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Professor Brankel's Secret

An Original Story

Fergus Hume

Chapter I

Extracts From The Diary Of Professor Brankel

‘Of a truth, sir, this oyster may contain a most precious jewel.’

Heidelberg, August 26, 1876.—Last night, having to prepare my lecture on chemistry for my students, I left my house and went to the library of the University in order to verify some remarks relative to the chemical discoveries of the fourteenth century. I had no difficulty in finding the books I wanted, all of them being well known. Just as I had finished and was about to roll up my notes, on glancing over them I saw that I had omitted to verify a remark as to Giraldus von Breen.

Giraldus von Breen was a famous but somewhat obscure alchemist of the Middle Ages whose life was wholly spent in searching after the philosopher's stone. As the point I wished to elucidate was rather important, I went back to find the ‘Giraldus.’ I hunted for a long time, but was unable to discover anything of the book I wanted. In despair I consulted the librarian, and he told me that he had seen a copy of the ‘Giraldus’ in two volumes about a year ago, but had lost sight of it since. He also added that it was but little known, and that until myself no one had inquired for it, with the exception of a young Englishman who had left Heidelberg about eight or nine months back. Under these circumstances nothing could be done, as the book was evidently not in the library; so, in despair, I took myself home in no very amiable frame of mind at my failure.

August 27.—I lectured to-day to my students, and during my discourse I mentioned how unfortunate I had been with regard to the ‘Giraldus.’ At the end of my lecture Herr Buechler, one of my students, desired to speak with me, and said he thought he could tell me where to find the ‘Giraldus.’ I asked him where, and he said he had lodged in the same house with a young Englishman called Black, who had left Heidelberg about eight months ago. Of course, I immediately saw that it was the same young Englishman that the librarian had mentioned. Herr Buechler also said that the young Englishman was a great admirer of the works of Giraldus Von Breen, and that he was constantly studying them. He thought it likely that Herr Black had taken it from the library to read at his lodgings, and, as he had left a number of books behind him, it might be amongst them. I immediately accompanied Herr Buechler to the late lodgings of the young Englishman, and found there a great number of old books, principally works on chemistry. Both Herr Buechler and myself hunted for a long time without success, but at last the ‘Giraldus’ was found hidden under a pile of old manuscripts. Thanking Herr Buechler for his trouble, I took the ‘Giraldus’ home with me, and spent the night in taking notes from it for my next day's lecture on the chemistry of the

fourteenth century. It was in the old black-letter type, and was bound in faded yellow leather, with the arms of Giraldus stamped upon it. I found out in a short time that I had only the first volume; doubtless the Englishman had the second, as Herr Buechler and myself had searched too thoroughly among the books to leave any doubt as to it being among them.

August 28.—Coming home to-night, I was smoking in my study after dinner when I caught sight of the ‘Giraldus’ lying on the table where I had thrown it the previous night. I took it up and began to turn over the leaves idly, when a piece of paper fell out on to the floor. I took no notice, as it was evidently only a book-mark, but went on reading and turning over the leaves. I became so absorbed in the book that three o’clock struck before I found that I had finished the book and let my pipe go out. I arose, yawned, and proposed to myself to go to bed, when I thought that I would just have one more pipe. I looked about for a piece of paper to light it, when I caught sight of the slip that had dropped out of the ‘Giraldus.’ It was lying under the table, and, bending forward, I picked it up. Then, twisting it up, I held it over the flame of the lamp to light it. In doing so I caught sight of some writing on it, and, being of a curious turn of mind, I withdrew it and spread it out in order to examine it. I found that it was not paper as I thought, but a piece of parchment yellow with age. It was so very dirty that on close examination all I could make out was the figure ‘V’ and the words ‘*erecipisa*’ and ‘*is*.’ I could not make out the meaning of this. I knew that the first was the Roman numeral for five, and that ‘*is*’ was an English word, but I could not make out the meaning of ‘*erecipisa*.’ I examined the paper more particularly in order to see if I could find out anything likely to elucidate the mystery, and saw that there were other words which I could not make out, as the paper was so dirty and my light so dim. As this was the case, I thought it best to defer all examination of the paper until next day.

August 29.—As soon as I could get away from my duties, I hurried home eager to discover the meaning of the mysterious words on the parchment. I washed it gently in warm water in order to remove the dirt, and then, with the aid of a strong magnifying glass, I made out the words. They were in black-letter type, and I translate them word for word into modern writing. The following is a facsimile of the writing translated from the black-letter type: ‘*IV XII seremun sudlari G V silev erics arutuf is . . . amenev saecsim euqsatib alli taedna atiretearp erecipisa? ... is sumina mutnat utitser alos etsev simina ni te silev ereuxe ilos metsev VVRLXXLR.*’ It was evidently a cryptogram—that is, the words had been purposely thrown into confusion in order to conceal some secret. I was determined to find it out. Giraldus von Breen, although an obscure chemist, might by some strange chance have found out a great secret of nature which had escaped his more famed contemporaries. The task which I now set myself to do was to unravel the cryptogram and find out the secret it contained. The question which immediately presented itself was how to begin. There did not seem any starting-point, so I laid down the parchment in order to consider some method. By a singular coincidence I had a few months before been reading Jules Verne’s scientific romance, ‘A Journey into the Centre of the Earth,’ and I remembered the clever elucidation of the cryptogram therein. I went to my bookcase, and took down the romance of Monsieur Verne in order to read the part I referred to. Having done so, I again took up my own puzzle, and proceeded to find out its meaning. In the first place the figures VVRLXXLR at the end were underlined, which evidently showed that they were of great importance. They were rather disconnected from the rest of the writing. I noticed there were two figures of each kind, two fives and two tens. The thought then came into my head to add them up. The total was thirty. I then counted the words of the cryptogram (including also the Roman numerals), and I found they also came to the number of thirty. I was certain now that the figures were a key to the writing, and puzzled over it for four or five hours in order to find out the meaning. At last I gave it up in despair, and went to bed, where I had a nightmare, and thought that I was a cryptogram somebody was trying to elucidate.

August 30th.—All day long I have puzzled over that cryptogram, trying to find out the connection between the figures and the writing. When I went home I shut myself up in my study, and proceeded to steadily work out the mystery. Again the figures VVRLXXLR met my eyes: and this time I noticed the letters. What might RL and LR mean? One was the reverse of the other. In puzzling over this, I noticed a Hebrew Talmud lying on my desk, which I had borrowed in order to verify a quotation. While looking at

it, the thought came into my head of the strange peculiarity of the Hebrew language, being read backwards, and from right to left. As this struck me, I looked at the figures, and immediately thought of applying it.

VVRL evidently meant, read V and V from right to left, while XXLR meant read X and X from left to right. The whole number of words was thirty; and the total of the underlined figures was thirty. The cryptogram was, without doubt, divided into two sections of five words each, and two sections of ten words each, which made a total of thirty. If I counted five words from the first, and read from right to left, I would get the meaning. Then the question came, should I count five nine words, and then two tens? I thought not. If there were two fives and two tens, it would be more likely that the maker of the cryptogram only put them thus: VV, RL, XX, LR, to mislead, and that the proper way to arrange the words would be to divide them into sections of five, ten, five, ten, and read them as instructed.

Pursuing this method, I read the first five letters from right to left, the next ten from left to right, and did the same with the other two sections. This was the result:—

sudlariG seremun II X IV.

silev erics arutuf is euqsatib saecsim amenev alli taedua—mutnat sumina is ? erecipsa atiretearp utitsev alos etsev simina ni te silev ereuxe ilos metsev.

Arranging this in its order it came out:—

sudlariG seremun II X IV silev erics arutuf is euqsatib saecsim amenev alli taedua mutnat sumina is ? erecipsa atiretearp utitsev alos etsev simina ni te silev ereuxe ilos metsev.

Thus far the document had assumed a more feasible aspect, and I had great hopes of unravelling it. On looking at my last effort, however, I found myself as far back as ever, the words made no sense. In fact, they were not words at all, but a mere jumble of letters. I laid it down at last, and betook myself to my pipe in order to ponder over some method for the solution of the problem. I caught up the romance of Jules Verne, and it opened at the twenty-eighth page. I read carelessly until I came to the last sentence of the page: ‘Aha! clever Satenussenum,’ he cried, ‘you had first written out your sentence the wrong way.’

I immediately dashed down both book and pipe, and with a shout proceeded to apply the idea to my cryptogram with this result.

Vestem soli exuere velis et in animis veste sola vestitu praeterita aspicere? Si animus tantum audeat ilia venema misceas bitasque. Si futura scire velis V IV X II numeres Giraldus.

At last I had solved the problem. It was written in Latin, and oh! what vile Latin; but still I easily made it out, and write it down here in good German—

‘Wouldst thou cast thy vestments of clay, walking unclad, save in thy soul garment, and view past ages? If thy spirit dareth as much, mingle then these drugs, and drink, if thou wouldst know the future add V IV X II Giraldus.’

When I read these marvellous words my brain reeled, and, staggering to the table, I filled up a glass with brandy, and drank it off. To think that I had re-discovered this wonderful secret and by the merest chance! What infinite power it would give me! By mingling these drugs—but what drugs? The cryptogram did not mention any. I got out my magnifying glass, and examined the paper carefully. At last I succeeded in making out a number of small red letters, which looked like Greek. My own magnifying glass was not powerful enough, so I sent to my brother-professor, Herr Palamam, to borrow his. When it came, I again

applied myself to the red letters, and at last succeeded in making out the names. They are rare and valuable drugs, but I shall not inscribe them even in thee, my diary, for fear they should meet any prying eye. I shall share my mighty power with no one; but shall walk through the realms of the past alone.

Chapter II

Extracts From The Diary Of Professor Brankel—Continued

If it is
Within the circle of this orbed universe,
I'll have this secret out before the sun.

