Marsh Richard

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Содержание

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My Aunt's Excursion

"Thomas," observed my aunt, as she entered the room, "I have taken you by surprise."

She had. Hamlet could scarcely have been more surprised at the appearance of the ghost of his father. I had supposed that she was in the wilds of Cornwall. She glanced at the table at which I had been seated.

"What are you doing? – having your breakfast?"

I perceived, from the way in which she used her glasses, and the marked manner in which she paused, that she considered the hour an uncanonical one for such a meal. I retained some fragments of my presence of mind.

"The fact is, my dear aunt, that I was at work a little late last night, and this morning I find myself with a trifling headache."

"Then a holiday will do you good."

I agreed with her. I never knew an occasion on which I felt that it would not.

"I shall be only too happy to avail myself of the opportunity

afforded by your unexpected presence to relax for a time, the strain of my curriculum of studies. May I hope, my dear aunt, that you propose to stay with me at least a month?"

"I return to-night."

"To-night! When did you come?"

"This morning."

"From Cornwall?"

"From Lostwithiel. An excursion left Lostwithiel shortly after midnight, and returns again at midnight to-day, thus giving fourteen hours in London for ten shillings. I resolved to take advantage of the occasion, and to give some of my poorer neighbours, who had never even been as far as Plymouth in their lives, a glimpse of some of the sights of the Great City. Here they are-I filled a compartment with them. There are nine."

There were nine-and they were about the most miscellaneous-looking nine I ever saw. I had wondered what they meant by coming with my aunt into my sitting-room. Now, if anything, I wondered rather more. She proceeded to introduce them individually-not by any means by name only.

"This is John Eva. He is eighty-two and slightly deaf. Good gracious, man! don't stand there shuffling, with your back against the wall: sit down somewhere, do. This is Mrs. Penna, sixty-seven, and a little lame. I believe you're eating peppermints again. I told you, Mrs. Penna, that I can't stand the odour, and I can't. This is her grandson, Stephen Treen, aged nine. He cried in the train."

My aunt shook her finger at Stephen Treen, in an admonitory fashion, which bade fair, from the look of him, to cause an immediate renewal of his sorrows.

"This is Matthew Holman, a converted drunkard who has been the worst character in the parish. But we are hoping better things of him now." Matthew Holman grinned, as if he were not certain that the hope was mutual, "This is Jane, and this is Ellen, two maids of mine. They are good girls, in their way, but stupid. You will have to keep your eye on them, or they will lose themselves the first chance they get." I was not amazed, as I glanced in their direction, to perceive that Jane and Ellen blushed.

"This," went on my aunt, and into her voice there came a sort of awful dignity, "is Daniel Dyer, I believe that he kissed Ellen in a tunnel."

"Please ma'am," cried Ellen, and her manner bore the hall-mark of truth, "it wasn't me, that I'm sure."

"Then it was Jane-which does not alter the case in the least." In saying this, it seemed to me that, from Ellen's point of view, my aunt was illogical. "I am not certain that I ought to have brought him with us; but, since I have, we must make the best of it. I only hope that he will not kiss young women when he is in the streets with me."

I also hoped, in the privacy of my own breast, that he would not kiss young women while he was in the streets with me-at least, when it remained broad day.

"This," continued my aunt, leaving Daniel Dyer buried in the

depths of confusion, and Jane on the verge of tears, "is Sammy Trevenna, the parish idiot. I brought him, trusting that the visit would tend to sharpen his wits, and at the same time, teach him the difference between right and wrong. You will have, also, to keep an eye upon Sammy. I regret to say that he is addicted to picking and stealing. Sammy, where is the address card which I gave you?"

Sammy-who looked his character, every inch of it! – was a lanky, shambling youth, apparently eighteen or nineteen years old. He fumbled in his pockets.

"I've lost it," he sniggered.

"I thought so. That is the third you have lost since we started. Here is another. I will pin it to your coat; then when you are lost, someone will be able to understand who you are. Last, but not least, Thomas, this is Mr. Poltifen. Although this is his first visit to London, he has read a great deal about the Great Metropolis. He has brought a few books with him, from which he proposes to read selections, at various points in our peregrinations, bearing upon the sights we are seeing, in order that instruction may be blended with our entertainment."

Mr. Poltifen was a short, thick-set individual, with that in his appearance which was suggestive of pugnacity, an iron-grey, scrubby beard, and a pair of spectacles-probably something superior in the cobbling line. He had about a dozen books fastened together in a leather strap, among them being-as, before the day was finished, I had good reason to be aware-a "History

of London," in seven volumes.

"Mr. Poltifen," observed my aunt, waving her hand towards the gentleman referred to, "represents, in our party, the quality of intelligent interest."

Mr. Poltifen settled his glasses on his nose and glared at me as if he dared me to deny it. Nothing could have been further from my mind.

"Sammy," exclaimed my aunt, "sit still. How many times have I to request you not to shuffle?"

Sammy was rubbing his knees together in a fashion the like of which I had never seen before. When he was addressed, he drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and he sniggered. I felt that he was the sort of youth anyone would have been glad to show round town.

My aunt took a sheet of paper from her hand-bag.

"This is the outline programme we have drawn up. We have, of course, the whole day in front of us, and I have jotted down the names of some of the more prominent places of interest which we wish to see." She began to read: "The Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, Woolwich Arsenal, the National Gallery, British Museum, South Kensington Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Zoological Gardens, Kew Gardens, Greenwich Hospital, Westminster Abbey, the Albert Memorial, the Houses of Parliament, the Monument, the Marble Arch, the Bank of England, the Thames Embankment, Billingsgate Fish Market, Covent Garden Market, the Meat

Market, some of the birthplaces of famous persons, some of the scenes mentioned in Charles Dickens's novels-during the winter we had a lecture in the schoolroom on Charles Dickens's London; it aroused great interest-and the Courts of Justice. And we should like to finish up at the Crystal Palace. We should like to hear any suggestions you would care to make which would tend to alteration or improvement-only, I may observe, that we are desirous of reaching the Crystal Palace as early in the day as possible, as it is there we propose to have our midday meal." I had always been aware that my aunt's practical knowledge of London was but slight, but I had never realised how slight until that moment. "Our provisions we have brought with us. Each person has a meat pasty, a potato pasty, a jam pasty, and an apple pasty, so that all we shall require will be water."

This explained the small brown-paper parcel which each member of the party was dangling by a string.

"And you propose to consume this-little provision at the Crystal Palace, after visiting these other places?" My aunt inclined her head. I took the sheet of paper from which she had been reading. "May I ask how you propose to get from place to place?"

"Well, Thomas, that is the point. I have made myself responsible for the entire charge, so I would wish to keep down expenses. We should like to walk as much as possible."

"If you walk from Woolwich Arsenal to the Zoological Gardens, and from the Zoological Gardens to Kew Gardens, you

will walk as far as possible-and rather more."

Something in my tone seemed to cause a shadow to come over my aunt's face.

"How far is it?"

"About fourteen or fifteen miles. I have never walked it myself, you understand, so the estimate is a rough one."

I felt that this was not an occasion on which it was necessary to be over-particular as to a yard or so.

"So much as that? I had no idea it was so far. Of course, walking is out of the question. How would a van do?"

"A what?"

"A van. One of those vans in which, I understand, children go for treats. How much would they charge, now, for one which would hold the whole of us?"

"I haven't the faintest notion, aunt. Would you propose to go in a van to all these places?" I motioned towards the sheet of paper. She nodded. "I have never, you understand, done this sort of thing in a van, but I imagine that the kind of vehicle you suggest, with one pair of horses, to do the entire round would take about three weeks."

"Three weeks? Thomas!"

"I don't pretend to literal accuracy, but I don't believe that I'm far wrong. No means of locomotion with which I am acquainted will enable you to do it in a day, of that I'm certain. I've been in London since my childhood, but I've never yet had time to see one-half the things you've got down upon this sheet of paper."

"Is it possible?"

"It's not only possible, it's fact. You country folk have no notion of London's vastness."

"Stupendous!"

"It is stupendous. Now, when would you like to reach the Crystal Palace?"

"Well, not later than four. By then we shall be hungry."

I surveyed the nine.

"It strikes me that some of you look hungry now. Aren't you hungry?"

I spoke to Sammy. His face was eloquent.

"I be famished."

I do not attempt to reproduce the dialect: I am no dialectician. I merely reproduce the sense; that is enough for me. The lady whom my aunt had spoken of as "Mrs. Penna, sixty-seven, and a little lame," agreed with Sammy.

"So be I. I be fit to drop, I be."

On this subject there was a general consensus of opinion-they all seemed fit to drop. I was not surprised. My aunt was surprised instead.

"You each of you had a treacle pasty in the train!"

"What be a treacle pasty?"

I was disposed to echo Mrs. Penna's query, "What be a treacle pasty?" My aunt struck me as really cutting the thing a little too fine.

"You finish your pasties now-when we get to the Palace I'll

see that you have something to take their place. That shall be my part of the treat."

My aunt's manner was distinctly severe, especially considering that it was a party of pleasure.

"Before we started it was arranged exactly what provisions would have to be sufficient. I do not wish to encroach upon your generosity, Thomas-nothing of the kind."

"Never mind, aunt, that'll be all right. You tuck into your pasties."

They tucked into their pasties with a will. Aunt had some breakfast with me-poor soul! she stood in need of it-and we discussed the arrangements for the day.

"Of course, my dear aunt, this programme of yours is out of the question, altogether. We'll just do a round on a 'bus, and then it'll be time to start for the Palace."

"But, Thomas, they will be so disappointed-and, considering how much it will cost me, we shall seem to be getting so little for the money."

