believed to be mad. His hand crept along the wall. There was intense silence between them. Allen did not fire. Slowly the lawyer's hand moved towards the electric button. At last he felt the ebony rim and his fingers quickly covered it. In the stillness, the vibrating ring of an electric bell somewhere below was audible. Then the sharp crack of the revolver suddenly split the silence. The lawyer dropped on one knee, holding his arm in the air as if to ward off attack. Again the revolver rang out, and Grey plunged forward on his face. The other five shots struck a lifeless body.

A stratum of blue smoke hung breast high in the room as if it were the departing soul of the man who lay motionless on the floor. Outside were excited voices, and some one flung himself ineffectually against the stout locked door.

Allen crossed the room and, turning the key, flung open the door. "I have murdered your master," he said, handing the revolver butt forward to the nearest man. "I give myself up. Go and get an officer."

OVER THE STELVIO PASS

There is no question about it, Tina Lenz was a flirt, as she had a perfect right to be, living as she did on the romantic shores of Como, celebrated in song, story, and drama as the lover's blue lake. Tina had many admirers, and it was just like her perversity to favor the one to whom her father most objected. Pietro, as the father truly said, was a beggarly Italian driver, glad of the few francs he got from the travellers he took over the humble Maloga to the Engadine, or over the elevated Stelvio to the Tyrol, the lowest and the highest passes in Europe. It was a sad blow to the hopes as well as the family pride of old Lenz when Tina defiantly announced her preference for the driver of the Zweispanner. Old Lenz came of a long and distinguished line of Swiss hotel-keepers, noted for the success with which they squeezed the last attainable centime from the reluctant traveller. It was bad enough that he had no son to inherit his justly celebrated hotel (*pension* rates for a stay of not less than eight days), but he hoped for a son-in-law, preferably of Swiss extraction, to whom he might, in his old age, hand over the lucrative profession of deferentially skinning the wealthy Englishman. And now Tina had deliberately chosen a reckless, unstable Italian who would, in a short time, scatter to the winds the careful accumulation of years.

"Pietro, the scoundrel, will not have one piastra of my money," cried the old man wrathfully, dropping into Italian as he was speaking about a native of Italy.

"No, I shall see that he doesn't," said the girl. "I shall hold the purse, and he must earn what he spends."

"But if you marry him, you will not have any of it."

"Oh yes, I shall, papa," said Tina confidently; "you have no one else to leave it to. Besides, you are not old, and you will be reconciled to our marriage long before there is any question of leaving money."

"Don't be so sure of that," returned the hotel-keeper, much mollified, because he was old and corpulent, and red in the face.

He felt that he was no match for his daughter, and that she would likely have her own way in the long run, but he groaned when he thought of Pietro as proprietor of the prosperous *pension*. Tina insisted that she would manage the hotel on the strictest principles of her ancestors, and that she would keep Pietro lounging about the place as a picturesque ornament to attract sentimental visitors, who seemed to see some unaccountable beauty about the lake and its surroundings.

Meanwhile Landlord Lenz promptly discharged Pietro, and cursed the day and hour he had first engaged him. He informed the picturesque young man that if he caught him talking to his daughter he would promptly have him arrested for some little thefts from travellers of which he had been guilty, although the landlord had condoned them at the time of discovery, probably because he had a fellow-feeling in the matter, and saw the making of a successful hotel proprietor in the Zweispanner driver. Pietro, on his part, to make things pleasant all round, swore that on the first favourable opportunity he would run six inches of knife into the extensive corporation of the landlord, hoping in that length of steel to reach a vital spot. The ruddy face of old Lenz paled at this threat, for the Swiss are a peace-loving people, and he told his daughter sadly that she was going to bring her father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave through the medium of her lover's stiletto. This feat, however, would have been difficult to perform, as the girl flippantly pointed out to him, for the old man was as bald as the smooth round top of the Ortler; nevertheless, she spoke to her lover about it, and told him frankly that if there was any knife practice in that vicinity he need never come to see her again. So the young man with the curly black hair and the face of an angel, swallowed his resentment against his desired father-in-law, and promised to behave himself. He secured a position as driver at another hotel, for the season was brisk, and he met Tina when he could, at the bottom of the garden overlooking the placid lake, he on one side of the stone wall, she on the other.

If Landlord Lenz knew of these meetings he did not interfere; perhaps he was frightened of Pietro's stiletto, or perhaps he feared his daughter's tongue; nevertheless, the stars in their courses were fighting for the old man. Tina was naturally of a changeable disposition, and now that all opposition had vanished, she began to lose interest in Pietro. He could talk of little else than horses, and interesting as such conversation undoubtedly is, it palls upon a girl of eighteen leaning over a stone wall in the golden evening light that hovers above Como. There are other subjects, but that is neither here nor there, as Pietro did not recognise the fact, and, unfortunately for him, there happened to come along a member of the great army of the unemployed who did.