October 16.—After great trouble I have at last succeeded in obtaining the rare and costly drugs mentioned; I have mingled them in their due proportions as required, and the result is a colourless liquid like water, which has no taste and a faint perfume as of Eastern spices. To-night I shall try the strength of this drink for the first time, and, if it fulfils its mission, then who shall be so powerful as I! Oh, what glories I anticipate! My soul will leave this heavy clinging garb of clay; it will shake off 'this mortal coil,' as the English Shakespeare says, and roam light as air through the infinite splendour of the past. The centuries themselves will roll back before me like the flood of Jordan before the redeemed Israelites. At my bidding will Time, the insatiable, withdraw the many-tinted curtains of the past, and usher me into the presence of bygone days. I shall sweep on wings of light through the countless aeons of the past—yea, even unto the portals of creation.

October 17.—I have passed the night under the influence of the elixir, and the result has more than surpassed my thoughts and desires. Oh, how can I paint the sublime majesty of the scenes through which I have passed? Tongue of man cannot describe them, nor pen portray them. They, like the seven thunders in the Apocalypse, have altered their voices, and must now be sealed up—only the spiritual eye of man can behold them, and it would be vain to give even a faint reflection of their splendour. Weary does the day seem to me, and eagerly do I wait for the cool, calm night, in which I can again throw off this cumbersome dress of flesh and assume my spiritual robes. What monarch is so powerful as I? To the world I am the professor of chemistry at Heidelberg—to myself I am a demi-god, for to me alone are shown the visions of the past, and to me alone is it permitted to commune with the mighty dead.

October 18.—Once more have I walked through dead ages. My feet have pressed the dusty and silent floors of the palace of Time, and I have wandered spirit-clad through the deserted splendours of his mansion. But yet there remains the future. How can I lift the immutable veil which hangs before the altar of Time, and enter the Holy of Holies? How can I see with clear eyes the splendid goal reserved for humanity, the triumphant consummation of the design of the world? What mean those last mysterious words of the cryptogram? "If thou wouldst know the future add V IV X II, Giraldus." I have searched through the book in vain, and I can find nothing to give me the slightest clue to their solution. What is the drug which will admit me behind the veil of Time, and compel him to show me his deepest secrets? The secret is evidently contained in the numerals; but how to discover the meaning? I have puzzled over it for hours, but as yet I am no nearer the end than before.

October 19.—Eureka! I have found it. At last I see the meaning of the mysterious sentence. After a sleepless night I have at last hit on what appears to be the solution of the enigma. After lengthy scrutiny I have come to the conclusion that it means the fifth word of the fourth line of the tenth page of the second volume of Giraldus. But how to get that second volume! I went to the lodgings lately occupied by the young Englishman, and turned over all his books, but was unable to find any trace of the missing volume. I questioned Herr Buechler, and he informed me that the young Englishman had been a student at the University for about two years. (I remembered him, when this was told me, as a thin, cadaverous youth, who attended my chemistry class.) He had left Heidelberg on suddenly being summoned, as he said, to the

death-bed of his father. He might have taken the second volume of Giralduſ with him, for he was always reading it. I asked Herr Buechler the reaſon. He replied that Herr Black was trying to find out the philoſopher's ſtone, and that Giralduſ gave an account of it in his ſecond volume. I remembered then that in the firſt volume Giralduſ ſays he will touch on that branch of chemistry in his ſecond volume. After this I had not the leaſt doubt in my mind as to the fate of the ſecond volume of the Giralduſ. Only one thing remained to me—to ſtart for England at once, in order to get it. For ſuch a trivial cauſe as the loſs of a book, was I to reſt contented, and not avail myſelf of the ſplendid promiſe held out to me? A thouſand times no! I ſhall ſtart as ſoon as poſſible for England. . . .

October 29.—I have gathered all the information concerning the young Engliſhman procurable, and that is very little. The information was furniſhed me by Herr Buechler, who told me that about two months after the departure of Herr Black from Heidelberg, he had received a letter from him, written from the Anchor Hotel, London. This is all the baſis I have to go upon; I have to find out the Anchor Hotel, and depend upon the reſult of my viſit there for my next ſtep. It is underſtood among my friends that I am going for a little trip to England—I have a letter of introduction to Profeſſor Home, of Oxford, and one to Sir Gilbert Harkneſs, of Aſhton Hall, Hampſhire. The latter has an immense library, and a paſſion for collecting rare and curious books. I look to him to aſſiſt me in diſcovering the 'Giralduſ.' But he ſhall never know what I want with it—no man ſhall poſſeſs my ſecret, I ſhall reign alone over the realms of the paſt.

November 10.—I write this portion of my diary in the Anchor Hotel, London, and I have found out ſome more particulars concerning the young Engliſhman. The Anchor Hotel is an obſcure inn in a little dark ſtreet, and only frequented by the poorer claſs. I aſked the landlord if he remembered a perſon named Black ſtaying at his hotel ſix months ago, and deſcribed his perſonal appearance. The landlord is a big, fat ſtupid Saxon, and does not remember, but his wife, a ſharp and active woman, does. She ſaid that ſuch a perſon did reſide there for a month. He had paid in advance, but ſeemed very poor. He was always reading and muttering to himſelf. He left the hotel one day with all his things, ſaying he was going to Black's book-ſtall, and ſince then nothing had been heard of him. Thanking the landlord's wife, I ſet off in ſearch of Black's book-ſtall. Perhaps Black is his father; he is evidently ſome relation, or perhaps the book-ſtall is his own.

November 11.—I have hunted all day without ſucceſs. Black's book-ſtall is not very well known, but towards the end of the day I met a policeman who told me there was a book-ſtall of that name, he thought, in Van Street. I am going to-morrow to ſee.

November 12.—I have found Black's book-ſtall, but not the 'Giralduſ.' I went to Van Street, and found it there as deſcribed by the policeman. It was wedged up between two tall houſes, and had a cruſhed appearance. I entered, and aſked to ſee ſome book which I named. The owner of the book-ſtall was a little old man with white hair, dreſſed in a ruſty black ſuit, and took ſnuff. I led the converſation up to a certain point, and then aſked him if he had a ſon. He ſaid yeſ, but that his ſon was dead. He ſaid that he had ſent him to Germany to ſtudy about three years ago, but had returned and died only three months back. I told him who I was, and the old man ſeemed pleaſed. He had been very proud of his ſon. I aſked him if his ſon had brought home with him from Germany the ſecond volume of the works of Giralduſ Von Breen. The old man thought for a long time, and replied that he had done ſo. I aſked him where the book now was. He ſaid he had ſold it to a literary gentleman about a month ago. I aſked the name of the purchaſer. The book-ſtall keeper could not tell me, but he ſaid the gentleman had the largeſt library of old books in England, and had ſaid he was writing a hiſtory of chemistry. It muſt be Sir Gilbert Harkneſs. He has a very large library, and I know that he is writing a hiſtory of chemistry, for I was told ſo in Germany. He muſt have required the 'Giralduſ' for reference. I thanked the old man, and left the book-ſtall. There is no doubt in my mind now but that the book I ſeek is in the library of Sir Gilbert Harkneſs. I ſtart for his place to-morrow.

Chapter III In The Library

Behold this pair, and note their divers looks,
A man of letters and a man of books,
With various knowledge each is stuffed and crammed. Oh!
Yes, they are indeed 'arcades ambo.'

Sir Gilbert Harkness was a bookworm. All his life he had fed and fattened on books, until they had become part of himself. When they (the books) found themselves in the citadel of his heart, they turned and devoured all the other passions until the heart of their victim was emptied of all save themselves. Sir Gilbert found himself at the age of fifty with a brain weary of its cumbersome load of knowledge, and eyes dim with long study to acquire the same cumbersome load. Left an orphan at the age of twenty, master of his own actions and a magnificent fortune, he had spent all his time and much of his money in filling the shelves of his library. He spared no cost in procuring any rare and valuable book, and on his frequent visits to London he would be found turning over the dusty treasures of the old book-stalls with eager hands. The nature of the man could be seen at once by the way in which he smoothed and caressed his treasures. Oh, how tenderly did he brush the dust off the back of some antique volume, and how gloatingly did his eyes dwell on its yellow pages, as it displayed their store of black-letter type! He honoured Fust and Caxton above all men, and looked up to them with as much reverence as the world does to its great heroes. He would descant for hours on the extraordinary excellence of the printing of John de Spira, and would show with pride a quaint old folio of Caxton which he had picked up in some dingy book-stall. But the dragon-like propensities of his books had devoured all the rest of his passions, and beyond his library he was a man childish and simple. He never went out save on some bookish expedition, but passed all his days in his great library, cataloguing his treasures and writing his History of German Chemistry. In order to give an exhaustive and critical work on this subject, he had collected at enormous expense a great number of famous books by German chemists. He was a tall, thin man, with a stoop, caused doubtless by his sedentary habits; and clad in his long velvet dressing-gown, with his thin white hair scattered from under a velvet skull-cap, he looked like a magician of medievalism.

He was standing by the quaint diamond-paned window of his library, examining a book which he had just received from London, and his eyes, dim and blear with work, were bent on the yellow page in a severe scrutiny of the text. All around him were books from floor to ceiling, in all kinds of binding, in all shapes and sizes. They had overflowed the shelves, and were piled in little heaps here and there upon the floor. They were scattered on all the chairs, they were heaped upon his writing-table, they were lying on the edge of the window, they peered out of all the pockets of his dressing-gown—wherever the eye turned it saw nothing but books, books, books!

Good Heavens! What a quantity of human learning and industry was collected between those four walls! East, west, north, south; ancient, mediaeval, and modern representatives of all time and all countries were there. O shades of Fust, Guttenberg, and Caxton, if, indeed, it is permitted to spirits to revisit the 'glimpses of the moon,' come hither and feast your spiritual eyes on your progeny! Behold! in these myriad bindings, many-coloured as the coat of Joseph, is the spirit of past ages preserved. Here you will find the supreme singer of the world, Shakespeare himself, fast bound betwixt these boards, and as securely prisoned as ever the genius was under the seal of Solomon in the Arabian tale. Open yon grim brown folio, and lo! Homer will step forth, followed by all the fresh untrodden generations of the world. Ulysses with his sea-weary eyes eagerly straining for the low rocky coast of Ithaca. Helen with her imperial beauty standing on the towers of Illiun. Achilles with his angry face set fierce against the walls of windy Troy, over the dead body of his friend. All, all, are there, and will appear to thee in their fresh eternal beauty if thou sayest but the word. Truly the deftest necromancer of the Middle Ages held not half the airy spirits and fantastic fancies under the spell of his wand as thou dost, O Gilbert Harkness!