"My dear aunt, you will have had enough by the time you get back, I promise you."

My promise was more than fulfilled-they had had good measure, pressed down and running over.

The first part of our programme took the form, as I had suggested, of a ride on a 'bus. Our advent in the Strand-my rooms are in the Adelphi-created a sensation. I fancy the general impression was that we were a party of lunatics, whom I was

personally conducting. That my aunt was one of them I do not think that anyone doubted. The way in which she worried and scurried and fussed and flurried was sufficient to convey that idea.

It is not every 'bus which has room for eleven passengers. We could not line up on the curbstone, it would have been to impede the traffic. And as my aunt would not hear of a division of forces, as we sauntered along the pavement we enjoyed ourselves immensely. The "parish idiot" would insist on hanging on to the front of every shop-window, necessitating his being dragged away by the collar of his jacket. Jane and Ellen glued themselves together arm in arm, sniggering at anything and everything-especially when Daniel Dyer digged them in the ribs from behind. Mrs. Penna, proving herself to be a good deal more than a little lame, had to be hauled along by my aunt on one side, and by Mr. Holman, the "converted drunkard," on the other. That Mr. Holman did not enjoy his position I felt convinced from the way in which, every now and then, he jerked the poor old soul completely off her feet. With her other hand my aunt gripped Master Treen by the hand, he keeping his mouth as wide open as he possibly could; his little trick of continually looking behind him resulting in collisions with most of the persons, and lamp-posts, he chanced to encounter. The deaf Mr. Eva brought up the rear with Mr. Poltifen and his strapful of books that gentleman favouring him with totally erroneous scraps of information, which he was, fortunately, quite unable to hear.

We had reached Newcastle Street before we found a 'bus which contained the requisite amount of accommodation. Then, when I hailed one which was nearly empty, the party boarded it. Somewhat to my surprise, scarcely anyone wished to go outside. Mrs. Penna, of course, had to be lifted into the interior, where Jane and Ellen joined her-I fancy that they fought shy of the ladder-like staircase-followed by Daniel Dyer, in spite of my aunt's protestations. She herself went next, dragging with her Master Treen, who wanted to go outside, but was not allowed, and, in consequence, was moved to tears. Messrs. Eva, Poltifen, Holman and I were the only persons who made the ascent; and the conductor having indulged in some sarcastic comments on things in general and my aunt's *protégés* in particular, which nearly drove me to commit assault and battery, the 'bus was started.

We had not gone far before I had reason to doubt the genuineness of Mr. Holman's conversion. Drawing the back of his hand across his lips, he remarked to Mr. Eva-

"It do seem as if this were going to be a thirsty job. 'Tain't my notion of a holiday-"

I repeat that I make no attempt to imitate the dialect. Perceiving himself addressed, Mr. Eva put his hand up to his ear.

"Beg pardon-what were that you said?"

"I say that I be perishing for something to drink. I be faint for want of it. What's a day's pleasure if you don't never have a chance to moisten your lips?"

Although this was said in a tone of voice which caused the foot-passengers to stand and stare, the driver to start round in his seat, as if he had been struck, and the conductor to come up to inquire if anything were wrong, it failed to penetrate Mr. Eva's tympanum.

"What be that?" the old gentleman observed.

"It do seem as if I were more deaf than usual."

I touched Mr. Holman on the shoulder.

"All right-leave him alone. I'll see that you have what you want when we get down; only don't try to make him understand while we're on this 'bus."

"Thank you kindly, sir. There's no denying that a taste of rum would do me good. John Eva, he be terrible hard of hearing-terrible; and the old girl she ain't a notion of what's fit for a man."

How much the insides saw of London I cannot say. I doubt if any one on the roof saw much. In my anxiety to alight on one with room I had not troubled about the destination of the 'bus. As, however, it proved to be bound for London Bridge, I had an opportunity to point out St. Paul's Cathedral, the Bank of England, and similar places. I cannot say that my hearers seemed much struck by the privileges they were enjoying. When the vehicle drew up in the station-yard, Mr. Holman pointed with his thumb-

"There be a public over there."

I admitted that there was.

"Here's a shilling for you-mind you're quickly back. Perhaps

Mr. Poltifen would like to come with you."

Mr. Poltifen declined.

"I am a teetotaller. I have never touched alcohol in any form."

I felt that Mr. Poltifen regarded both myself and my proceedings with austere displeasure. When all had alighted, my aunt, proceeding to number the party, discovered that one was missing; also, who it was.

"Where is Matthew Holman?"

"He's-he's gone across the road to-to see the time."

"To see the time! There's a clock up over the station there. What do you mean?"

"The fact is, my dear aunt, that feeling thirsty he has gone to get something to drink."

"To drink! But he signed the pledge on Monday!"

"Then, in that case, he's broken it on Wednesday. Come, let's get inside the station; we can't stop here; people will wonder who we are."

"Thomas, we will wait here for Matthew Holman. I am responsible for that man."

"Certainly, my dear aunt; but if we remain on the precise spot on which we are at present planted, we shall be prosecuted for obstruction. If you will go into the station, I will bring him to you there."

"Where are you going to take us now?"

"To the Crystal Palace."

"But-we have seen nothing of London."

"You'll see more of it when we get to the Palace. It's a wonderful place, full of the most stupendous sights; their due examination will more than occupy all the time you have to spare."

Having hustled them into the station, I went in search of Mr. Holman. "The converted drunkard" was really enjoying himself for the first time. He had already disposed of four threepennyworths of rum, and was draining the last as I came in.

"Now, sir, if you was so good as to loan me another shilling, I shouldn't wonder if I was to have a nice day, after all."

"I dare say. We'll talk about that later on. If you don't want to be lost in London, you'll come with me at once."

I scrambled them all into a train; I do not know how. It was a case of cram. Selecting an open carriage, I divided the party among the different compartments. My aunt objected; but it had to be. By the time that they were all in, my brow was damp with perspiration. I looked around. Some of our fellow-passengers wore ribbons, about eighteen inches wide, and other mysterious things; already, at that hour of the day, they were lively. The crowd was not what I expected.

"Is there anything on at the Palace?" I inquired of my neighbour. He laughed, in a manner which was suggestive.

"Anything on? What ho! Where are you come from? Why, it's the Foresters' Day. It's plain that you're not one of us. More shame to you, sonny! Here's a chance for you to join."

Foresters' Day! I gasped. I saw trouble ahead. I began to

think that I had made a mistake in tearing off to the Crystal Palace in search of solitude. I had expected a desert, in which my aunt's friends would have plenty of room to knock their heads against anything they pleased. But Foresters' Day! Was it eighty or a hundred thousand people who were wont to assemble on that occasion? I remembered to have seen the figures somewhere. The ladies and gentlemen about us wore an air of such conviviality that one wondered to what heights they would attain as the day wore on.

We had a delightful journey. It occupied between two and three hours-or so it seemed to me. When we were not hanging on to platforms we were being shunted, or giving the engine a rest, or something of the kind. I know we were stopping most of the time. But the Foresters, male and female, kept things moving, if the train stood still. They sang songs, comic and sentimental; played on various musical instruments, principally concertinas; whistled; paid each other compliments; and so on. Jane and Ellen were in the next compartment to mine-as usual, glued together; how those two girls managed to keep stuck to each other was a marvel. Next to them was the persevering Daniel Dyer. In front was a red-faced gentleman, with a bright blue tie and an eighteen-inch-wide green ribbon. He addressed himself to Mr. Dyer.

"Two nice young ladies you've got there, sir."

Judging from what he looked like at the back, I should say that Mr. Dyer grinned. Obviously Jane and Ellen tittered: they put their heads together in charming confusion. The red-faced

gentleman continued-

"One more than your share, haven't you, sir? You couldn't spare one of them for another gentleman? meaning me."

"You might have Jane," replied the affable Mr. Dyer.

"And which might happen to be Jane?"

Mr. Dyer supplied the information. The red-faced gentleman raised his hat. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, miss; hope we shall be better friends before the day is over."

My aunt, in the compartment behind, rose in her wrath.

"Daniel Dyer! Jane! How dare you behave in such a manner!"

The red-faced gentleman twisted himself round in his seat.

"Beg pardon, miss-was you speaking to me? If you're alone, I dare say there's another gentleman present who'll be willing to oblige. Every young lady ought to have a gent to herself on a day like this. Do me the favour of putting this to your lips; you'll find it's the right stuff."

Taking out a flat bottle, wiping it upon the sleeve of his coat, he offered it to my aunt. She succumbed.

When I found myself a struggling unit in the struggling mass on the Crystal Palace platform, my aunt caught me by the arm.

"Thomas, where have you brought us to?"

"This is the Crystal Palace, aunt."

"The Crystal Palace! It's pandemonium! Where are the members of our party?"

That was the question. My aunt collared such of them as she could lay her hands on. Matthew Holman was missing.

Personally, I was not sorry. He had been "putting his lips" to more than one friendly bottle in the compartment behind mine, and was on a fair way to having a "nice day" on lines of his own. I was quite willing that he should have it by himself. But my aunt was not. She was for going at once for the police and commissioning them to hunt for and produce him then and there.

"I'm responsible for the man," she kept repeating. "I have his ticket."

"Very well, aunt-that's all right. You'll find him, or he'll find you; don't you trouble."

But she did trouble. She kept on troubling. And her cause for troubling grew more and more as the day went on. Before we were in the main building-it's a journey from the low level station through endless passages, and up countless stairs, placed at the most inconvenient intervals-Mrs. Penna was *hors de combat*. As no seat was handy she insisted on sitting down upon the floor. Passers-by made the most disagreeable comments, but she either could not or would not move. My aunt seemed half beside herself. She said to me most unfairly,

"You ought not to have brought us here on a day like this. It is evident that there are some most dissipated creatures here. I have a horror of a crowd-and with all the members of our party on my hands-and such a crowd!"