He came that way just in the nick of time, and proud as old Lenz was of his *pension* and its situation, it was not the unrivalled prospect (as stated in the hotel advertisements) that stopped him. It was the sight of a most lovely girl leaning over the stone wall at the foot of the garden, gazing down at the lake and singing softly to herself.

"By Jove!" said young Standish, "she looks as if she were waiting for her lover." Which, indeed, was exactly what Tina was doing, and it augured ill for the missing man that she was not the least impatient at his delay.

"The missing lover is a defect in the landscape which ought to be supplied," murmured young Standish as he unslung his knapsack, which, like that of the late John Brown, was strapped upon his back. He entered the *pension* and inquired the rates. Old Lenz took one glance at the knickerbockers, and at once asked twice as much as he would have charged a native. Standish agreed to the terms with that financial recklessness characteristic of his island, and the old man regretted he had not asked a third more.

"But never mind," he said to himself as the newly arrived guest disappeared to his room, "I shall make it up on the extras."

With deep regret it must be here admitted that young Standish was an artist. Artists are met with so often in fiction that it is a matter of genuine grief to have to deal with one in a narrative of fact, but it must be remembered that artists flock as naturally to the lake of Como as stock-brokers to the Exchange, and in setting down an actual statement of occurrences in that locality the unfortunate writer finds himself confronted with artists at every turn. Standish was an artist in water-colours, but whether that is a mitigation or an aggravation of the original offense the relater knoweth not. He speedily took to painting Tina amidst various combinations of lake and mountain scenery. Tina over the garden wall as he first saw her; Tina under an arch of roses; Tina in one of the clumsy but picturesque lake boats. He did his work very well, too. Old Landlord Lenz had the utmost contempt for this occupation, as a practical man should, but he was astonished one day when a passing traveller offered an incredible sum for one of the pictures that stood on the hall table. Standish was not to be found, but the old man, quite willing to do his guest a good turn, sold the picture. The young man, instead of being overjoyed at his luck, told the landlord, with the calm cheek of an artist, that he would overlook the matter this time, but it must not occur again. He had sold the picture, added Standish, for about one-third its real value. There was something in the quiet assurance of the youth that more than his words convinced old Lenz of the truth of his statement. Manner has much to do with getting a well-told lie believed. The inn-keeper's respect for the young man went up to the highest attainable point, and he had seen so many artists, too. But if such prices were obtained for a picture dashed off in a few hours, the hotel business wasn't in it as a money- making venture.

It must be confessed that it was a great shock to young Standish when he found that the fairy-like Tina was the daughter of the gross old stupid keeper of the inn. It would have been so nice if she had happened to be a princess, and the fact would have worked in well with the marble terrace overlooking the lake. It seemed out of keeping entirely that she should be any relation to old money-making Lenz. Of course he had no more idea of marrying the girl than he had of buying the lake of Como and draining it; still, it was such a pity that she was not a countess at least; there were so many of them in Italy too, surely one might have been spared for that *pension* when a man had to

stay eight days to get the lowest rates. Nevertheless, Tina did make a pretty water-colour sketch. But a man who begins sliding down a hill such as there is around Como, never can tell exactly where he is going to bring up. He may stop halfway, or he may go head first into the lake. If it were to be set down here that within a certain space of time Standish did not care one continental objurgation whether Tina was a princess or a char-woman, the statement would simply not be believed, because we all know that Englishmen are a cold, calculating race of men, with long side whiskers and a veil round their hats when they travel.

It is serious when a young fellow sketches in water-colours a charming sylph-like girl in various entrancing attitudes; it is disastrous when she teaches him a soft flowing language like the Italian; but it is absolute destruction when he teaches her the English tongue and watches her pretty lips strive to surround words never intended for the vocal resources of a foreigner. As all these influences were brought to bear on Walter Standish, what chance did the young fellow have? Absolutely as little as has the un-roped man who misses his footing on the Matterhorn.

And Tina? Poor little girl, she was getting paid back with a vengeance for all the heart-aches she had caused—Italian, German, or Swiss variety. She fell helplessly in love with the stalwart Englishman, and realised that she had never known before what the word meant. Bitterly did she regret the sham battles of the heart that she had hitherto engaged in. Standish took it so entirely for granted that he was the first to touch her lips (in fact she admitted as much herself) that she was in daily, hourly terror lest he should learn the truth. Meanwhile Pietro unburdened his neglected soul of strange oily imprecations that might have sounded to the uneducated ear of Standish like mellifluous benedictions, notwithstanding the progress he was making in Italian under Tina's tuition. However, Pietro had one panacea for all his woes, and that he proceeded to sharpen carefully.