Outside, the short November twilight is closing in, and Sir Gilbert finds that the fat black letters are all running into one blurred line under his eager eyes. A knock at the door of his library disturbs him, and it is with a spirit of relief that he pitches the volume on the table and calls 'Come in.' A servant enters with a card which Sir Gilbert takes to the window and reads in the failing, grey light, 'Otto Brankel.'

'Show the gentleman in,' he says, and then looks at the card again. 'Brankel? Brankel?' he murmurs in a dreamy tone; 'where have I heard that name? Nuremberg? Leipsic?'

'No! Heidelberg,' interrupts a voice, and looking up he sees a tall, slender man wrapped in a fur greatcoat, regarding him with a smile.

'Heidelberg,' repeated Sir Gilbert. 'Ah, yes; are you not the professor of chemistry there?'

'I have that honour,' replied the visitor, sinking with a complacent sigh into the chair indicated by the baronet. 'I must apologise for this untimely visit, but I have a letter of introduction to you from Professor Schlaadt, and I was so impatient that I thought I would lose no time, but present it at once.'

The baronet took the letter, and glancing rapidly over it shook the professor warmly by the hand.

'I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Professor,' he said eagerly. 'I have heard a great deal about your learning and research.'

'A mere nothing,' said the Professor, with a deprecating glance and a wave of his hand; 'mere scraps of knowledge, picked out of the infinite ocean of learning. You have a wonderful collection of books here. I heard about your library in Germany;' and he cast a keen glance round into all the dark corners of the room.

'Ah! you do not see all,' said Sir Gilbert, with a grateful smile, as the servant brought in a lamp and placed it on the writing table; 'this dim light does not show it to advantage.'

'The fame of it has penetrated to Heidelberg,' said the Professor, languidly, with another glance round.

'Perhaps that is because I have so many of your German works on chemistry,' returned Sir Gilbert. 'You know I am writing a History of Chemistry.'

'Have you any alchemists of the fourteenth century?—any of their works I mean?' asked Brankel with a faint glow of interest.

'Oh, yes,' answered the Baronet, pointing towards a dark corner of the library, whither the Professor's eye eagerly followed him, 'You will find there Rostham von Helme Gradious Giraldus.'

The Professor's hands were resting lightly on the arms of the chair, but at the last word he gave a convulsive clutch. He, however, merely observed, coldly:

'"Giraldus" is rather a rare book, is it not?'

'Yes,' replied the Baronet slowly. 'I got it by a curious chance. I—'

'Oh, Governor! Governor!' cried a clear ringing voice, and a young lady in a riding habit, all splashed with mud, stepped lightly through the window into the room.

‘Such a splendid run. Fiddle-de-dee carried me splendidly. I was in at the death,’ displaying a fox’s brush—‘so was Jack. I was the only lady; we came home in about half an hour—both nags quite worn out, which I am sure I don’t wonder at. Jack has behaved like a trump all day, so as a reward I have brought him to dinner—Come in, Jack.’

A young gentleman in a hunting costume, likewise splashed with mud, in reply to this invitation also came in through the window. He was advancing with a smile towards Sir Gilbert when the young lady suddenly caught sight of the Professor, who had risen at her entry and was standing somewhat in the shade.

‘Visitor, dad?’ she said carelessly, shifting the folds of her riding habit, which was lying on her arm. ‘Introduce me, dear.’

‘My daughter—Philippa—Professor Brankel,’ said Sir Gilbert in a vexed tone.

‘I do wish, Philippa, you would come in at the door like a Christian and not in at the window like a—’

‘Pagan; eh, dad?’ said Philippa with a laugh.

She was looking at the Professor, and his eyes seemed to have a magnetic attraction for her. The German had stepped out of the shade, and the light of the lamp was striking full on his face, which the girl regarded curiously. It was a remarkable face—a deadly white complexion with jet black hair, all brushed back from a high forehead; black, bushy eyebrows, with a Mephistofelian curve over light and brilliant eyes, a thin hooked nose, and a nervous cruel mouth with neither moustache nor beard. Such was the countenance of the famous German professor of chemistry.

Philippa appeared fascinated by this weird countenance staring at her with flashing eyes. And yet she was not a girl much given to being fascinated—rather the opposite—a bold audacious nature which did not know fear. But there was some thing in the steady burning gaze of the German that mastered her at once.

She was a tall slender girl, very beautiful, with masses of dark hair coiled under a coquettish hat set daintily on the side of her head. Her eyes flashed with a mixture of fun and mischief, while her rather large mouth displayed a row of very white teeth when she smiled. She looked charming in her dark blue riding habit and white gloves, with a linen collar at her throat caught by a dainty brooch. She was an extremely self-possessed and self-willed young woman. Her mother died when she was quite a baby, and being neglected by her father, who was too busy with his library to attend to her, the education she received was of a loose and somewhat desultory kind. Sometimes she would learn and then astonish everybody with the rapidity of her progress. At other times she would refuse to open a single book, and alternately teased and delighted her friends by her fantastic moods.

She was a splendid rider, and most of her childhood’s days were spent in scampering about the country with her Shetland pony and Jack.

Jack, otherwise Lord Dulchester, was the eldest son of the Earl of Chesham, whose estate was next to that of Sir Gilbert Harkness. Jack and Philippa were always together, and the wild young lady followed Jack into whatever scrapes he chose to lead her. She copied Jack’s manners and speech, and consequently became rather full of slang expressions. But the longest lane has a turning, and at length Sir Gilbert awoke to the fact that something must be done with his erratic offspring. He wrote to his married sister in London, and she promptly suggested a French boarding-school. So one morning Miss Philippa was violently seized and sent into exile; at the same time her companion-in-mischief, Jack, went to Eton. When Miss Harkness returned from her Gallic exile, she found Jack unaltered, and he found her as jolly as ever (so he put it). Their positions, however, were altered, and instead of Philippa following Jack, Jack followed Philippa. He admired her as being the only girl who could ride straight across country and

discuss horses in a proper way. Besides, he had known her such a long time that he had had plenty of opportunity of seeing any faults in her, and he had seen none. Having come to the conclusion that she was ‘the jolliest girl he had ever met,’ he rode over one morning and promptly asked her to marry him, which Philippa as promptly refused, politely telling him not to be an idiot. But Lord Dulchester persisted, and ultimately Miss Harkness—who really did like him—accepted him, and they were engaged. All the county ladies talked of her as ‘that misguided girl,’ and lamented that Sir Gilbert had not married again in order to give one of the female sex an opportunity to initiate Philippa into the intricacies of good breeding. They were horrified at her fast ways and strong expressions, which even her French education could not eradicate. It was rumoured one time that she had actually smoked a whole cigarette, and Philippa had laughingly acknowledged the fact to a lady who questioned her about it. When she secured in Lord Dulchester the matrimonial prize of the county, the ladies loved her none the more, you may be sure. They accepted her as an unpleasant fact, and hoped she would improve in time. And the male sex liked Philippa because she was handsome and said witty things about her neighbours; but it was generally acknowledged that she had a wild eye in her head, and would need breaking in, a task which they did not think Lord Dulchester capable of.

That gentleman was a tawny-haired, clean-limbed son of Anak, who stood six feet, and could ride, shoot, and box better than any man in the county.

He was good-looking and had a title, but no brains, and he adored Philippa.

Miss Harkness withdrew her eyes from the remarkable face before her with an uneasy laugh, and introduced Lord Dulchester.

‘You are going to stay to dinner, of course, Professor?’ said Sir Gilbert.

The Professor bowed, whilst Philippa hurried away to dress for dinner.

Jack followed soon to make himself a little decent, for the dress in which a man has done a hard day’s hunting is certainly not the most presentable for dining.

The Professor was left alone with Sir Gilbert, and as he looked at him he thought:

‘I wonder where the “Giraldus” is?’

Chapter IV

In The Drawing-Room

Do you believe, sir, in metempsychosis?
Of course you don’t, but I can tell you, sir,
He was a serpent ere he was a man.

THERE is no more charming hour in the whole day than the dinner hour, and especially after a hard day’s hunting. At least so Lord Dulchester thought. In spite of his splashed hunting dress (which he had made as presentable as he could) he felt a sweet, lazy kind of happiness as he sat down at the dinner table.

The white cloth, the hothouse flowers, the gleaming and antique silver and delicate china, all assembled under the soft light of rose-coloured lamps, made up a very pleasant picture, and Lord Dulchester felt at peace with all mankind.

Beside him sat Philippa, dark and handsome in her rich dinner dress, as she toyed with her soup and discussed the day's sport.

At the head of the table sat Sir Gilbert, holding an animated conversation on books with the Professor, who was seated near him.

Dulchester had taken a great dislike to the German, and set him down in his own mind as a charlatan, although what reason he had for doing so Heaven only knows.

Perhaps the silvery fluency of the foreigner's conversation, together with the mesmeric glances of his wonderful eye, helped him to the conclusion.

At any rate, the presence of the Professor was to him the one discordant element of the evening.

'I am quite ashamed of my dress, Sir Gilbert,' he said. 'I wanted to go home and change it, but Phil would not let me.'

'Of course not,' retorted that young lady with a laugh, 'you would have arrived here about midnight.'

'But I am sure you need not apologise so much,' she went on merrily; 'you have done the same thing plenty of times before, and each time you have excused yourself in the same manner. Why don't you practise what you preach?'

'Because you won't let me,' said Jack with a laugh, coolly pouring himself out a glass of wine.

'You had good sport to-day?' asked the Professor, fixing his piercing eyes on Jack.

'Slashing,' replied that young man enthusiastically, setting down his glass, which was half-way to his mouth, in order to give more freedom to his eloquence.