"How was I to know? I had not the faintest notion that anything particular was on till we were in the train."

"But you ought to have known. You live in London."

"It is true that I live in London. But I do not, on that account, keep an eye on what is going on at the Palace. I have something else to occupy my time. Besides, there is an easy remedy-let us leave the place at once. We might find fewer people in the Tower of London-I was never there, so I can't say-or on the top of the Monument."

"Without Matthew Holman?"

"Personally, I should say 'Yes.' He, at any rate, is in congenial company."

"Thomas!"

I wish I could reproduce the tone in which my aunt uttered my name! it would cause the edges of the sheet of paper on which I am writing to curl.

Another source of annoyance was the manner in which the red-faced gentleman persisted in sticking to us, like a limpet-as if he were a member of the party. Jane and Ellen kept themselves glued together. On Ellen's right was Daniel Dyer, and on Jane's left was the red-faced gentleman. This was a condition of affairs of which my aunt strongly disapproved. She remonstrated with the stranger, but without the least effect. I tried my hand on him, and failed. He was the best-tempered and thickest-skinned individual I ever remember to have met.

"It's this way," I explained-he needed a deal of explanation. "This lady has brought these people for a little pleasure excursion to town, for the day only; and, as these young ladies are in her sole charge, she feels herself responsible for them. So would you

just mind leaving us?"

It seemed that he did mind; though he showed no signs of having his feelings hurt by the suggestion, as some persons might have done.

"Don't you worry, governor; I'll help her look after 'em. I've looked after a few people in my time, so the young lady can trust me-can't you, miss?"

Jane giggled. My impression is that my aunt felt like shaking her. But just then I made a discovery.

"Hallo! Where's the youngster?"

My aunt twirled herself round.

"Stephen! Goodness! where has that boy gone to?"

Jane looked through the glass which ran all along one side of the corridor.

"Why, miss, there's Stephen Treen over in that crowd there."

"Go and fetch him back this instant."

I believe that my aunt spoke without thinking. It did seem to me that Jane showed an almost criminal eagerness to obey her. Off she flew into the grounds, through the great door which was wide open close at hand, with Ellen still glued to her arm, and Daniel Dyer at her heels, and the red-faced gentleman after him. Almost in a moment they became melted, as it were, into the crowd and were lost to view. My aunt peered after them through her glasses.

"I can't see Stephen Treen-can you?"

"No, aunt, I can't. I doubt if Jane could, either."

"Thomas! What do you mean? She said she did."

"Ah! there are people who'll say anything. I think you'll find that, for a time, at any rate, you've got three more members of the party off your hands."

"Thomas! How can you talk like that? After bringing us to this dreadful place! Go after those benighted girls at once, and bring them back, and that wretched Daniel Dyer, and that miserable child, and Matthew Holman, too."

It struck me, from her manner, that my aunt was hovering on the verge of hysterics. When I was endeavouring to explain how it was that I did not see my way to start off, then and there, in a sort of general hunt, an official, sauntering up, took a bird's-eye view of Mrs. Penna.

"Hallo, old lady what's the matter with you? Aren't you well?"

"No, I be not well-I be dying. Take me home and let me die upon my bed."

"So bad as that, is it? What's the trouble?"

"I've been up all night and all day, and little to eat and naught to drink, and I be lame."

"Lame, are you?" The official turned to my aunt. "You know you didn't ought to bring a lame old lady into a crowd like this."

"I didn't bring her. My nephew brought us all."

"Then the sooner, I should say, your nephew takes you all away again, the better."

The official took himself off. Mr. Poltifen made a remark. His tone was a trifle sour.

"I cannot say that I think we are spending a profitable and pleasurable day in London. I understood that the object which we had in view was to make researches into Dickens's London, or I should not have brought my books."

The "parish idiot" began to moan.

"I be that hungry-I be! I be!"

"Here," I cried: "here's half-a-crown for you. Go to that refreshment-stall and cram yourself with penny buns to bursting point."

Off started Sammy Trevenna; he had sense enough to catch my meaning. My aunt called after him.

"Sammy! You mustn't leave us. Wait until we come."

But Sammy declined. When, hurrying after him, catching him by the shoulder, she sought to detain him, he positively showed signs of fight.

Oh! it was a delightful day! Enjoyable from start to finish. Somehow I got Mrs. Penna, with my aunt and the remnant, into the main building and planted them on chairs, and provided them with buns and similar dainties, and instructed them not, on any pretext, to budge from where they were until I returned with the truants, of whom, straightway, I went in search. I do not mind admitting that I commenced by paying a visit to a refreshment-bar upon my own account-I needed something to support me. Nor, having comforted the inner man, did I press forward on my quest with undue haste. Exactly as I expected, I found Jane and Ellen in a sheltered alcove in the grounds, with

Daniel Dyer on one side, the red-faced gentleman on the other, and Master Stephen Treen nowhere to be seen. The red-faced gentleman's friendship with Jane had advanced so rapidly that when I suggested her prompt return to my aunt, he considered himself entitled to object with such vehemence that he actually took his coat off and invited me to fight. But I was not to be browbeaten by him; and, having made it clear that if he attempted to follow I should call the police, I marched off in triumph with my prizes, only to discover that the young women had tongues of their own, with examples of whose capacity they favoured me as we proceeded. I believe that if I had been my aunt, I should, then and there, have boxed their ears.

My aunt received us with a countenance of such gloom that I immediately perceived that something frightful must have occurred.

"Thomas!" she exclaimed, "I have been robbed!"

"Robbed? My dear aunt! Of what-your umbrella?"

"Of everything!"

"Of everything? I hope it's not so bad as that."

"It is. I have been robbed of purse, money, tickets, everything, down to my pocket-handkerchief and bunch of keys."

It was the fact-she had. Her pocket, containing all she possessed-out of Cornwall-had been cut out of her dress and carried clean away. It was a very neat piece of work, as the police agreed when we laid the case before them. They observed that, of course, they would do their best, but they did not think there was

much likelihood of any of the stolen property being regained; adding that, in a crowd like that, people ought to look after their pockets, which was cold comfort for my aunt, and rounded the day off nicely.

Ticketless, moneyless, returning to Cornwall that night was out of the question. I put "the party" up. My aunt had my bed, Mrs. Penna was accommodated in the same room, the others somewhere and somehow. I camped out. In the morning, the telegraph being put in motion, funds were forthcoming, and "the party" started on its homeward way. The railway authorities would listen to nothing about lost excursion tickets. My aunt had to pay full fare-twenty-one and twopence halfpenny-for each. I can still see her face as she paid.

Two days afterwards Master Stephen Treen and Mr. Matthew Holman were reported found by the police, Mr. Holman showing marked signs of a distinct relapse from grace. My aunt had to pay for their being sent home. The next day she received, through the post, in an unpaid envelope, the lost excursion tickets. No comment accompanied them. Her visiting-card was in the purse; evidently the thief, having no use for old excursion tickets, had availed himself of it to send them back to her. She has them to this day, and never looks at them without a qualm. That was her first excursion; she tells me that never, under any circumstances, will she try another.

The Irregularity of the Juryman

Chapter I
THE JURYMAN IS STARTLED

His first feeling was one of annoyance. All-round annoyance. Comprehensive disgust. He did not want to be a juryman. He flattered himself that he had something better to do with his time. Half-a-dozen matters required his attention. Instead of which, here he was obtruding himself into matters in which he did not take the faintest interest. Actually dragged into interference with other people's most intimate affairs. And in that stuffy court. And it had been a principle of his life never to concern himself with what was no business of his. Talk about the system of trial by jury being a bulwark of the Constitution! At that moment he had no opinion of the Constitution; or its bulwarks either.

Then there were his colleagues. He had never been associated with eleven persons with whom he felt himself to be less in sympathy. The fellow they had chosen to be foreman he felt convinced was a cheesemonger. He looked it. The others looked, if anything, worse. Not, he acknowledged, that there was anything inherently wrong in being a cheesemonger. Still, one did not want to sit cheek by jowl with persons of that sort for

an indefinite length of time. And there were cases-particularly in the Probate Court-which lasted days; even weeks. If he were in for one of those! The perspiration nearly stood on his brow at the horror of the thought.

What was the case about? What was that inarticulate person saying? Philip Poland knew nothing about courts-and did not want to-but he took it for granted that the gentleman in a wig and gown, with his hands folded over his portly stomach, was counsel for one side or the other-though he had not the slightest notion which. He had no idea how they managed things in places of this sort. As he eyed him he felt that he was against him anyhow. If he were paid to speak, why did not the man speak up?

By degrees, for sheer want of something else, Mr. Roland found that he was listening. After all, the man was audible. He seemed capable, also, of making his meaning understood. So it was about a will, was it? He might have taken that for granted. He always had had the impression that the Probate Court was the place for wills. It seemed that somebody had left a will; and this will was in favour of the portly gentleman's client; and was as sound, as equitable, as admirable a legal instrument as ever yet was executed; and how, therefore, anyone could have anything to say against it surprised the portly gentleman to such a degree that he had to stop to wipe his forehead with a red silk pocket-handkerchief.

The day was warm. Mr. Roland was not fond of listening to speeches. And this one was-well, weighty. And about something

for which he did not care two pins. His attention wandered. It strayed perilously near the verge of a dose. In fact, it must have strayed right over the verge. Because the next thing he understood was that one of his colleagues was digging his elbow into his side, and proffering the information that they were going lunch. He felt a little bewildered. He could not think how it had happened. It was not his habit to go to sleep in the morning. As he trooped after his fellows he was visited by a hazy impression that that wretched jury system was at the bottom of it all.