One evening Standish was floating dreamily through the purple haze, thinking about Tina of course, and wondering how her piquant archness and Southern beauty would strike his sober people at home. Tina was very quick and adaptable, and he had no doubt she could act to perfection any part he assigned to her, so he was in doubt whether to introduce her as a remote connexion of the reigning family of Italy, or merely as a countess in her own right. It would be quite easy to ennoble the long line of hotel-keepers by the addition of "di" or "de" or some such syllable to the family name. He must look up the right combination of letters; he knew it began with "d." Then the *pension* could become dimly "A castle on the Italian lakes, you know"; in fact, he would close up the *pension* as soon as he had the power, or change it to a palace. He knew that most of the castles in the Tyrol and many of the palaces of Italy had become boarding- houses, so why not reverse the process? He was sure that certain furnishing houses in London could do it, probably on the hire system. He knew a fashionable morning paper that was in the habit of publishing personal items at so much a line, and he thought the following would read well and be worth its cost:—

"Mr. Walter Standish, of St. John's Wood, and his wife, the Comtessa di Lenza, are spending the summer in the lady's ancestral home, the Palazzio di Lenza, on the lake of Como."

This bright vision pleased him for a moment, until he thought it would be just his luck for some acquaintance to happen along who remembered the Palazzio Lenza when it was the Pension Lenz—rates on application. He wished a landslide would carry buildings, grounds, and everything else away to some unrecognisable spot a few hundred feet down the mountain.

Thus it was that young Standish floated along with his head in the clouds, swinging his cane in the air, when suddenly he was brought sharply down to earth again. A figure darted out from behind a tree, an instinct rather than reason caused the artist to guard himself by throwing up his left arm. He caught the knife thrust in the fleshy part of it, and the pain was like the red-hot sting of a gigantic wasp. It flashed through his brain then that the term cold steel was a misnomer. The next moment his right hand had brought down the heavy knob of his stout stick on the curly head of the Italian, and Pietro fell like a log at his feet. Standish set his teeth, and as gently as possible drew the stiletto from his arm, wiping its blade on the clothes of the prostrate man. He thought it better to soil Pietro's suit

than his own, which was newer and cleaner; besides, he held, perhaps with justice, that the Italian being the aggressor should bear any disadvantages arising from the attack. Finally, feeling wet at the elbow, he put the stiletto in his pocket and hurried off to the hotel.

Tina fell back against the wall with a cry at the sight of the blood. She would have fainted, but something told her that she would be well advised to keep her senses about her at that moment.

"I can't imagine why he should attack me," said Standish, as he bared his arm to be bandaged. "I never saw him before, and I have had no quarrel with any one. It could not have been robbery, for I was too near the hotel. I cannot understand it."

"Oh," began old Lenz, "it's easy enough to account for it. He–"

Tina darted one look at her father that went through him as the blade had gone through the outstretched arm. His mouth closed like a steel trap.

"Please go for Doctor Zandorf, papa," she said sweetly, and the old man went. "These Italians," she continued to Standish, "are always quarrelling. The villain mistook you for some one else in the dusk."

"Ah, that's it, very likely. If the rascal has returned to his senses, he probably regrets having waked up the wrong passenger."

When the authorities searched for Pietro they found that he had disappeared as absolutely as though Standish had knocked him through into China. When he came to himself and rubbed his head, he saw the blood on the road, and he knew his stroke had gone home somewhere. The missing knife would be evidence against him, so he thought it safer to get on the Austrian side of the fence. Thus he vanished over the Stelvio pass, and found horses to drive on the other side.

The period during which Standish loafed around that lovely garden with his arm in a sling, waited upon assiduously and tenderly by Tina, will always be one of the golden remembrances of the Englishman's life. It was too good to last for ever, and so they were married when it came to an end. The old man would still have preferred a Swiss innkeeper for a son-in-law, yet the Englishman was better than the beggarly Italian, and possibly better than the German who had occupied a place in Tina's regards before the son of sunny Italy appeared on the scene. That is one trouble in the continental hotel business; there is such a bewildering mixture of nationalities.

Standish thought it best not to go back to England at once, as he had not quite settled to his own satisfaction how the *pension* was to be eliminated from the affair and transformed into a palace. He knew a lovely and elevated castle in the Tyrol near Meran where they accepted passers-by in an unobtrusive sort of way, and there, he resolved, they would make their plans. So the old man gave them a great set-out with which to go over the pass, privately charging the driver to endeavour to get a return fare from Meran so as to, partly at least, cover the outlay. The carriage was drawn by five horses, one on each side of the pole and three in front. They rested the first night at Bormeo, and started early next day for over the pass, expecting to dine at Franzenshöhe within sight of the snowy Ortler.