'You should have seen the spin the fox led us. We caught him this side of Masterton's Mill. There was one beautiful hedge and ditch which half the field refused, but Miss Harkness cleared it like a bird, and I followed. I think we were neck and neck, Phil, across the next field,' he added, addressing that young lady, who was listening with flashing eyes.

'Rather,' she answered vivaciously; and 'by Jove, Jack, what a smash old Squire Damer came!'

'Right into the middle of the ditch.'

'He would insist on giving me the lead, and I did laugh when I saw him flying in the air like a fat goose.'

'Serve him right,' growled Jack, who did not think anyone had a right to give Miss Harkness a lead but himself. 'He's too old for that sort of thing.'

'Oh yes! You will knock off hunting when you reach his age, eh Jack?' said Philippa sarcastically.

'Well, I won't ride so many stone, at any rate,' retorted Jack, evasively applying himself vigorously to his plate to prevent the possibility of a reply.

Philippa laughed, and then began talking about some newly-imported mare with miraculous powers of endurance and speed ascribed to her.

Jack responded enthusiastically, and their conversation became so ‘horsey’ as to be unintelligible, except to a Newmarket trainer or one of Whyte-Melville’s heroes.

Meanwhile, the two scholars were holding an equally mystical conversation in the higher branches of knowledge on the other side of the table.

At last the Professor, by skilful generalship, led the conversation round to the subject dearest to his heart.

‘You were going to tell me where you got the “Giraldus,” ’ he said, carelessly playing with his glass.

‘Ah, yes,’ answered Sir Gilbert, leaning back in his chair. ‘It was a most curious chance. I was greatly in want of his works, but had not the least idea where to get them. I went up to London, to see my agent about looking through the Continental libraries for them, when one day I found out an old book-stall, kept by a man named Black.’

‘Yes?’ interrogatively.

‘Well, he had it,’ replied Sir Gilbert, nodding his head, ‘that is, only the second volume. He said it had been brought from Germany by his son, who had lately died.’

‘But it is only the second volume.’

‘I wish I knew where the first was.’

‘I think I can satisfy your curiosity,’ said the German coolly, bending forward; ‘the first volume is in the library at Heidelberg.’

‘Indeed!’ Sir Gilbert looked amazed. ‘How did the two volumes come to be separated?’

‘The son of the book-stall keeper whom you mention,’ said the Professor, twisting a ring on his finger round and round, ‘was a student at the Heidelberg University. He was a great admirer of the works of Giraldus, and leaving Heidelberg hurriedly, he carried it with him to England—that is, of course, the second volume only. I found the first by a mere chance in his lodgings.’

‘Why! were you looking for it?’ asked Sir Gilbert.

‘Yes,’ answered Brankel. ‘I wanted to illustrate a certain point to my class, which I was unable to do satisfactorily without the aid of Giraldus.’

‘I must send this second volume back to Heidelberg,’ said the book-worm in a vexed tone, ‘as it was taken from there.’

‘I don’t see it,’ replied the Professor calmly. ‘Giraldus is a very obscure alchemist, and if you send the value of the book to the University, I dare say you can have the first volume also. By-the-by, Sir Gilbert, I think I omitted to tell you that I intend to stay in England for at least six months, and any assistance I can afford you I shall be most happy.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ answered the Baronet eagerly. ‘I shall be delighted to avail myself of it. Where are you staying?’

‘At present at an hotel in Launceston,’ answered the German, ‘but I have taken a house near you, which I am about to fit up. I shall be established in it in about a week, and then you may expect to see me in your library pretty frequently.’

‘I shall be glad,’ said Sir Gilbert; ‘but where is the house you have taken?’

‘It is called Wolfden,’ replied the Professor.

‘Wolfden?’ exclaimed Philippa catching the name. ‘Are you going to live *there*. Professor?’

‘Yes, why not?’ he asked, rather amused at her sudden entry into the conversation.

‘It is such a gloomy place,’ she answered, with a little nervous laugh, for those serpent eyes were fixed upon her, ‘and has not been inhabited for the last twenty years, except by the ghost of the former proprietor, who hanged himself.’

‘Ghost? Bah,’ said the Professor with a sneer, which wrinkled up the corners of his thin mouth. ‘I’m not afraid of that. This is the nineteenth century.’

‘Well, ghosts or no ghosts, I wouldn’t live there,’ replied Philippa gaily as she rose, ‘it’s extremely damp, and bad for the health.’ And with a bow she swept out of the door, which the Professor held open for her, for which civility he was rewarded by a frown from Lord Dulchester, who considered that as his special province.

The two *savants* began to discuss chemistry over their wine, so Lord Dulchester, after moodily toying with his glass for some minutes, rose and went off to the drawing-room in search of Miss Harkness.

He found that young lady seated by the fire, staring dreamily into the heart of the red coals.

He came forward, and, leaning his elbow on the mantel-piece, looked down on her with a smile.

‘Dreaming, Phil?’ he asked softly, as he looked into her face, ringed round with the flare of the fire.

‘I was thinking of the Professor, Jack,’ she said abstractedly, leaning back and folding her hands. ‘Is he not a strange man?’

‘I don’t like him,’ retorted Jack bluntly.

‘Nor do I,’ she answered, ‘but he has a very remarkable face: like Mephistofeles. I don’t read much poetry, but when I saw his eyes I could not help thinking they were like the witch’s in *Cristabel*—like a serpent’s.’

‘Does he stay here long?’ asked Dulchester, giving the fire a poke with the toe of his hunting-boot, and thereby causing the downfall of a fantastical castle of burning coal.

‘About six months,’ answered Philippa. ‘Hand me the screen, Jack; you have made the fire so hot that it is scorching my face.’

Jack did so, and, kneeling down beside her, looked up in her face with a laugh.

‘Let us put away all thought of this Professor, sweetheart,’ he said, catching her hand, ‘and talk of something interesting.’

It must have been very interesting, for Sir Gilbert and the Professor, coming into the room half an hour afterwards, found them in the same position, with Philippa’s hand straying through Jack’s chestnut curls.

When discovered thus, Jack sprang to his feet with a growl, and became deeply interested in a picture hanging near him, while Miss Harkness directed her attentions to the Chinese pictorial representations on her screen.

The Professor looked at them with a kind of half-sneer, which made Jack long to ‘punch the beggar’s head,’ and then, at Philippa’s request, went to the piano, and began to play. Sir Gilbert was sound asleep in his arm-chair by the fire: Jack sat opposite him with his arm resting on his knee and his chin in his hand, staring at Philippa, who was flirting with her fan and staring into the fire.

Away in the semi-darkness, sat the Professor at the piano, playing *morceaux* of Mendelssohn and Schubert. The situation truly ‘had its charm,’ as Jack thought; but again the presence of the German seemed an unsympathetic element. Besides, Jack did not care for soft music, and preferred the lusty hunting songs of Whyte-Melville to all the pathos and melody of the masters of music.

Yet there was a kind of dreamy soporific tendency about the Professor’s playing which, at that time, seemed eminently satisfactory.

Suddenly the Professor stopped playing, and began to speak.

‘I will play a composition of my own,’ he said slowly. ‘It is called “A Dream-phantasy.” ’

He commenced to play again, beginning with a low crescendo of minor arpeggios in the bass, gradually ascending and becoming louder and more agitated, then changing the tempo and dreamily gliding into the swing and rhythm of a cradle-song, as if waves of sleep were softly closing over the head of the dreamer.

Then with an introductory prelude of sharp, clear chords came a grand movement in march-time, with the thunder and tread of many feet, and the silver sound of trumpets drifting into a sorrowful and pathetic melody, which seemed full of the grief and pathos of death.

A shower of silvery tones like the falling of summer rain on the sea, and then a wild, delicious waltz, fantastic and capricious as one of Chopin’s ethereal compositions.

Then followed a beautifully smooth modulation with wondrous extended harmonies, and the player glided into a quaint barcarolle, as if a boat were afloat on the breast of a calm summer sea, sailing towards the burning heart of the sunset, and drifting.

‘By Jove! you know, Jack, I think the run to-day was the best of the season.’

Philippa had been thinking for a long time before she delivered this eminently commonplace remark.

The Professor thought that she was listening to his music, whereas her thoughts were far away with the red-coated field, with the gallant fox flying ahead.

He shut down the piano with a crash, and rose to go.

‘You will come over to-morrow,’ said Sir Gilbert, as he shook hands.

‘Certainly,’ answered the Professor, with a smile. ‘Good-night, Lord Dulchester; you don’t come my way?’

‘No, I am going to ride home,’ answered Dulchester, who had no fancy for a talk with this foreigner.

‘I will send the carriage with you, Professor,’ said Sir Gilbert, going to the bell.

‘Thanks—no,’ returned the German, politely stopping him. ‘I prefer to walk. Good-night once more, and good-night to you, Miss Philippa. I see you do not care much for good music.’

And with this parting shaft, the Professor bowed himself out, with his cold and sardonic sneer, leaving Philippa angry with herself at having betrayed her thoughts so far, and Lord Dulchester with an unholy desire in his heart to ‘punch the foreign beggar’s head.’

Chapter V

The Effect Of The Elixir

Dreams are the nightly progeny of sleep,
The ghostly visitants which mock our rest;
And yet methinks they give a sovereignty
Within their airy realms to many a wight,
Who wakes to find himself a ragged knave,
And all the rainbow pageants of the night
Only the idle bubbles of the brain.

Launceston, November 14.—At last I have found the second volume of ‘Giraldus.’ By a strange train of circumstances I have been led step by step towards this successful end. Nothing now remains for me to do but to go over to Sir Gilbert’s library, take up the ‘Giraldus,’ and turn to the page indicated by the cryptogram.

Then shall I be able to supply the missing drug and put the final touch to this marvellous elixir. I have no fear of Sir Gilbert ever dreaming why I am so anxious about the ‘Giraldus.’ And, truth to tell, he cannot even notice that I am anxious, for I carefully repress all manifestations of interest concerning it beyond that of an admirer of rare books.