They were shown into an ill-ventilated room. Someone asked him what he would have to eat. He told them to bring him what they had. They brought some hot boiled beef and carrots. The sight of it nearly made him ill. His was a dainty appetite. Hot boiled beef on such a day, in such a place, after such a morning, was almost the final straw. He could not touch it.

His companion attacked his plate with every appearance of relish. He made a hearty meal. Possibly he had kept awake. He commented on the fashion in which Mr. Roland had done his duty to his Queen and country.

"Shouldn't think you were able to pronounce much of an opinion on the case so far as it has gone, eh?"

"My good sir, the judge will instruct us as to our duty. If we follow his instructions we shan't go wrong."

"You think, then, that we are only so many automata, and that the judge has but to pull the strings."

Mr. Roland looked about him, contempt in his eye.

"It would be fortunate, perhaps, if we were automata."

"Then I can only say that we take diametrically opposite views of our office. I maintain that it is our duty to listen to the evidence, to weigh it carefully, and to record our honest convictions in the face of all the judges whoever sat upon the Bench."

Mr. Roland was silent. He was not disposed to enter into an academical discussion with an individual who evidently had a certain command of language. Others, however, showed themselves to be not so averse. The luncheon interval was enlivened by some observations on the jury system which lawyers-had any been present-would have found instructive. There were no actual quarrels. But some of the arguments were of the nature of repartees. Possibly it was owing to the beef and carrots.

They re-entered the court. The case recommenced. Mr. Roland had a headache. He was cross. His disposition was to return a verdict against everything and everyone, as his neighbour had put it, "in the face of all the judges who ever sat upon the Bench." But this time he did pay some attention to what was going on.

It appeared, in spite of the necessity which the portly gentleman had been under to use his red silk pocket-handkerchief, that there were objections to the will he represented. It was not easy at that stage to pick up the lost threads, but from what Mr. Roland could gather it seemed it

was asserted that a later will had been made, which was still in existence. Evidence was given by persons who had been present at the execution of that will; by the actual witnesses to the testator's signature; by the lawyer who had drawn the will. And then-!

Then there stepped into the witness-box a person whose appearance entirely changed Mr. Roland's attitude towards the proceedings; so that, in the twinkling of an eye, he passed from bored indifference to the keenest and liveliest interest. It was a young woman. She gave her name as Delia Angel. Her address as Barkston Gardens, South Kensington. At sight of her things began to hum inside Mr. Roland's brain. Where had he seen her before? It all came back in a flash. How could he have forgotten her, even for a moment, when from that day to this she had been continually present to his mind's eye?

It was the girl of the train. She had travelled with him from Nice to Dijon in the same carriage, which most of the way they had had to themselves. What a journey it was! And what a girl! During those fast-fleeting hours-on that occasion they had fled fast-they had discussed all subjects from Alpha to Omega. He had approached closer to terms of friendship with a woman than he had ever done in the whole course of his life before-or since. He was so taken aback by the encounter, so wrapped in recollections of those pleasant hours, that for a time he neglected to listen to what she was saying. When he did begin to listen he pricked up his ears still higher.

It was in her favour the latest will had been made-at least, partly. She had just returned from laying the testator in the cemetery in Nice when he met her in the train-actually! He recalled her deep mourning. The impression she had given him was that she had lately lost a friend. She was even carrying the will in question with her at the time. Then she began to make a series of statements which brought Mr. Roland's heart up into his mouth.

"Tell us," suggested counsel, "what happened in the train."

She paused as if to collect her thoughts. Then told a little story which interested at least one of her hearers more than anything he had ever listened to.

"I had originally intended to stop in Paris. On the way, however, I decided not to do so but to go straight through."

Mr. Roland remembered he had told her he was going, and wondered; but he resolved to postpone his wonder till she had finished.

"When we were nearing Dijon I made up my mind to send a telegram to the concierge asking her to address all letters to me in town. When we reached the station I got out of the train to do so. In the compartment in which I had travelled was a gentleman. I asked him to keep an eye on my bag till I returned. He said he would. On the platform I met some friends. I stopped to talk to them. The time must have gone quicker than I supposed, because when I reached the telegraph office I found I had only a minute or two to spare. I scribbled the telegram. As I turned I slipped

and fell-I take it because of the haste I was in. As I fell my head struck upon something; because the next thing I realized was that I was lying on a couch in a strange room, feeling very queer indeed. I did ask, I believe what had become of the train. They told me it was gone. I understand that during the remainder of the day, and through the night, I continued more or less unconscious. When next day I came back to myself it was too late. I found my luggage awaiting me at Paris. But of the bag, or of the gentleman with whom I left it in charge, I have heard nothing since. I have advertised, tried every means my solicitor advised; but up to the present without result."

"And the will" observed counsel, "was in that bag?"

"It was."

Mr. Roland had listened to the lady's narrative with increasing amazement. He remembered her getting out at Dijon; that she had left a bag behind. That she had formally intrusted it to his charge he did not remember. He recalled the anxiety with which he watched for her return; his keen disappointment when he still saw nothing of her as the train steamed out of the station. So great was his chagrin that it almost amounted to dismay. He had had such a good time; had taken it for granted that it would continue for at least a few more hours, and perhaps-perhaps all sorts of things. Now, without notice, on the instant, she had gone out of his life as she had come into it. He had seen her talking to her friends. Possibly she had joined herself to them. Well, if she was that sort of person, let her go!

As for the bag, it had escaped his recollection that there was such a thing. And possibly would have continued to do so had it not persisted in staring at him mutely from the opposite seat. So she had left it behind? Serve her right. It was only a rubbishing hand-bag. Pretty old, too. It seemed that feather-headed young women could not be even depended upon to look after their own rubbish. She would come rushing up to the carriage window at one of the stations. Or he would see her at Paris. Then she could have the thing. But he did not see her. To be frank, as they neared Paris, half obliviously he crammed it with his travelling cap into his kit-bag, and to continue on the line of candour-ignored its existence till he found it there in town.

And in it was the will! The document on which so much hinged-especially for her! The bone of contention which all this pother was about. Among all that she said this was the statement which took him most aback. Because, without the slightest desire to impugn in any detail the lady's veracity, he had the best of reasons for knowing that she had-well-made a mistake.

If he had not good reason to know it, who had? He clearly called to mind the sensation, almost of horror, with which he had recognised that the thing was in his kit-bag. Half-a-dozen courses which he ought to have pursued occurred to him-too late. He ought to have handed it over to the guard of the train; to the station-master; to the lost property office. In short, he ought to have done anything except bring it with him in his bag to town. But since he had brought it, the best thing to do seemed to be

to ascertain if it contained anything which would be a clue to its owner.

It was a small affair, perhaps eight inches long. Of stamped brown leather. Well worn. Original cost possibly six or seven shillings. Opened by pressing a spring lock. Contents: Four small keys on a piece of ribbon; two pocket-handkerchiefs, each with an embroidered D in the corner; the remains of a packet of chocolate; half a cedar lead-pencil; a pair of shoe-laces. And that was all. He had turned that bag upside down upon his bed, and was prepared to go into the witness-box and swear that there was nothing else left inside. At least he was almost prepared to swear. For since here was Miss Delia Angel-how well the name fitted the owner! – positively affirming that among its contents was the document on which for all he knew all her worldly wealth depended, what was he to think?

The bag had continued in his possession until a week or two ago. Then one afternoon his sister, Mrs. Tranmer, had come to his rooms, and having purchased a packet of hairpins, or something of the kind, had wanted something to put them in. Seeing the bag in the corner of one of his shelves, in spite of his protestations she had snatched it up, and insisted on annexing it to help her carry home her ridiculous purchase. Its contents-as described above-he retained. But the bag! Surely Agatha was not such an idiot, such a dishonest creature, as to allow property which was not hers to pass for a moment out of her hands.

During the remainder of Miss Angel's evidence-so far as it

went that day-one juryman, both mentally and physically, was in a state of dire distress. What was he to do? He was torn in a dozen different ways. Would it be etiquette for a person in his position to spring to his feet and volunteer to tell his story? He would probably astonish the Court. But-what would the Court say to him? Who had ever heard of a witness in the jury-box? He could not but suspect that, at the very least, such a situation would be in the highest degree irregular. And, in any case, what could he do? Give the lady the lie? It will have been perceived that his notions of the responsibilities of a juryman were his own, and it is quite within the range of possibility that he had already made up his mind which way his verdict should go; whether the will was in the bag or not-and "in the face of all the judges who ever sat upon the Bench."

The bag! the bag! Where was it? If, for once in a way, Agatha had shown herself to be possessed of a grain of the common sense with which he had never credited her!

At the conclusion of Miss Angel's examination in chief the portly gentleman asked to be allowed to postpone his cross-examination to the morning. On which, by way of showing its entire acquiescence, the Court at once adjourned.

And off pelted one of the jurymen in search of the bag.

CHAPTER II
MRS. TRANMER IS STARTLED

Mrs. Tranmer was just going up to dress for dinner when in burst her brother. Mr. Roland was, as a rule, one of the least excitable of men. His obvious agitation therefore surprised her the more. Her feelings took a characteristic form of expression-to her, an attentive eye to the proprieties of costume was the whole duty of a Christian.

"Philip! – what have you done to your tie?"

Mr. Roland mechanically put up his hand towards the article referred to; returning question for question.

"Agatha, where's that bag?"

"Bag? My good man, you're making your tie crookeder!"

"Bother the tie!" Mrs. Tranmer started: Philip was so seldom interjectional. "Do you hear me ask where that bag is?"