It was late in the season and the weather was slightly uncertain, but they had a lovely Italian forenoon for going up the wonderful, zigzag road on the western side of the pass. At the top there was a slight sprinkling of snow, and clouds hung over the lofty Ortler group of peaks. As they got lower down a steady persistent rain set in, and they were glad to get to the shelter and warmth of the oblong stone inn at Franzenshöhe, where a good dinner awaited them. After dinner the weather cleared somewhat, but the clouds still obscured the tops of the mountains, and the roads were slippery. Standish regretted this, for he wanted to show his bride the splendid scenery of the next five miles where the road zigzags down to Trefoi, each elbow of the dizzy thoroughfare overhanging the most awful precipices. It was a dangerous bit of road, and even with only two horses, requires a cool and courageous driver with a steady head. They were the sole guests at the inn, and it needed no practised eye to see that they were a newly married couple. The news spread abroad, and every lounger about

the place watched them get into their carriage and drive away, one hind wheel of the carriage sliding on its skid, and all breaks on.

At the first turning Standish started, for the carriage went around it with dangerous speed. The whip cracked, too, like a succession of pistol shots, which was unusual going down the mountain. He said nothing to alarm his bride, but thought that the driver had taken on more wine than was good for him at the inn. At the second turn the wheel actually slid against and bumped the stone post that was the sole guard from the fearful precipice below. The sound and shock sent a cold chill up the back of Standish, for he knew the road well and there were worse places to come. His arm was around his wife, and he withdrew it gently so as not to alarm her. As he did so she looked up and shrieked. Following her glance to the front window of their closed carriage, where the back of the driver is usually to be seen, he saw pressed against the glass the distorted face of a demon. The driver was kneeling on his seat instead of sitting on it, and was peering in at them, the reins drawn over his shoulder, and his back to the horses. It seemed to Standish that the light of insanity gleamed from his eyes, but Tina saw in them the revengeful glare of the *vendetti*; the rage of the disappointed lover.

"My God! that's not our driver," cried Standish, who did not recognise the man who had once endeavoured to kill him. He sprang up and tried to open the front window, but the driver yelled out—

"Open that window if you dare, and I'll drive you over here before you get halfway down. Sit still, and I take you as far as the Weisse Knott. That's where you are going over. There you'll have a drop of a mile (*un miglio*)."

"Turn to your horses, you scoundrel," shouted Standish, "or I'll break every bone in your body!"

"The horses know the way, Signor Inglese, and all our bones are going to be broken, yours and your sweet bride's as well as mine."

The driver took the whip and fired off a fusilade of cracks overhead, beside them, and under them. The horses dashed madly down the slope, almost sending the carriage over at the next turn. Standish looked at his wife. She had apparently fainted, but in reality had merely closed her eyes to shut out the horrible sight of Pietro's face. Standish thrust his arm out of the open window, unfastened the door, and at the risk of his neck jumped out. Tina shrieked when she opened her eyes and found herself alone. Pietro now pushed in the frame of the front window and it dropped out of sight, leaving him face to face with her, with no glass between them. "Now that your fine Inglese is gone, Tina, we are going to be married; you promised it, you know."

"You coward," she hissed; "I'd rather die his wife than live yours."

"You're plucky, little Tina, you always were. But he left you. I wouldn't have left you. I won't leave you. We'll be married at the chapel of the Three Holy Springs, a mile below the Weisse Knott; we'll fly through the air to it, Tina, and our bed will be at the foot of the Madatseh Glacier. We will go over together near where the man threw his wife down. They have marked the spot with a marble slab, but they will put a bigger one for us, Tina, for there's two of us."

Tina crouched in the corner of the carriage and watched the face of the Italian as if she were fascinated. She wanted to jump out as her husband had done, but she was afraid to move, feeling certain that if she attempted to escape Pietro would pounce down upon her. He looked like some wild beast crouching for a spring. All at once she saw something drop from the sky on the footboard of the carriage. Then she heard her husband's voice ring out—

"Here, you young fool, we've had enough of this nonsense."

The next moment Pietro fell to the road, propelled by a vigorous kick. His position lent itself to treatment of that kind. The carriage gave a bump as it passed over Pietro's leg, and then Tina thinks that she fainted in earnest, for the next thing she knew the carriage was standing still, and Standish was rubbing her hands and calling her pleasant names. She smiled wanly at him.

"How in the world did you catch up to the carriage and it going so fast?" she asked, a woman's curiosity prompting her first words.

"Oh, the villain forgot about the short cuts. As I warned him, he ought to have paid more attention to what was going on outside. I'm going back now to have a talk with him. He's lying on the road at the upper end of this slope."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.