I heard him mention to-day where it was in his library with as cool and composed a manner as if I never heard of the book, while every vein in my body was tingling with excitement. However, I must now curb my impatience until I can see the book in the ordinary course. Sir Gilbert is a man wholly devoted to his books, and his desires are bounded by the overflowing shelves of his library. He asked me to stay to dinner, and I was introduced to his daughter and her lover. The lover is one of the aristocracy—a brainless young athlete, with the body of a Milo and the intellect, as Walter Savage Landor says, ‘of a lizard.’ But Miss Philippa Harkness, the daughter, is a very strange young woman. It is a long time since I have studied Lavater, and possibly my skill in physiognomy may have declined, but I have rarely seen a more contradictory face. She has intellect, but does not use it. As far as I can see she has not even the average education of an English lady; all her talk is about field sport and horses, while her conversation is full of words which I am certain are not in the English dictionary—at least, not as far as my acquaintance with it goes. She could be clever if she would, but she will not, for one of the most powerful passions of Nature is wanting in her. She is not ambitious, and is quite content to pass the days of her life as her senses dictate, without attempting to rise to eminence.

Strange that Nature, the bounteous, should be so capricious. To one she gives no talents, but ambition; while to this girl she gives talents and no ambition.

During the evening I made the discovery that Miss Harkness does not like me. She talked gaily and courteously enough, but she avoided my eye, and seemed ill at ease when I addressed her. I suppose it is my manner. A scholastic occupation is certainly not the best for acquiring graces, and I am always rather awkward in the presence of women. I also made the discovery during the evening that she has no soul—at least, not for music. When I was playing my ‘Dream Phantasy,’ she suddenly broke in with some remark about her day’s sport. Bah! why should I be angry? and yet it wounded my self-esteem. I thought that my playing would hold anyone spell-bound, and now I find that it has no effect on this woman. If I took the trouble to hate anybody, I should hate this girl. But I never trouble. Her nature is quite opposite to mine, and we seem to have a mutual distrust and dislike of one another. Strange I never felt like this before. I had better get over this absurd feeling, as I am to see her almost daily for the next six months. In the meantime all my thoughts are concentrated on the ‘Giraldus.’ By this time to-morrow I shall know the secret drug, and then—I must go over to-morrow and look up the ‘Giraldus’ without delay. . . .

Professor Brankel closed his diary and then prepared for bed. Before he put out the light he went to his desk and took out a small phial filled with a colourless liquid. He took three drops out of the bottle and swallowed them. Then, putting the phial away again, he went to bed, and was soon away in visions begat by the strange power of the elixir.

* * * * *

Behold I stand under the shadows of a moonless and starless night, divested of that gross garment of clay which is the emblem of mortality. The immortal part of myself is severed from the mortal, and I am an airy spirit, nameless and soulless, for I myself am the soul. Nothing of earth has any part in me; I am formed of the ethereal essence which God breathes into the body of man. I have no feelings, physical or mental, but stand a naked human soul, a citizen of the universe, a partaker of eternity. Time draws back the veil of the past, and I enter into the vast halls of his palace, to wander through the populous courts, and see the splendid kaleidoscope of humanity and the marvellous colours which the iridescent dome of life has thrown on the white surface of eternity.

* * * * *

. . . I stand within the mighty arena of the Colosseum, and above me, tier above tier, I see the blood-loving Roman populace gazing down with wolfish eyes on the blood-stained sands. The bright blue sky gleams every now and then through the striped awning which shadows the heads of the people. There is Horace, fresh from his little Sabine farm, laughing with Maecenas; Virgil, with a placid smile on his face, listening to the witty and epigrammatical conversation of Catullus—the Rochester of his day—who is amusing his fickle Lesbia with remarks on the spectators. And he, the master of the world, rose-crowned, looks down with a serene face at the long train of gladiators. Ave Caesar! . . . The fight begins . . . a battle of Titans. . . . See how their eyes flash . . . how the sparks fly from their shields at every blow. And Fortune, fickle as a woman, gives her favours sometimes to one and then to another. . . . See, one has fallen . . . and his triumphant adversary stands over him, looking round meanwhile to see the verdict of the people. . . . *Habet!* . . . And the blood of the conquered sinks into the thirsty sands of the arena—insatiable of blood as the masters of the world. . . .

* * * * *

. . . Is it thou, O Athens, the omphalos of Greece . . . set like a jewel in the midst of thy green groves, and filled with all the superb intellects of antiquity? . . . Behold the great white streets . . . the vivid, sparkling crowd brimming over with veritable Aristophanic humour . . . the wrangling of the philosophers and their

pupils from the porticoes, and the god-like figures of the youths as they haste to the gymnasium. . . . Yes, this is indeed the intellectual capital of the world. . . . The great theatre, with the semicircle of eager faces gazing spell-bound at the splendid pageantry of the ‘Agamemnon.’ . . . The deep-mouthed roll of the Eschylean line fills the wide-ringed theatre with a sublime thunder, and then goes echoing down the vaulted corridors of Time with ever-increasing volume. . . . How magnificent . . . the fiery ring of the speech of Clytemnestra . . . the stately eloquence of the king of men . . . the wild cry of Cassandra, shrinking back with prophetic horror from the blood-stained threshold of the palace. . . . See. . . . Chorus. . . [Here the entries in the diary become illegible.]

* * * * *

Hail, Queen with the snow-white breasts and eyes of fire. . . . I pray you, wherefore do you look from the mighty walls of wide-streeted Troy so eagerly? . . . Helen . . . fairest and most imperial of women, thy fatal beauty hath doomed the proud towers of Ilium. Think not that yonder light at which thou gazest as it gleams like a crimson-hearted star . . . think not that it comes from the tent of thy forsaken husband. . . .

. . . It lights the funeral couch of Patroclus, and beneath its beam sits the sullen-faced Achilles, gazing with wrathful eyes at the dimly-seen walls of Troy. . . . Ai! . . . Ai! . . . The end is near, O Queen. . . . Thy fatal beauty hath worked out its evil destiny . . . and already the irrevocable fiat has gone forth from the Fates. . . . Ai! Ai!

. . . Crafty Ulysses, with the cautious wrinkles round thy deep-set eyes, I pray thee tell me where thou art going. . . . Ithaca! . . . Push off the galley from the shores of Troy. . . . Unloose the ten years’ bound sail . . . and let us sail across the foaming leagues of perilous seas in search of thine island home. . . . Lo! how the great sea freshens and whitens under the caress of the winds, and we feel the salt breath of the wandering fields of foam of large savour in our nostrils. . . . But lo! what purple land gleams dimly in the distance? . . . Lotus-eaters. . . . [Here the diary is illegible.] . . . See . . . how the nymphs sport in the crystal waters . . . the flash of their white bodies and the waving of dishevelled locks. . . . Ithaca! . . . Turn the galley home to where the ever-weaving Penelope awaits thee. . . . Ah, Ithaca! . . .

* * * * *

. . . Oh, clash and clamour of music . . . the light tread of slave-girls scattering flowers . . . the barbaric gleam of scarlet and gold . . . the martial bearing of the Roman soldiers . . . and she—the serpent of the Nile—comes for her Roman lover. . . . Ah, Cleopatra . . . Egypt . . . he with the serene face, that stretches out his arms to thee, would sustain the great diadem of the world on his brow, but for thee, dark-browed gipsy. . . . Hark, how the shrill music sounds . . . he comes . . . Anthony. . . .

* * * * *

. . . Ancient Egypt, mysterious and marvellous, wrapped in the deepest mists of antiquity. . . . Long, slumbrous ranges of palaces . . . long trains of painted figures on the walls . . . and symbolical hieroglyphics. . . . Lift up the dense veil which shrouds thy mysterious . . . countenance, O Isis. . . . Behold how the solemn sphynxes in silent lines gaze wide-eyed at the mysterious Pyramids. . . . O mysterious Egypt . . . hail . . . Osiris . . . Thoth. . . . [Here the diary becomes illegible.]

. . . Strike the timbrel, for Miriam, the prophetess of the Lord, sings a paean of victory, and her great brother towers sublime over the redeemed Israelites. . . . Golgotha. . . . Calvary. . . . The Cross. . . . who . . . who hangs upon it so still and lifeless? . . . Behind . . . reddens the evening sky, and the Cross hangs like a thunder-cloud over Jerusalem. . . . Is it then true . . . this which I deemed a fable? . . . Didst thou die for humanity, O Christ? . . . Ah, lift not those pain-charged eyes, O Nazarene! . . . see how the red blood drips from thy thorn-wreathed diadem . . . Prophet . . . Christianity . . . I am in space, the centre of the . . . great

wheel of the universe . . . around through the nebulous masses of worlds . . . and this heaving mass of fire, is this the earth? . . . I stand before the portals of creation. . . . Open! . . . God. . . . Fire. . . , Chaos! . . .

The fresh morning breaks slowly in the East, and the dreamer awakes to the reality of life.

Chapter VI

The Last Ingredient Of The Elixir

A rarer drug
Than all the perfumed spices of the East.

PHILIPPA was seated at the window of the breakfast-room, dressed in her riding habit. She was going to ride that morning with Lord Dulchester, and was waiting his arrival with some impatience, for she longed to be in the saddle. She was reading the 'Field,' her favourite paper, and every now and then glancing at the clock or bending down to caress the huge staghound lying at her feet. At last with a laugh she arose, pitched the paper on the floor, and stepped out on the terrace followed by her dog.

It was a cold, clear morning, with a brisk wind blowing which brought the blood into Philippa's cheeks in no time. There were a number of pigeons on the terrace, but at her approach they flew away, and she saw them, whirling specks of white, in the cold, blue sky. Miss Harkness stood staring at them for some time, and then, giving her dog's ears a malicious pull, she began to talk to herself.

'I never did see anyone like that Jack of mine—he is always late; it is about half an hour since the time I told him. Ah, there's that dear old pater hard at work; I think I shall go in and see him.'

The window of the library was open, so, stepping lightly in, she went over to her father. He was bending over his writing-table examining a stray leaf of some book, and looked up with a bewildered expression when her shadow fell on him.