"My dear brother, before you knock me down, will you permit me to suggest that your tie is still in a shocking condition?"

He gave her one look-such a look! Then he went to the looking-glass and arranged his tie. Then he turned to her.

"Will that do?"

"It is better."

"Now, will you give me that bag-at once?"

"Bag? What bag?"

"You know very well what bag I mean-the one you took from

my room."

"The one I took from your room?"

"I told you not to take it. I warned you it wasn't mine. I informed you that I was its involuntary custodian. And yet, in spite of all I could say-of all I could urge, with a woman's lax sense of the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, you insisted on removing it from my custody. The sole reparation you can make is to return it at once-upon the instant."

She observed him with growing amazement-as well she might. She subsided into an armchair.

"May I ask you to inform me from what you're suffering now?"

He was a little disposed towards valetudinarianism, and was apt to imagine himself visited by divers diseases. He winced.

"Agatha, the only thing from which I am suffering at this moment is-is-"

"Yes; is what?"

"A feeling of irritation at my own weakness in allowing myself to be persuaded by you to act in opposition to my better judgment."

"Dear me! You must be ill. That you are ill is shown by the fact that your tie is crooked again. Don't consider my feelings, and pray present yourself in my drawing-room in any condition you choose. But perhaps you will be so good as to let me know if there is any sense in the stuff you have been talking about a bag."

"Agatha, you remember that bag you took from my room?"

"That old brown leather thing?"

"It was made of brown leather-a week or two ago?"

"A week or two? Why, it was months ago."

"My dear Agatha, I do assure you-"

"Please don't let us argue. I tell you it was months ago."

"I told you not to take it-"

"You told me not to take it? Why, you pressed it on me. I didn't care to be seen with such a rubbishing old thing; but you took it off your shelf and said it would do very well. So, to avoid argument, as I generally do, I let you have your way."

"I-I don't want to be rude, but a-a more outrageous series of statements I never heard. I told you distinctly that it wasn't mine."

"You did nothing of the sort. Of course I took it for granted that such a disreputable article, which evidently belonged to a woman, was not your property. But as I had no wish to pry into your private affairs I was careful not to inquire how such a curiosity found its way upon your shelves."

"Agatha, your-your insinuations-"

"I insinuate nothing. I only want to know what this fuss is about. As I wish to dress for dinner, perhaps you'll tell me in a couple of words."

"Agatha, where's that bag?"

"How should I know?"

"Haven't you got it?"

"Got it? Do you suppose I have a museum in which I preserve rubbish of the kind?"

"But-what have you done with it?"

"You might as well ask me what I've done with last year's gloves."

"Agatha-think! More hinges upon this than you have any conception. What did you do with that bag?"

"Since you are so insistent-and I must say, Philip, that your conduct is most peculiar-I will think, or I'll try to. I believe I gave the bag to Jane. Or else to Mrs. Pettigrew's little girl. Or to my needle-woman-to carry home some embroidery she was mending for me; I am most particular about embroidery, especially when its good. Or to the curate's wife, for a jumble sale. Or I might have given it to someone else. Or I might have lost it. Or done something else with it."

"Did you look inside?"

"Of course I did. I must have done. Though I don't remember doing anything of the kind."

"Was there anything in it?"

"Do you mean when you gave it me? If there was I never saw it. Am I going to be accused of felony?"

"Agatha, I believe you have ruined me."

"Ruined you! Philip, what nonsense are you talking? I insist upon your telling me what you mean. What has that wretched old bag, which would have certainly been dear at twopence, to do with either you or me?"

"I will endeavour to explain. I believe that I stood towards that bag in what the law regards as a fiduciary relation. I was

responsible for its safety. Its loss will fall on me."

"The loss of a twopenny-halfpenny bag?"

"It is not a question of the bag, but of its contents."

"What were its contents?"

"It contained a will."

"A will? – a real will? Do you mean to say that you gave me that bag without breathing a word about there being a will inside?"

"I didn't know myself until to-day."

By degrees the tale was told. Mrs. Tranmer's amazement grew and grew. She seemed to have forgotten all about its being time to dress for dinner.

"And you are a juryman?"

"I am."

"And you actually have the bag on which the whole case turns?"

"I wish I had."

"But was the will inside?"

"I never saw it."

"Nor I. It was quite an ordinary bag, and if it had been we must have seen it. A will isn't written on a scrappy piece of paper which could have been overlooked. Philip, the will wasn't in the bag. That young woman's an impostor."

"I don't believe it for a moment-not for a single instant. I am convinced that she supposes herself to be speaking the absolute truth. Even granting that she is mistaken, in what position do I

stand? I cannot go and say, 'I have lost your bag, but it doesn't matter, for the will was not inside.' Would she not be entitled to reply, 'Return me the bag in the condition in which I intrusted it to your keeping, and I will show that you are wrong'? It will not be enough for me to repeat that I have not the bag; my sister threw it into her dust-hole."

"Philip!"

"May she not retort, 'Then, for all the misfortunes which the loss of the bag brings on me, you are responsible'? The letter of the law might acquit me. My conscience never would. Agatha, I fear you have done me a serious injury."

"Don't talk like that! Under the circumstances you had no right to give me the bag at all."

"You are wrong; I did not give it you. On the contrary, I implored you not to take it. But you insisted."

"Philip, how can you say such a wicked thing? I remember exactly what happened. I had been buying some veils. I was saying to you how I hated carrying parcels, even small ones-"

"Agatha, don't let us enter into this matter now. You may be called upon to make your statement in another place. I can only hope that our statements will not clash."

For the first time Mrs. Tranmer showed symptoms of genuine anxiety.

"You don't mean to say that I'm to be dragged into a court of law because of that twopenny-halfpenny bag?"

"I think it possible. What else can you expect?

"I must tell this unfortunate young lady how the matter stands. I apprehend that I shall have to repeat my statement in open court, and that you will be called upon to supplement it. I also take it that no stone will be left unturned to induce you to give a clear and satisfactory account of what became of the bag after it passed into your hands."

"My goodness! And I know no more what became of it than anything."

"I must go to Miss Angel at once."

"Philip!"

"I must. Consider my position. I cannot enter the court as a juryman again without explaining to someone how I am placed. The irregularity would transgress all limits. I must communicate with Miss Angel immediately; she will communicate with her advisers, who will no doubt communicate with you."

"My goodness!" repeated Mrs. Tranmer to herself after he had gone. Still she did not proceed upstairs to dress.

CHAPTER III
THE PLAINTIFF IS STARTLED

Miss Angel was dressed for dinner. She was in the drawing-room with other guests of the hotel, waiting for the gong to sound, when she was informed that a gentleman wished to see her. On the heels of the information entered the gentleman himself. It seemed that Mr. Roland had only eyes for her. As if oblivious of others he moved rapidly forward. She regarded him askance. He, perceiving her want of recognition, introduce himself in a fashion of his own.

"Miss Angel, I'm the man who travelled with you from Nice to Dijon."

At once her face lighted up. Her eyes became as if they were illumined.

"Of course! To think that we should have met again! At last!"

To judge from certain comments which were made by those around one could not but suspect that Miss Angel's story was a theme of general interest. As a matter of fact, they were being entertained by her account of the day's proceedings at the very moment of Mr. Roland's entry. People in these small "residential" hotels are sometimes so extremely friendly. Altogether unexpectedly Mr. Roland found himself an object of interest to quite a number of total strangers. He was not the sort of man to shine in such a position, particularly as it was only too

plain that Miss Angel misunderstood the situation.

"Mr. Roland, you are like a messenger from Heaven. I have prayed for you to come, so you must be one. And at this time of all times-just when you are most wanted! Really your advent must be miraculous."

"Ye-es." The gentleman glanced around. "Might I speak to you for a moment in private?"

She regarded him a little quizzically.

"Everybody here knows my whole strange history; my hopes and fears; all about me. You needn't be afraid to add another chapter to the tale, especially since you have arrived at so opportune a moment."

"Precisely." His tone was expressive of something more than doubt. "Still, if you don't mind, I think I would rather say a few words to you alone."

The bystanders commenced to withdraw with some little show of awkwardness, as if, since the whole business had so far been public, they rather resented the element of secrecy. The gong sounding, Miss Angel was moved to proffer a suggestion.

"Come dine with me. We can talk when we are eating."

He shrank back with what was almost a gesture of horror.

"Excuse me-you are very kind-I really couldn't. If you prefer it, I will wait here until you have dined."

"Do you imagine that I could wait to hear what you have to say till after dinner? You don't know me if you do. The people are going. We shall have the room all to ourselves. My dinner

can wait."

The people went. They did have the room to themselves. She began to overwhelm him with her thanks, which, conscience-striken, he endeavoured to parry.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for coming in this spontaneous fashion-at this moment, too, of my utmost need."

"Just so."

"If you only knew how I have searched for you high and low, and now, after all, you appear in the very nick of time."

"Exactly."

"It would almost seem as if you had chosen the dramatic moment; for this is the time of all times when your presence on the scene was most desired."

"It's very good of you to say so; – but if you will allow me to interrupt you-I am afraid I am not entitled to your thanks. The fact is, I-I haven't the bag."

"You haven't the bag?"

Although he did not dare to look at her he was conscious that the fashion of her countenance had changed. At the knowledge a chill seemed to penetrate to the very marrow in his bones.

"I-I fear I haven't."

"You had it-I left it in your charge!"

"Unfortunately, that is the most unfortunate part of the whole affair."

"What do you mean?"