'Well, pater,' she said gaily, laying her gloved hand on his shoulder, 'hard at work? Why don't you come out for a ride, instead of sitting all day among these musty old books?'

'Bless me, Philippa, how you talk,' answered her father peevishly. 'How can I spare the time? Besides, Professor Brankel is coming over to see the library to-day.'

Philippa turned round without a word and went on to the terrace, where she stood carelessly flicking at the leaves of a cypress which grew near, and thinking deeply. Her dog lay down at her feet and put his nose between his paws, keeping one bright eye sharply on his mistress while the other blinked half-asleep. The thoughts of Miss Harkness were not of a pleasant nature. She had forgotten all about the German, and her father's reminder had brought to her the unpleasant fact that there was such a person. She was not by any means a young lady given to fancies, and yet there was something about this Professor she did not like. Although not of an imaginative tendency, there was something in his eyes that seemed to fascinate her, and again she thought of Christabel.

'It's one comfort I shall be away all day,' she muttered to herself, 'and he will be gone by the time I come home—that is, if the pater does not ask—'

'Phil! Phil!' cried a voice almost immediately beneath her, and on looking over she saw her tardy lover, mounted on a splendid horse, and looking handsome and fresh, as a young Briton ought to look on riding five miles on a cold morning, with his ladylove at the end of the fifth mile.

‘How late you are, Jack!’ she cried, catching up her gloves and flying down the steps. ‘I’ve been waiting about an hour.’

‘Couldn’t get away,’ replied Dulchester, who had dismounted, and was looking with pride at her handsome, eager face. ‘The governor wanted to consult me about some things, and it was with great difficulty I could come even now.’

‘I am to take that explanation with a grain of salt,’ laughed Philippa, whose horse had now been brought round.

‘Just as you like—with or without salt,’ retorted Jack, coolly flinging the reins of his horse to the groom, and standing ready to assist her to mount.

She gave a saucy laugh, put her small foot on his hand, and in another moment was in the saddle. She gathered up her reins, and gave Fiddle-de-dee a sharp stroke with her whip, which caused him to dance about in the most alarming manner.

‘Now then, Phil, are you ready?’ asked Lord Dulchester, who had mounted his own horse and was steering it beside hers.

‘Aye, aye, sir,’ and away they went down the avenue, leaving the grooms looking after them with intense admiration.

‘They’re a rare couple,’ said one to the other.

‘Aye, the finest this part o’ the country,’ and with a laugh both went inside.

Meanwhile Miss Harkness and her lover had reached the park gates, and had just passed through them when they saw the Professor coming along the road. Philippa’s heart gave a jump as she saw those gleaming eyes fixed on hers once more.

‘Good-morning, Miss Harkness,’ said the Professor; ‘I see you are indulging in your favourite pastime. I am just going to see Sir Gilbert.’

‘You will find him in the library,’ said Philippa, bowing coldly, while Dulchester passed him with a curt ‘Good-morning.’

The Professor stood looking after them with a sneer on his face as they rode away laughing and chatting merrily, and the same envy of their happiness came into his heart as Satan felt when he saw Adam and Eve in the garden—

Oh, Hell, what do mine eyes with grief behold?

The feeling, however, soon passed, and with a shrug of his shoulders he resumed his way.

He was immediately ushered into the library on his arrival at the Hall, and found his master anxiously expecting his arrival.

‘Ah, Professor!’ he said, shaking him heartily by the hand, ‘I am so delighted you have come. I want to find out a certain point; but first I must show you all my treasures.’

The Professor assented with delight, for he felt the true joy of a bibliomaniac as he stood in this treasure-house of books. All day long they examined the treasures of the shelves, and ate their lunch as hurriedly as possible, eager to get back to the feast of intellect. Sir Gilbert found that he had a truly congenial spirit in the Professor, and expounded his favourite theories and rode his favourite hobbies until the twilight began to close in. All this time the astute Professor had been thinking of the 'Giraldus,' but did not ask where it was, fearing lest a too great eagerness on his part might cause suspicion in the jealous breast of the bookworm. He led the conversation round to the request which the baronet had made to him when he came into the room.

'You were saying something about a point you wanted elucidated, when I came in, Sir Gilbert,' he said, looking at him keenly.

'Yes, yes!' replied Sir Gilbert; 'it is in regard to the discovery of the philosopher's stone. Can you tell me any notable work on the subject?'

'I think you will find what you want in "Giraldus,"' said the Professor, whose pulse was beating quickly.

'But he is an obscure chemist,' objected Sir Gilbert.

'You find pearls in oysters,' quoth the German calmly; 'and the obscure chemist gives the best description of the philosopher's stone I have met with.'

'I thought you had never read the "Giraldus?"' said Sir Gilbert sharply.

The Professor felt that he was on dangerous ground.

'Not the work itself,' he answered coolly; 'but other authors which I have studied give extracts, and, putting them together, I have arrived at the conclusion that the work of Giraldus's is the best on the subject.'

'Well, I had better bring you the book, and you can show me the part you refer to,' answered Sir Gilbert, and went off to find it.

The Professor sat down in the Baronet's chair by the writing-table, and waited with his heart beating rapidly. At last he had arrived at the consummation of his hope, and in another minute would know the name of the drug which was to be of such value to him. Presently the Baronet came back and laid on the table an old yellow book, the counterpart of that which lay in the Professor's study at Heidelberg. The Professor took it up and turned over the leaves carelessly, although the touch of every page caused a thrill to go through him.

'You had better get Von Helme too,' he said, looking at the Baronet. 'I think he will prove also useful to you.'

Sir Gilbert hurried away well pleased, while the Professor took the 'Giraldus' to the window and turned to the tenth page. Then, counting four lines down, he ran his finger along until it stopped at the fifth word:

'Maiden's blood. . .'

When Sir Gilbert came back with the book wanted, he found Brankel standing by the window turning over the leaves of the 'Giraldus.' In handing him Von Helme's work he glanced up in his face to see if it was the one required, but recoiled in a moment with a cry.

‘Good God! what ails you?’

The cold light of the evening was striking fair on the face of the German, and the rest of his body was in the shadow. His face was livid, with great drops of perspiration standing on it, and with the jet-black eyebrows, wild hair, and thin, sneering mouth, he looked the incarnation of the arch-fiend—a modern Mephisto-pheles. When the Baronet spoke he turned to him with a cold smile, and the writhe of pain passing over his face vanished and left him with his usual countenance.

‘I had a spasm of pain,’ he explained, gently going back to the study table; ‘it is gone now.’

The Baronet looked at him doubtfully, and then suggested that some brandy should be brought.

‘Nothing, thank you,’ replied the Professor, holding the ‘Giraldus’ with one hand and waving the other. ‘I am subject to these attacks. I am perfectly well now. See, here is the remark of Giraldus on the philosopher’s stone.’ And they were soon deep in the book.

The Professor refused to stay to dinner on the plea that he had an engagement, and hastened away almost immediately. When he got to his hotel he went to his bedroom, and, pulling out his diary, began to write rapidly.

November 15.—At last I have solved this problem, which has been my aim these many days. I have had the second volume of ‘Giraldus’ in my hands, and on turning to the page mentioned in the cryptogram I find that the mysterious drug is ‘maiden’s blood.’ In order to bring out the highest powers of the elixir I must mingle with it the heart-blood of a pure maiden. It is a terrible ingredient, and will be difficult to obtain, but I shall not shrink, for I consider it my duty to bring this elixir to its highest state. But where am I to find the maiden from whom to obtain the blood?

Murder is a crime generally punished by the gallows. Bah! why do I bring these things into my thoughts? The killing of a person in the cause of science is no murder. If my own blood were necessary I should not hesitate a moment, but give it freely, in order to consummate this great discovery. Before we can wrest the secrets from the great mother, Nature, we must propitiate her with victims. How many human beings have been slain in a less noble cause than this? Was not the daughter of Agamemnon slain by her own father in order to satisfy the wrath of Artemis? and shall I shrink from offering up a woman on the altar of science? A thousand times no. The cause of science must be advanced even at the cost of human blood, and I, who am appointed by fate to give this secret of Nature to the world, shall not shrink from my task.

Everything is prepared, the altar, the priest, and the victim, for Miss Harkness will have the honour of contributing her heart’s blood to this great discovery. I have made up my mind that she is to die in this cause; and what greater honour can I offer her? Do not the Hindoo maidens immolate themselves cheerfully under the death-dealing wheels of the chariot of their god, and shall an Englishwoman shrink from sacrificing herself in the cause of science? I cannot tell her my wish, for such is the lack of ambition in her soul that she would not comprehend the magnitude of the thing, and doubtless refuse. I must decoy her into my power some way, and kill her.

It is a terrible thing to do, no doubt, but in my case must be used the motto of the Jesuits: ‘The end justifies the means.’ Did I believe in the existence of a Supreme Being I would pray to him to direct me, but as I have no such belief I must kneel to thee, O Science, and entreat thine aid to bring round this sacrifice on thy shrine. The blood of this one maiden will be of more value to the world than that which thousands of human beings have shed on the fields of Marathon or Waterloo.

Chapter VII

Wolfden

Good gentlemen!

The house is stuff'd with ghosts, pray you be wary;

For every footfall wakes a hundred fiends,

Who have the power to do us devilries.