He explained. For the second time that night he told his tale. It

had not rolled easily off his tongue at the first time of telling. He found the repetition a task of exquisite difficulty. In the presence of that young lady it seemed so poor a story. Especially in the mood in which she was. She continually interrupted him with question and comment-always of the most awkward kind. By the time he had made an end of telling he felt as if most of the vitality had gone out of him. She was silent for some seconds-dreadful seconds; Then she drew a long breath, and she said: -

"So I am to understand, am I, that your sister has lost the bag-my bag?"

"I fear that it would seem so, for the present."

"For the present? What do you mean by for the present? Are you suggesting that she will be able to find it during the next few hours? Because after that it will be too late."

"I-I should hardly like to go so far as that, knowing my sister."

"Knowing your sister? I see. Of course I am perfectly aware that I had no right to intrust the bag to your charge even for a single instant: to you, an entire stranger; though I had no notion that you were the kind of stranger you seem to be. Nor had I any right to slip, and fall, and become unconscious and so allow that train to leave me behind. Still-it does seems a little hard. Don't you think it does?"

"I can only hope that the loss was not of such serious importance as you would seem to infer."

"It depends on what you call serious. It probably means the difference between affluence and beggary. That's all."

"On one point you must allow me to make an observation. The will was not in the bag."

"The will was not in the bag!"

There was a quality in the lady's voice which made Mr. Roland quail. He hastened to proceed.

"I have here all which it contained."

He produced a neat packet, in which were discovered four keys, two handkerchiefs, scraps of what might be chocolate, a piece of pencil, a pair of brown shoe-laces. She regarded the various objects with unsympathetic eyes.

"It also contained the will."

"I can only assure you that I saw nothing of it; nor my sister either. Surely a thing of that kind could hardly have escaped our observation."

"In that bag, Mr. Roland, is a secret pocket; intended to hold-secure from observation-banknotes, letters, or private papers. The will was there. Did you or your sister, in the course of your investigations, light upon the secret of that pocket?"

Something of the sort he had feared. He rubbed his hands together, almost as if he were wringing them.

"Miss Angel, I can only hint at my sense of shame; at my consciousness of my own deficiencies; and can only reiterate my sincere hope that the consequences of your loss may still be less serious than you suppose."

"I imagine that nothing worse than my ruin will result."

"I will do my best to guard against that."

"You! – what can you do-now?"

"I am at least a juryman."

"A juryman?"

"I am one of the jury which is trying the case."

"You!" Her eyes opened wider. "Of course! I thought I had seen you somewhere before today! That's where it was! How stupid I am! Is it possible?" Exactly what she meant by her disjointed remarks was not clear. He did not suspect her of an intention to flatter. "And you propose to influence your colleagues to give a decision in my favour?"

"You may smile, but since unanimity is necessary I can, at any rate, make sure that it is not given against you."

"I see. Your idea is original. And perhaps a little daring. But before we repose our trust on such an eventuality I should like to do something. First of all, I should like to interview your sister."

"If you please."

"I do please. I think it possible that when I explain to her how the matter is with me her memory may be moved to the recollection of what she did with my poor bag. Do you think I could see her if I went to her at once?"

"Quite probably."

"Then you and I will go together. If you will wait for me to put a hat on, in two minutes I will return to you here."

CHAPTER IV
TWO CABMEN ARE STARTLED

Hats are uncertain quantities. Sometimes they represent ten minutes, sometimes twenty, sometimes sixty. It is hardly likely that any woman ever "put a hat on" in two. Miss Angel was quick. Still, before she reappeared Mr. Roland had arrived at something which resembled a mental resolution. He hurled it at her as soon as she was through the doorway.

"Miss Angel, before we start upon our errand I should like to make myself clear to you at least upon one point. I am aware that I am responsible for the destruction of your hopes-morally and actually. I should like you therefore to understand that, should the case go against you, you will find me personally prepared to make good your loss so far as in my power lies. I should, of course, regard it as my simple duty."

She smiled at him, really nicely.

"You are Quixotic, Mr. Roland. Though it is very good of you all the same. But before we talk about such things I should like to see your sister, if you don't mind."

At this hint he moved to the door. As they went towards the hall he said: -

"I hope you are building no high hopes upon your interview with my sister. I know my sister, you understand; and though she is the best woman in the world, I fear that she attached so little

importance to the bag that she has allowed its fate to escape her memory altogether."

"One does allow unimportant matters to escape one's memory, doesn't one?"

Her words were ambiguous. He wondered what she meant. It was she who started the conversation when they were in the cab.

"Would it be very improper to ask what you think of the case so far as it has gone?"

He was sensible that it would be most improper. But, then, there had been so much impropriety about his proceedings already that perhaps he felt that a little more or less did not matter. He answered as if he had followed the proceedings with unflagging attention.

"I think your case is very strong."

"Really? Without the bag?"

It was a simple fact that he had but the vaguest notion of what had been stated upon the other side. Had he been called upon to give even a faint outline of what the case for the opposition really was he would have been unable to do so. But so trivial an accident did not prevent his expressing a confident opinion.

"Certainly; as it stands."

"But won't it look odd if I am unable to produce the will?"

Mr. Roland pondered; or pretended to.

"No doubt the introduction of the will would bring the matter to an immediate conclusion. But, as it is, your own statement is so clear that it seems to me to be incontrovertible."

"Truly? And do your colleagues think so also?"

He knew no more what his "colleagues" thought than the man in the moon. But that was of no consequence.

"I think you may take it for granted that they are not all idiots. I believe, indeed, that it is generally admitted that in most juries there is a preponderance of common sense."

She sighed, a little wistfully, as if the prospect presented by his words was not so alluring as she would have desired. She kept her eyes fixed on his face-a fact of which he was conscious.

"Oh, I wish I could find the will!"

While he was still echoing her wish with all his heart a strange thing happened.

The cabman turned a corner. It was dark. He did not think it necessary to slacken his pace. Nor, perhaps, to keep a keen look-out for what was advancing in an opposite direction. Tactics which a brother Jehu carefully followed. Another hansom was coming round that corner too. Both drivers, perceiving that their zeal was excessive, endeavoured to avoid disaster by dragging their steeds back upon their haunches. Too late! On the instant they were in collision. In that brief, exciting moment Mr. Roland saw that the sole occupant of the other hansom was a lady. He knew her. She knew him.

"It's Agatha!" he cried.

"Philip!" came in answer.

Before either had a chance to utter another word hansoms, riders, and drivers were on the ground. Fortunately the horses

kept their heads, being possibly accustomed to little diversions of the kind. They merely continued still, as if waiting to see what would happen next. In consequence he was able to scramble out himself, and to assist Miss Angel in following him.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I don't think so; not a bit."

"Excuse me, but my sister's in the other cab."

"Your sister!"

He did not wait to hear. He was off like a flash. From the ruins of the other vehicle-which seemed to have suffered most in the contact-he gradually extricated the dishevelled Mrs. Tranmer. She seemed to be in a sad state. He led her to a chemist's shop, which luckily stood open close at hand, accompanied by Miss Angel and a larger proportion of the crowd than the proprietor appeared disposed to welcome. He repeated the inquiry he had addressed to Miss Angel.

"Are you hurt?"

This time the response was different.

"Of course I'm hurt. I'm shaken all to pieces; every bone in my body's broken; there's not a scrap of life left in me. Do you suppose I'm the sort of creature who can be thrown about like a shuttlecock and not be hurt?"

Something, however, in her tone suggested that her troubles might after all be superficial.

"If you will calm yourself, Agatha, perhaps you may find that your injuries are not so serious as you imagine."

"They couldn't be, or I should be dead. The worst of it is that this all comes of my flying across London to take that twopenny-halfpenny bag to that ridiculous young woman of yours."

He started.

"The bag! Agatha! have you found it?"

"Of course I've found it. How do you suppose I could be tearing along with it in my hands if I hadn't?" The volubility of her utterance pointed to a rapid return to convalescence. "It seems that I gave it to Jane, or she says that I did, though I have no recollection of doing anything of the kind. As she had already plenty of better bags of her own, probably most of them mine, she didn't want it, so she gave it to her sister-in-law. Directly I heard that, I dragged her into a cab and tore off to the woman's house. The woman was out, and, of course, she'd taken the bag with her to do some shopping. I packed off her husband and half-a-dozen children to scour the neighbourhood for her in different directions, and I thought I should have a fit while I waited. The moment she appeared I snatched the bag from her hand, flung myself back into the cab-and now the cab has flung me out into the road, and heaven only knows if I shall ever be the same woman I was before I started."

"And the bag! Where is it?" She looked about her with bewildered eyes.

"The bag? I haven't the faintest notion. I must have left it in the cab."

Mr. Roland rushed out into the street. He gained the vehicle

in which Mrs. Tranmer had travelled. It seemed that one of the shafts had been wrenched right off, but they had raised it to what was as nearly an upright position as circumstances permitted.

"Where's the hand-bag which was in that cab?"

"Hand-bag?" returned the driver. "I ain't seen no hand-bag. So far I ain't hardly seen the bloomin' cab."

A voice was heard at Mr. Roland's elbows.

"This here bloke picked up a bag-I see him do it."

Mr. Roland's grip fastened on the shoulder of the "bloke" alluded to, an undersized youth apparently not yet in his teens. The young gentleman resented the attention.

"'Old 'ard, guv'nor! I picked up the bag, that's all right; I was just a-wondering who it might belong to."

"It belongs to the lady who was riding in the cab. Kindly hand it over."

It was "handed over"; borne back into the chemist's shop; proffered to Miss Angel.

"I believe that this is the missing bag, apparently not much the worse for its various adventures."

"It is the bag." She opened it. Apparently it was empty. But on her manipulating an unseen fastening an inner pocket was disclosed. From it she took a folded paper. "And here is the will!"

CHAPTER V
THE COURT IS STARTLED

They dined together-it was still not too late to dine-in a private room at the Piccadilly Restaurant. Mrs. Tranmer found that she was, indeed, not irreparably damaged; and by the time she could be induced to look over the fact that she was not what she called "dressed" she began to enjoy herself uncommonly well. Delia Angel was in the highest spirits, which, on the whole, was not surprising. The recovery of the bag and the will had transformed the world into a rose-coloured Paradise. The evening was one continuous delight. As for Philip Roland-his mood was akin to Miss Angel's. Everything which had begun badly was ending well. He was the host. The meal did credit to his choice-and to the cook. The wine was worthy of the toasts they drank. There was one toast which was not formally proposed, and of which, even in his heart he did not dream, but whose presence was answerable for not a little of the rapture which crowned the feast-"The Birth of Romance." His life had been tolerably commonplace and grey. For the first time that night Romance had entered into it. It was just possible that, maintaining the place it had gained, it would continue to the end. So might it be; for sure, the Spirit is the best of company.

After dinner the three journeyed together to Miss Angel's solicitor. He lived in town, not far away from where they were,

and though the hour was uncanonical it was not so very late. And though he was amazed at being required to do business at such a season, the tale they had to tell amazed him more. Nor was he indisposed to commend them for coming straight away to him with it at once.

He heard them to an end. Then he looked at the bag; then at the will. Then once more at the bag; then at the will again. Then he smoothed his chin.

"It seems to me-speaking without prejudice-that this ends the matter. In the face of this the other side is left without a leg to stand upon. With this in your hand" – he was tapping the will with his finger-tip-"I cannot but think, Miss Angel, that you must carry all before you."

"So I should imagine."

He contemplated Mr. Roland.

"So you, sir, are one of the jury. As at present advised, I cannot see how, in the course of action which you have pursued, blame can in any way be attached to you. But, at the same time, I am bound to observe that in the course of a somewhat lengthy experience I cannot recall a single instance of a juryman-an actual juryman-playing such a part as you have done. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, the position you have taken up is-in a really superlative degree-irregular."

Such, also, seemed to be the opinion of counsel before whom, at a matutinal hour, he laid the facts of the case. When, in view of those facts, counsel on both sides conferred before the

case was opened, the general feeling plainly pointed in the same direction. And, on its being stated in open court that, in face of the discovery of the vanished will, all opposition to Miss Delia Angel would, with permission, be at once withdrawn, it was incidentally mentioned how the discovery had been brought about. All eyes, turning to the jury-box, fastened on Philip Roland, whose agitated countenance pointed the allusion. The part which he had played having been made sufficiently plain, the judge himself joined in the general stare. His lordship went so far as to remark that while he was pleased to accede to the application which had been made to him to consider the case at an end, being of opinion that the matter had been brought to a very proper termination, still he could not conceal from himself that, so far as he could gather from what had been said, the conduct of one of the jurymen, even allowing some latitude-here his lordship's eyes seemed to twinkle-was marked by a considerable amount of irregularity.

Mitwaterstraand
THE STORY OF A SHOCK

Chapter I
THE DISEASE

On the night before their daughter's Wedding Mr. and Mrs. Staunton gave a ball. As the festivities were drawing to a close, Mr. Staunton button-holed the bridegroom of the morrow.

"By the way, Burgoyne, there's one thing with reference to Minnie I wish to speak to you about. I-I'm not sure I oughtn't to have spoken to you before."

In the ball-room they were playing a waltz. Mr. Burgoyne's heart was with the dancers.

"About Minnie? What about Minnie? Don't you think that the little I don't know about her already, I shall find out soon enough upon my own account?"

"This is something-this is something that you ought to be told."

Mr. Staunton hesitated, and the opportunity was lost. The next morning Mr. Burgoyne was married.

During their honeymoon the newly-married pair spent a night at Mont St. Michel. In the course of that night an unpleasant

incident took place. There was a bright moon, and the occupants of the bedrooms gathered on the balconies of the Maison Blanche to enjoy its radiance. The room next to theirs was tenanted by two sisters, Brooklyn girls. The costumes of these young ladies, although in that somewhat remote corner of the world, would have made an impression on the Boulevards, and still more emphatically in the Park. The married one-a Mrs. Homer Joy-wore some striking jewellery, in particular a diamond brooch, redolent of Tiffany, which would have attracted notice on a Shah night at the opera. Mr. Burgoyne had noticed this brooch earlier in the day, and had told himself that we must have returned to the days of King Alfred-with several points in our favour-if a woman could journey round the world with that advertisement in diamond work flashing in the sun.

Someone proposed a midnight stroll about the rock. They strolled. In the morning there was a terrible to-do. The advertisement in diamond work had disappeared! – stolen! – giving satisfactory proof that in those parts, at any rate, the days of King Alfred were now no more.

Mrs. Joy stated that, previous to starting for the midnight ramble about the Mount, she had placed it on her dressing-table, apparently despising the precaution of placing it even in an ordinary box. She was not even sure that she had closed her bedroom door, so it had, of course, struck the eye of the first person who strolled that way, and, in all probability, that person had, in the American sense, "struck it." Mont St. Michel was

still in a little tumult of excitement when Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne journeyed on their way.

Oddly enough, this discordant note, once struck, was struck again-kept on striking, in fact. At almost every place where the honeymooners stopped for an appreciable length of time there something was lost. It seemed fatality. At Morlaix, a set of quaint, old, hammered silver-spoons, which had accompanied their coffee, vanished-not, according to the indignant innkeeper, into thin air, but into somebody's pockets. It was most annoying. At Brest, Quimper Vannes, Nantes, and afterwards through Touraine and up the Loire, it was the same tale, the loss of something of appreciable value-somebody else's property, not their's-accompanied their visitation. The coincidence was singular. However they did seem to have shaken off the long arm of coincidence at last. There had been no sort of unpleasantness at either of the last two or three places at which they had stopped, and when they reached Paris at last, they were so contented with all the world, that each seemed to have forgotten everything in the existence of the other.

They stayed at the Grand Hotel-for privacy few places can compete with a large hotel-and directly they stayed the annoyances began again. It was indeed most singular. On the very morning after their arrival a notice was posted in the *salle de lecture* that the night before a lady had lost her fan-something historical in fans, and quite unique. She had been seated outside the reading-room-the Burgoynes must have been arriving at that

very moment-preparatory to going to the opera. She laid this wonderful fan on a chair beside her, it was only for an instant, yet when she turned it was gone. The administration charitably suggested-in their notice-that someone of their lady guests had mistaken it for her own.

That same evening a really remarkable tale was whispered about the place. A certain lady and gentleman-not our pair, but another-happened to be honeymooning in the hotel. Monsieur had left Madame asleep in bed. When she got up and began to dress, she discovered that the larger and more valuable portion of the jewellery which had been given her as wedding presents, and which she, perhaps foolishly, had brought abroad, had gone-apparently vanished into air. The curious part of the tale was this. She had dreamed that she saw a woman-unmistakably a lady-trying on this identical jewellery before the looking-glass. Query, was it a dream? Or had she, lying in bed, in a half somnolent condition, been the unconscious witness of an actual occurrence?

"Upon my word," declared Mr. Burgoyne to his wife, "If the thing weren't actually impossible, I should be inclined to believe that we were the victims of some elaborate practical joke; that people were in a conspiracy to make us believe that ill luck dogged our steps!"

Mrs. Burgoyne smiled. She was putting on her bonnet before the glass. They were preparing to sally out for a quiet dinner on the boulevard.

"You silly Charlie! What queer ideas you get in your head.

What does it matter to us if foolish people lose their things? We have not a mission to make folks wiser, or, what amounts to the same thing, to compel them to keep valuable things in secure places."

The lady, who had finished her performance at the glass, came and put her hands upon her lord's two shoulders,

"My dear child, don't look so black? I shall be much better prepared to discuss that, or any subject, when-we have dined."

The lady made a little *moue* and kissed him on the lips. Then they went downstairs. But when they had got so far upon their road, the gentleman discovered that he had brought no money in his pockets. Leaving his wife in the *salle de lecture*, he returned to his bedroom to supply the omission.

The desk in which he kept his loose cash was at that moment standing on the chest of drawers. On the top of it was a bag of his wife's-a bag on which she set much store. In it she kept her more particular belongings, and such care did she take of it that he never remembered to have seen it left out of her locked-up trunk before. Now, taking hold of it in his haste, he was rather surprised to find that it was unlocked-it was not only unlocked, but it flew wide open, and in flying open some of the contents fell upon the floor. He stooped to pick them up again.

The first thing he picked up was a silver spoon, the next was an ivory chessman, the next was a fan, and the next-was a diamond brooch.

He stared at these things in a sort of dream, and at the last

especially. He had seen the thing before. But where?

Good God! it came upon him in a flash! It was the advertisement in diamond work which had been the property of Mrs. Homer Joy!

He was seized with a sort of momentary paralysis, continuing to stare at the brooch as though he had lost the power of volition. It was with an effort that he obtained sufficient mastery over himself to be able to turn his attention to the other articles he held. He knew two of them. The spoon was one of the spoons which had been lost at Morlaix; the chessman was one of a very curious set of chessmen which had disappeared at Vannes. From the notice which had been posted in the *salle de lecture* he had no difficulty in recognising the fan which had vanished from the chair.

It was some moments before he realised what the presence of those things must mean, and when he did realize it a metamorphosis had taken place-the Charles Burgoyne standing there was not the Charles Burgoyne who had entered the room. Without any outward display of emotion, in a cold, mechanical way he placed the articles he held upon one side, and turned the contents of the bag out upon the drawers.