IT was a queer, rambling old place, built of grey stone, which was almost hidden in dark-green ivy. The stones in some places were so eaten away and cracked by the lapse of years that it seemed to be held together by the clinging parasite. It was a quaint, picturesque house, built in the Elizabethan style of architecture, with narrow, diamond-paned windows, huge stacks of chimneys twisted into all kinds of fantastic shapes, and little red-roofed turrets starting out of the walls at all sorts of odd corners, and clinging to the grey old stones like birds'-nests. Under the sloping eaves—where the swallows built regularly every summer—over the great oaken doors, beside the elaborately carved windows, were grotesque faces, carved out of stone into a fixed grin, peering everywhere, like the goblin inhabitants of the deserted mansion. Grass grew between the crevices of the broad stones of the balcony, thistles waved in the deserted courtyard, and there was a damp, green slime everywhere. Some of the shutters, torn off by the force of the wind, were lying half-buried in the bush-grass beneath, while others hung crazily on their broken hinges, and swung noisily to and fro with every breeze. It had formerly been a place of great magnificence, and the lofty ceilings of the state rooms were decorated with beautiful paintings. But the broad oaken stairs, down which had come so many generations, were now thick with dust, and the pale moon, looking through the painted windows, only saw dreary rooms filled with floating shadows. But it was not the dreary loneliness of the place that made it such a thing of horror to the simple folk around. There was said to be a curse on the place, for the last proprietor of it had hanged himself, after spending the remains of his fortune in a last banquet. In the great dining-hall a ragged piece of rope, suspended from a hook in the wall, still showed the place where he committed the deed. It was here, after that last terrible orgy was done—after he had exhausted all the wine of life and found that the lees were bitter indeed—that he came and launched himself into another world. His ghost was said to haunt the scene of his former follies, and wail for the past that could not be undone. But the lights which announced his presence were probably only the glimmer of the moon on the glittering windows, and the wail of the wind whistling through the deserted halls, his voice. But the rustics would have been indignant at such a solution, and firmly held to the belief that, whatever modern science might say to the contrary, there were ghosts, and that Wolfden was haunted by one. On the death of the last squire the estate had gone into Chancery, and the place to rack and ruin. No tenant could ever be found for it, even in this ghost-despising age, for the place was eerie, and a cloud hung over it. When the German Professor took it he was looked upon as a wonderfully brave man; and, indeed, it was whispered among the village gossips that he must have some acquaintance with the black art itself before he could trust himself so fearlessly among the ghostly inmates of Wolfden. Superstition still has her votaries, even in this enlightened age, among those lonely hills, and the strange-looking foreigner gave rise to a good many queer surmises. The Professor did not occupy all the house, but only a small range of rooms on the right side. Those on the left were the state rooms, and he shut them up close, leaving them to their dust and loneliness. Immediately above the rooms on the right side was an octagon-shaped apartment, which the Professor turned into a laboratory for the prosecution of his chemical experiments. A light could be seen in this room far into the night, for the Professor preferred working at night instead of the day time. All day he was at the Hall, in the library with Sir Gilbert, hunting among the books, and helping the Baronet with his 'History of Chemistry.' Sir Gilbert was the only member at the Hall with whom the German was on friendly terms. Philippa always avoided him, and showed plainly that she did not relish his company, while Lord Dulchester did not conceal his dislike in the least—a dislike which the Professor cordially returned. The German kept a vigilant watch on Philippa, in order to seize any opportunity which might offer itself of getting her into his power, for he was firmly fixed in his hideous purpose of killing her in order to add the necessary ingredient to the elixir.

Wherever Philippa went she would find those mesmeric eyes fixed steadily on her, like two evil planets blighting her with their malignant influence. Under this continual supervision she began to grow thin and pale. Wherever she went she seemed to feel the burning gaze of those eyes fixed on her, and would start nervously at every sound. Nature could not bear the strain, and at last Philippa saw that unless she removed herself from the influence of the Professor she would soon be very ill. To this end she took a sudden resolution, and unfolded it to Jack in this wise:

‘Jack,’ said she one evening, when they were alone in the drawing-room, and the Professor and Sir Gilbert were talking science over their wine, ‘do you believe in the evil eye?’

Lord Dulchester, who was gazing idly into the fire, turned round in dismay.

‘Good Heavens, Philippa, what put that idea into your head?’

‘I believe the Professor has,’ went on Philippa solemnly. ‘Whenever I look at him I always find his eyes fixed on me.’

‘Just give me leave, and I’ll soon settle his eyes,’ said Jack grimly.

‘Don’t be a fool, Jack,’ was Miss Philippa’s ungrateful retort; ‘he is a friend of papa’s.’

‘He doesn’t stay here,’ replied Dulchester sulkily, giving his huge shoulders a shake.

‘I don’t see what that’s got to do with it,’ answered Philippa candidly; ‘he is here every day. But look here, Jack,’ she went on, ‘I can’t stand this much longer, I am sure I shall get ill.’

‘You do look rather pale,’ interjected Jack, looking at her anxiously.

‘So I have made up my mind to go up to London and stay with Aunt Gertrude.’

‘Oh!’

Lord Dulchester gave a shiver. He had reason to remember that high-browed, Roman-nosed matron, for she had hunted him through several seasons in the most determined manner, in order to secure him for one of her daughters, who were all equally high-browed and Roman-nosed.

‘You need not make such faces, Jack,’ said Philippa coolly, for Jack had confided to her the system of social persecution to which her cousins had subjected him; ‘you need not come.’

‘Oh, won’t I though,’ retorted Dulchester vivaciously. ‘I am not afraid; I’m an engaged man now.’

‘Jack,’ said his lady-love solemnly, with a malicious twinkle in her eye, ‘let me implore you not to let my beautiful cousins win your heart from me, for you know your engagement will be no obstacle; and oh, Lord Dulchester, they have brought the art of flirting to a very high state of perfection.’

‘Let them try it on,’ said Jack, laughing gaily at the idea; ‘I am quite willing to risk it, Phil.’

And so it was arranged. Philippa wrote to her aunt and received an effusive answer, stating that she would only be too glad, and saying that they were going for the winter to the South of France; did dear Philippa mind? No, dear Philippa didn’t; for she would have gone to the North Pole, if necessary, to escape from those terrible eyes of the Professor. So she began to make arrangements, and fixed an early day for her departure.

* * * * *

Wolfden, November 22.—I have been peculiarly unfortunate with regard to the last ingredient of the elixir. I am no nearer the accomplishment of my desire than before. Miss Harkness persistently avoids me, and I am unable to get her alone. That infernal lover of hers is always with her, and I suspect would have no hesitation in doing me a personal injury. He hates me, I see, for he does not take the least pains to conceal it. This is unfortunate, for it adds to my difficulties in the accomplishment of my design. I have asked Miss Harkness over here, but she persistently refuses to come; and I have at times despaired of getting her at all. And now, to add to my difficulties in the matter, she has arranged to go to the South of France, where, as she told me, she will probably stay for a long time. It is an impossibility for me to prolong my stay in England beyond the six months, so if she goes away now there is every probability that I shall lose her. There is yet a week before she leaves, so I may think of some plan before then by which I can accomplish my purpose. The thought often comes across me that if I kill her I shall be liable to the law of England. The law has no sympathy with the sacred cause of science, and would hang me for the murder (as it would call it) as calmly and judiciously as if I were some common felon who had beaten his wife to death. It cannot be helped; if I wish to perfect this great discovery I see that there is no alternative but to become a victim to the law. But my discovery will live after me, and I shall be looked on as a glorious martyr to the cause of science. I will give this diary—in the event of my being hanged for the sacrifice on the altar of science of this girl—to some learned ‘savant’ in my own country, who will edit it, and the world shall see how gradually I was led to the crowning act of my life. I shall be honoured as a martyr; therefore I have no hesitation in committing the deed which is likely to bring me within the arm of the law. ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,’ and my death shall be the means of giving to the world an elixir by which they can foresee both past and present and future. They will be able to see far ahead, and avert from the world those calamities which have fallen on it hitherto owing to the darkness which has veiled the future. What are a few pang of physical pain in comparison with the splendid future thus open to the world through my agency? My mind is made up—I am ready and willing to fall a martyr in the cause of science against the powers of ignorance, and over my grave shall be inscribed the one word so pregnant with meaning—‘Resurgam!’

* * * * *

One! strikes slowly with a sound like thunder from the grey old belfry of the church. Midnight—this is the hour during which the earth is thronged with spirits. They pour from the green graveyards, from the charnel-house; the murderer’s skeleton descends from its gibbet, and the rich man’s spirit comes from its vault. So the air is thick with them; their incorporeal forms are thronging in myriad numbers thick as the leaves of Vallombrosa.

Wolfden stands black and dense in front of the calm splendour of the moon; the stars shine on it with their myriad eyes, but they cannot lift the shadow from off it. And he who lies within—is he mingling with the airy spirits of the dead, or dreaming of the accomplishment of his hideous purpose? Is he mad? Is his potent elixir only the outcome of a confused brain? Or is he a glorious genius shaping the form of a great discovery? Is he mad? Was Hamlet?

How still the night; only the murmur of the river as it flows, broad-breasted and fair, towards the infinite sea. A few barges lie on the surface of the stream—black, shapeless masses, hanging, as in the centre of a hollow globe, between the star-spread sky above and its counterpart in the breast of the river. The distant cry of an owl comes from the belfry, an answer comes from another at Wolfden, and then the bell again—one! two! Hark! the wind is rising; the hollow-voiced bell has woke it, and it rushes its wild and querulous voice through the deserted halls. Whew! how it whistled through the great dining-room, and shook the jagged fragment of rope to and fro as if in glee. The old Squire’s spirit is abroad to-night. Whew! how it catches the crazy shutters and shakes them to and fro until one falls off with a shriek, and then the wind rushes away again, rejoicing in its work. Whirr! what a blast down the chimney—the laboratory—what

armies of phials, what queer cabalistic apparatus! There are a few ashes in the furnace. How the fierce wind made them flare and blaze redly like the angry eye of the Cyclops. Away down the old oak stairs, where the moon, looking through the painted windows, casts a red stain on the dust. Whew! into the bedroom of the Professor. Blow the curtains aside, and let yon thin shaft of moonlight strike on his face. How calm, how passionless is the spirit indeed in the body, or is his discovery a great truth? How deadly pale, with the black eyebrows and the black hair wildly tossed about on the pillow. Look how his hand is clenched! A shade sweeps across his face. Is it the spirit returning to the body, or a cloud drifting across the face of the moon? Is he mad? Does that great brow only bind the fantastic humours of a madman's brain? Is he mad? Who can tell? Time alone will work out the solution of that problem. Leave him alone to his dreams and phantasies. Away! out to sea, where the great ships ride on the white waves. Whew! away! Whirr—whew! Look how the clouds drive across the midnight sky! Oh! this is rare sport; hark! the white surges of the Atlantic cry aloud! Whew! and the wind sweeps away into the black pavilion of clouds which hangs over the boiling surges of the ocean.