They presented a curious variety at any rate. As he gazed at them he experienced that singular phenomenon-the inability to credit the evidence of his own eyes. There were the rest of the chessmen, the rest of the spoons, nick-nacks, a quaint, old silver cream-jug, jewellery-bracelets, rings, ear-rings, necklaces,

pins, lockets, brooches, half the contents of a jeweller's shop. As he stood staring at this very miscellaneous collection, the door opened, and his wife came in.

She smiled as she entered.

"Charlie, have they taken your money too? Are you aware, sir, how hungry I am?"

He did not turn when he heard her voice. He continued motionless, looking at the contents of the bag. She advanced towards him and saw what he was looking at. Then he turned and they were face to face.

He never knew what was the fashion of his countenance. He could not have analysed his feelings to save his life. But, as he looked at her, his wife of yesterday, the woman whom he loved, she seemed to shrivel up before his eyes, and sank upon the floor. There was silence. Then she made a little gesture towards him with her two hands. She fell forward, hiding her face on the ground at his feet, prisoning his legs with her arms.

"How came these things into your bag?"

He did not know his own voice, it was so dry and harsh. She made no answer.

"Did you steal them?"

Still silence. He felt a sort of rage rising within him.

"There are one or two questions you must answer. I am sorry to have to put them; it is not my fault. You had better get up from the floor."

She never moved. For his life he could not have touched her.

"I suppose-." He was choked, and paused. "I suppose that woman's jewels are some of these?"

No answer. Recognising the hopelessness of putting questions to her now, he gathered the various articles together and put them back into the bag.

"I'm afraid you will have to dine alone."

That was all he said to her. With the bag in his hand he left the room, leaving her in a heap upon the floor. He sneaked rather than walked out of the hotel. Supposing they caught him red-handed, with that thing in his hand? He only began to breathe freely when he was out in the street.

Possibly no man in Paris spent the night of that twentieth of June more curiously than Mr. Burgoyne. When he returned it was four o'clock in the morning, and broad day. He was worn-out, haggard, the spectre of a man. In the bedroom he found his wife just as he had left her, in a heap upon the floor, but fast asleep. She had removed none of her clothes, not even her bonnet or her gloves. She had been crying-apparently had cried herself to sleep. As he stood looking down at her he realised how he loved her-the woman, the creature of flesh and blood, apart entirely from her moral qualities. He placed the bag within his trunk and locked it up. Then, kneeling beside his wife, he stooped and kissed her as she slept. The kiss aroused her. She woke as wakes a child, and, putting her arms about his neck, she kissed him back again. Not a word was spoken. Then she got up. He helped her to undress, and put her into a bed as though she were a child. Then he undressed

himself, and joined her. And they fell fast asleep locked in each other's arms.

That night they returned to London. The bag went with them. On the morning after their arrival, Mr. Burgoyne took a cab into the city, the fatal bag beside him on the seat. He drove straight to Mr. Staunton's office. When he entered, unannounced, his father-in-law started as though he were a ghost.

"Burgoyne! What brings you here? I hope there's nothing wrong?"

Mr. Burgoyne did not reply at once. He placed the bag-Minnie's bag-upon the table. He kept his eyes fixed upon his father-in-law's countenance.

"Burgoyne! Why do you look at me like that?"

"I have something here I wish to show you." That was Mr. Burgoyne's greeting. He opened the bag, and turned its contents out upon the table. "Not a bad haul from Breton peasants, – eh?"

Mr. Staunton stared at the heap of things thus suddenly disclosed.

"Burgoyne," he stammered, "what's the meaning of this?"

"Are you quite sure you don't know what it means?"

Looking up, Mr. Staunton caught the other's eyes. He seemed to read something there which carried dreadful significance to his brain. His glance fell and he covered his face with his hands. At last he found his voice.

"Minnie?"

The word was gasped rather than spoken. Mr. Burgoyne's

reply was equally brief.

"Minnie!"

"Good God!"

There was silence for perhaps a minute. Then Mr. Burgoyne locked the door of the room and stood before the empty fireplace.

"It is by the merest chance that I am not at this moment booked for the *travaux forces*. Some of those jewels were stolen from a woman's dressing case at the Grand Hotel, with the woman herself in bed and more than half awake at the time. She talked about having every guest in the place searched by the police. If she had done so, you would have heard from us as soon as the rules of the prison allowed us to communicate."

Mr. Burgoyne paused. Mr. Staunton kept his eyes fixed upon the table.

"That's what I wanted to tell you the night before the wedding, only you wouldn't stop. She's a kleptomaniac."

Mr. Burgoyne smiled, not gaily.

"Do you mean she's a habitual thief?"

"It's a disease."

"I've no doubt it's a disease. But perhaps you'll be so kind as to accurately define what in the present case you understand by disease."

"When she was a toddling child she took things, and secreted them-it's a literal fact. When she got into short frocks she continued to capture everything that caught her eye. When she

exchanged them for long ones it was the same. It was not because she wanted the things, because she never attempted to use them when she had them. She just put them somewhere-as a magpie might-and forget their existence. You had only to find out where they were and take them away again, and she was never one whit the wiser. In that direction she's irresponsible-it's a disease in fact."

"If it is, as you say, a disease, have you ever had it medically treated?"

"She has been under medical treatment her whole life long. I suppose we have consulted half the specialists in England. Our own man, Muir, has given the case his continual attention. He has kept a regular journal, and can give you more light upon the subject than I can. You have no conception what a life-long torture it has been to me."

"I have a very clear conception indeed. But don't you think you might have enlightened me upon the matter before?"

Rising from his seat, Mr. Staunton began to pace the room

"I do! I think so very strongly indeed. But-but-I was over persuaded. As you know, I tried at the very last moment; even then I failed. Besides, it was suggested to me that marriage might be the turning point, and that the woman might be different from the girl. Don't misunderstand me! She is not a bad girl; she is a good girl in the best possible sense, a girl in a million! No better daughter ever lived; you won't find a better wife if you search the whole world through; There is just this one point. Some people

are somnambulists; in a sense she is a somnambulist too. I tell you I might put this watch upon the table" – Mr. Staunton produced his watch from his waistcoat pocket-"and she would take it from right underneath my nose, and never know what it was that she had done. I confess I can't explain it, but so it is!"

"I think," remarked Mr. Burgoyne, with a certain dryness, "that I had better see this doctor fellow-Muir."

"See him-by all means, see him. There is one point, Burgoyne. I realised from the first that if we kept you in the dark about this thing, and it forced itself upon you afterwards, you would be quite justified in feeling aggrieved."

"You realised that, did you? You did get so far?"

"And therefore I say this, that, although my child has only been your wife these few short days, although she loves you as truly as woman ever loved a man-and what strength of love she has I know-still, if you are minded to put her from you, I will not only not endeavour to change your purpose, but I will never ask you for a penny for her support-she shall be to you as though she had never lived."

Mr. Burgoyne looked his father-in-law in the face.

"No man shall part me from my wife, nor anything-but death." Mr. Burgoyne turned a little aside. "I believe I love her better because of this. God knows I loved her well enough before."

"I can understand that easily. Because of this she is dearer to us, too."

There was silence. Moving to the table, Mr. Burgoyne began

to replace the things in the bag.

"I will go and see this man Muir."

Dr. Muir was at home. His appearance impressed Mr. Burgoyne favourably, and Mr. Burgoyne had a keen eye for the charlatan in medicine.

"Dr. Muir, I have come from Mr. Staunton. My name is Burgoyne. You are probably aware that I have married Mr. Staunton's daughter, Minnie. It is about my wife I wish to consult you." Dr. Muir simply nodded. "During our honeymoon in Brittany she has stolen all these things."

Mr. Burgoyne opened the bag sufficiently to disclose its contents. Dr. Muir scarcely glanced at them. He kept his eyes fixed on Mr. Burgoyne's face. There was a pause before he spoke.

"You were not informed of her-peculiarity?"

"I was not. I don't understand it now. It is because I wish to understand it that I have come to you."

"I don't understand it either."

"But I am told that you have always given the matter your attention."

"That is so, but I don't understand it any the more for that. I am not a specialist."

"Do you mean that she is mad?"

"I don't say that I mean anything at all; very shortly you will be quite as capable of judging of the case as I am. I've no doubt that if you wished to place her in an asylum, you would have no difficulty in doing so. So much I don't hesitate to say."

"Thank you. I have no intention of doing anything of the kind. Can you not suggest a cure?"

"I can suggest ten thousand, but they would all be experiments. In fact, I have tried several of them already, and the experiments have failed. For instance, I thought marriage might effect a cure. It is perhaps yet too early to judge, but it would appear that, so far, the thing has been a failure. Frankly, Mr. Burgoyne, I don't think you will find a man in Europe who, in this particular case, can give you help. You must trust to time. I have always thought myself that a shock might do it, though what sort of shock it will have to be is more than I can tell you. I thought the marriage shock might serve. Possibly the birth shock might prove of some avail. But we cannot experiment in shocks, you know. You must trust to time."

On that basis-*trust in time*-Mr. Burgoyne arranged his household. The bag with its contents was handed to his solicitor. The stolen property was restored to its several owners. It cost Mr. Burgoyne a pretty penny before the restoration was complete. A certain Mrs. Deal formed part of his establishment. She acted as companion and keeper to Mr. Burgoyne's wife. They never knew whether that lady realised what Mrs. Deal's presence really meant. And, in spite of their utmost vigilance, things were taken-from shops, from people's houses, from guests under her own roof. It was Mrs. Deal's business to discover where these things were, and to see that they were instantly restored. Her life was spent in a continual game of hide and seek.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.