Chapter VIII In The Laboratory

Whene'er a man
Is near the pinnacle of his desire,
'What ho!' cries Death, and lo! he tumbles down.

Just outside the gates of Wolfden stood a large hawthorn, whose branches, bare of leaves, were shaking wildly in the keen November blasts. It was raining heavily, and the sky was overcast with heavy clouds, while there was not a speck of blue to be seen giving any promise of clearing up.

Under the hawthorn, trying to get some shelter from the driving rain, stood Lord Dulchester and his *fiancée*. They had come out for a short walk, and were now caught in the full fury of the storm just outside the gates of Wolfden.

Jack drew Philippa under the hawthorn, but they might as well have been in the open for all the protection that delusive shelter afforded them. They were a quarter of a mile away from the Hall; the storm gave no promise of clearing away, and the nearest place at which they could get shelter was Wolfden, which Philippa resolutely declined to enter.

'I can't go in while that horrible man is there,' she said in reply to Jack's persistent entreaties that she would seek shelter there.

'I like him as little as you do,' retorted Dulchester bluntly; 'but I'm not going to have you get your death of cold for anything of that sort. We have got no umbrella. Wolfden is the nearest shelter, and the storm won't clear away for some time, so the best thing we can do is to go in.'

Philippa cast a disconsolate look around. It was raining vigorously, and the road was full of little puddles of water. She had her furs on, but her feet were quite wet, so she at last consented to try the hospitality of the Professor.

'Beggars mustn't be choosers,' she said miserably. 'Lead on, Macduff.'

Macduff (otherwise Lord Dulchester) pushed open the gate, and, letting Philippa pass through, shut it with a bang. The house looked dreary and gloomy in the rain, but they had not much time to inspect it. They hastened up the path, and soon found themselves at the huge oaken door. Jack applied the knocker vigorously, and in a few minutes the door was opened by the Professor himself. He expressed the greatest

surprise at seeing them, and inwardly determined that he would accomplish his design at once, since the elements had put it into his power.

‘You had better come upstairs to my laboratory,’ he said, shaking Dulchester by the hand, which civility that gentleman did not seem to relish at all; ‘it is the only place I have a fire in.’

‘Thanks, I should prefer to wait here,’ said Philippa coldly, looking out through the door at the steady rain.

‘Permit me to observe, Miss Harkness,’ said the Professor blandly, ‘that I am a little bit of a doctor, and you are very likely to catch cold standing here in your wet clothes.’

‘You had better go, Phil,’ struck in Jack, giving himself a shake like a huge water-dog; ‘I’ll come too.’

The Professor acquiesced in this arrangement with at least some show of pleasure, and led the way upstairs to his laboratory.

It was an octagon-shaped room, with a triple-arched, diamond-paned window, and a furnace nearly opposite. There were a multitude of instruments and drugs required for chemistry scattered about, and on a small table were writing materials.

Opposite the door which gave entrance from the body of the house was another smaller and massive-looking door, bound with iron; it was partly open, but nothing could be seen beyond.

The Professor led his unexpected visitors into this workshop of science, and, having apologised for the disorder it was in, put Philippa in a chair in front of the furnace. He removed a portion of the top, so that more heat could get at her, and then asked his visitors if they would take any wine. Both of them declined, so the Professor set his wits to work to get Dulchester out of the way.

Jack was rather taken with the queer apparatus about, and the quick-witted German, seeing this, began explaining various experiments to him. Philippa sat looking dreamily into the fire and drying her wet boots, while her lover and the Professor moved about. At last Dulchester found himself close to the iron-bound door.

‘What have you in here, Professor?’ he asked, pushing it slightly open with his hand.

The Professor’s eyes flashed. Here was a chance of getting rid of Dulchester he had not reckoned upon.

‘Go and see,’ he said with a laugh. Jack, feeling curious, stepped in, upon which the Professor pulled the door to. It was a spring door and shut with a click, hearing which Philippa turned round.

‘Where is Lord Dulchester?’ she asked, rising from her chair in alarm.

‘In there,’ answered the Professor, with a harsh laugh of triumph, pointing to the door.

‘Hallo, Professor, let me out,’ called Jack, with a kick at the door.

The Professor paid no attention, but advanced towards Philippa.

‘Let him out, Professor,’ she asked with a calmness she was far from feeling, for she did not like the glare in his eyes. ‘I think we will go now; the storm has cleared away.’

The Professor did not answer, but pulling a drawer out of the table, produced from it a long steel knife, the edge of which he felt with a hideous smile. Philippa felt her heart leap, and would have fainted, but she knew that all her courage would be needed in this terrible situation.

‘Young lady,’ said the Professor, looking at her with a triumphant smile, and speaking slowly. ‘Some months ago I made a great discovery which requires one thing to perfect it. That is the blood of a pure and innocent maiden. I have chosen you as the person who is to assist at the consummation of this great secret of Nature. You will have had a short life but an eternal fame.’

Philippa’s heart turned sick within her as she saw the long blade of the knife, and the wild fire in his eyes.

‘It is an honour,’ he went on in the same monotonous tone, ‘to be an aid to the great cause of science. What is death? Only a pang, and then all is over. Are you prepared?’

The poor girl breathed a prayer to God, and then fixed her eyes steadily on the madman.

‘You have been my father’s guest,’ she said in a hard voice, which sounded unnatural to her own ears. ‘Will you stain your hands with the blood of his daughter?’

‘It is an honour,’ answered the madman with a ghastly smile, running his thumb along the edge of the knife. ‘Prepare.’

Philippa had retreated to the window as he advanced, and she looked round for some weapon of defence. On the window-sill by her side was a huge bottle filled with some chemical preparation. At an ordinary time she could not have lifted it, but at the present moment the terrible danger gave her strength, and, catching it up, she turned round on the German.

He was now standing immediately in front of the furnace, and she could see the fire blazing up behind him.

‘Advance another step and I will throw this,’ she cried fiercely, clenching her teeth.

‘It is an honour,’ he repeated with a vacant smile, advancing.

She closed her eyes in desperation and flung the bottle at him with all her strength. It struck the advancing madman on the shoulder, causing him to stagger against the furnace, and then fell fair into the burning heat of the fire with a crash. Immediately there was a terrible explosion, and Philippa saw a wall of fire rise up before her as she sank insensible on the floor.

Meanwhile Jack, who had guessed that there was something wrong, hammered at the door with unabated vigour, but finding that it resisted all his efforts, looked round about for some way of escape.

He was in a long, narrow room, and at the end a small window gave an indistinct light. Jack hurried towards this and dashed it open. He got outside on the ledge which ran round the house, and found himself about twenty feet from the ground. But the ivy which grew in profusion all over the walls offered a natural ladder. He did not hesitate a moment, but scrambled down at once. How he reached the ground he did not know, but as soon as he found himself on *terra firma* he rushed round to the front, in at the door which the Professor had left open, and up the stairs.

The door of the laboratory was closed. But that was no obstacle to the athlete putting his shoulder to it and bursting it open, and on entering he found the room full of smoke. He stumbled over a body lying on the floor, and on bending down saw it was that of the Professor, lying in a pool of blood.

With a cry he stepped over him, and found Philippa lying under the window insensible. He caught her in his arms, and, carrying her downstairs, called loudly for the servants.

On their appearance he sent them upstairs to see after the Professor, while he laid Philippa on a sofa in the sitting-room and sprinkled her face with water. She opened her eyes with a low moan, and, on seeing Jack's face bending over her, caught his arm with a convulsive sob.

'Oh, Jack,' she gasped, 'what has happened?'

'That's what I should like to know,' said Jack anxiously, as she sat up.

'The Professor wanted to kill me,' she said, looking at him with a haggard face, 'and I flung some bottle at him. It fell into the fire, there was an explosion, and I knew no more.'

Jack did not say anything, but telling one of the servants to go for the police at Launceston, took her home.

* * * * *

Of course the affair caused a nine days' wonder. The back of the Professor's head was blown away, and death must have been instantaneous. The bottle evidently contained some dangerous drug, which exploded on touching the fire. He was buried in England, and news of his death was sent to his relatives in Germany.

Sir Gilbert was horrified at the event, and came to the conclusion, as everyone else did, that the German was mad. Philippa's system sustained a severe shock, and she was ill for a long time.

She is now Lady Dulchester, and her husband is devotedly attached to her.

The diary of the Professor fell into the hands of Sir Gilbert, and it was from it that Lady Dulchester learned the strange series of events which had so nearly cost her her life.

Jack is very proud of his wife's bravery, but she can never recall without a shudder that terrible hour when she discovered the Professor's secret.

Note By Dr. E. Andrews.—I was on a visit to Sir Gilbert Harkness, and found the diary of the late Professor Brankel in the library. I read it, and was deeply interested in the wonderful workings of a diseased brain which it afforded to me. Sir Gilbert had a phial of the elixir which the Professor claimed to have discovered, and on analysing it I found that the principal ingredient was opium. Without doubt this was the cause of his visions and hallucinations as described by him in his diary. Whether he did find the cryptogram which led to his discovery I do not know, but I think that the quantity of opium and other drugs which he took must have sent him mad.

From the earlier portions of his diary I am inclined to think that he must have had the germs of insanity in him, which developed under the evil influence of the drink which he called the elixir.

I obtained leave from Sir Gilbert to publish the portions of the diary contained in this story (which I translated from the German—of course, I mean I translated the diary only), and, from what was told me by Lady Dulchester and her husband, I joined the rest of the story together.

The opium vision in Chapter V. struck me as being peculiarly strange. It seems to embrace short and vivid pictures of what the dreamer saw, and must have been written by him immediately after he awoke in the morning. In the diary it was written hurriedly, and was so illegible that I could not make portions of it out.

The inner workings of a man's mind are always interesting, and this, coupled with the strange series of events linking it to the outer world, led me to publish this story. Of a certainty there is no truer saying than 'Truth is stranger than fiction.'

THE END

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