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# The Gentleman Who Vanished

Fergus Hume

## Chapter I Flying From Justice

It was an oppressively hot night towards the end of June, and the heavy still atmosphere surcharged with electricity was full of premonitions of storm. Here in London the glare and glitter of myriad lamps seemed to be crushed down by a lowering sky, in which the stars were almost hidden by great masses of sombre clouds. Every now and then a thin thread of lightning flashed ghost-like through the murky air and the low hoarse roll of the thunder which followed, seemed to warn mankind that Nature was in one of her angry moods. So hot, terribly hot, one could hardly breathe in the crowded streets, where throngs of people, well-dressed and otherwise—principally otherwise—were sweeping along intent on business and pleasure, paying no attention to the sultry heavens pressing so cruelly down upon the panting earth.

The signs and tokens of heaven were not for them, with their sordid souls longing for gold, or their empty stomachs yearning for bread, as they worked, danced, sang, and busied themselves with the material things of this life, the same to-day as their forefathers centuries ago on the eve of that Deluge they did not believe would ever come.

In a handsomely-furnished room, in a large house which stood in one of the fashionable streets off Piccadilly, sat two young men playing cards. The windows of the apartment were open on to a flower-decorated balcony, from whence one could see the people walking, and the cabs flashing past. The rhythmical beat of the horses' hoofs, the quick tread or weary dragging gait of passers-by, the subdued murmur of distant voices and the sultry air of the hot night, penetrated into the room, but the occupants were too busy with their game to pay any attention to outside disturbances. A handsome room it was, but evidently that of a bachelor, as in the picturesque confusion there was wanting that subtle touch of refinement and order which indicates the hand of woman. Curiously-patterned carpets of Turkish workmanship were scattered about on the polished floor and here and there stood small tables laden with photographs in chased silver frames, books, principally consisting of English and French novels, flowers and other things too numerous to mention. A pipe rack, fencing foils and boxing gloves over the mantelpiece, pictures of race-horses and pretty women on the walls, and plenty of plush-covered lounging-chairs placed in luxurious corners, with spirit-stand, glasses, pipes, cigarettes and tobacco jars, handy to anyone who sat down.

In the centre of all this confusion was a green covered table at which sat the two young men aforesaid in evening dress, with several packs of cards scattered at their feet and their eyes intent upon the game, which seemed to be rather an expensive one, judging by the pile of gold pieces that lay on the green cloth.

One of the players was tall, with clearly cut features, dark hair, closely cropped, and a small dark moustache, beneath which gleamed regular white teeth when he smiled, which he did not seem inclined to do at the present moment. Adrian Lancaster was not at all pleased, as luck was dead against him, and he frequently took deep draughts of a brandy-and-soda which stood near him, in order to console himself for his bad fortune. His friend Philip Trevanna was short, fair, and insignificant-looking, so much so that not even the well-cut clothes he wore could give him a distinguished appearance.

The Louis Quinze clock on a bracket in one corner of the room chimed eleven, with a silvery ring, but still the two young men played on steadily. The savage look on Adrian's face showed that he was losing still, until at last the look of triumph on his companion's smug countenance proved too much for his philosophy, and rising from his seat with a stifled oath he flung down his cards, upset the table by his sudden movement and lounging over to the fireplace, lighted a cigarette.

"Hullo," said Trevanna lazily, looking at the overturned table and the scattered cards with an air of well-bred surprise, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Adrian, thrusting his hands into his pockets and looking down at the debris from his height of six feet odd, "only I'm sick of playing—you've won a deuce of a lot, so unless I want to leave myself a pauper, I think I'll give the game best for to-night."

"Better luck next time," said Trevanna, rising and stretching himself, "you're a bad loser."

"There never yet was a philosopher who could bear the toothache patiently," quoted Adrian with a grim smile.

"You call losing at cards, toothache," murmured Philip indolently, "I daresay you're right, it's quite as disagreeable at all events."

He glanced complacently over the bundle of I. O. U's he held in his hand, added the amounts together, then offered them to his companion.

"I'm rather in luck's way to-night," he said in a satisfied tone, "if you don't mind, old chap, I'd like a cheque for a thousand,"

Adrian bit his nether lip angrily, then walking towards his desk, and pulling out a blank cheque, made it out for the amount named, which he handed to Philip without a word, then taking the I. O. U's he tore them up and threw the pieces on the floor.

"That pretty well clears me out of ready money," he said at length, resuming his position in front of the mantelpiece, while Philip filled himself a glass of brandy-and-soda, "it will pull me up for a bit."

"Never mind," said Trevanna with an evil smile, "your marriage with Olive Maunders will put you straight."

"Leave Miss Maunders out of the question," observed Adrian imperiously, "you've no right to use her name."

"I'll use the name of anybody I like," retorted Trevanna, into whose head the liquor he had drunk was rapidly mounting.

"Except hers," said Lancaster quietly, although his dark face was flushed with anger.

Philip Trevanna laughed insolently at the remark and taking up a few cards, lightly balanced them in his hand.

“A nice one you are, to preach morality,” he said scoffingly, “you’re about as bad a lot as there is in Town.”

“You’re not much better, at all events,” observed Adrian wrathfully. “Look here, Trevanna, shut up—I’m not in the best of tempers, and you know I’ve got hot blood in my veins, so when I get angry it’s dangerous. Don’t rouse the tiger in me.”

“Don’t talk bosh,” said Trevanna politely, “you know you only want to marry Olive Maunders for her money.”

“Speak for yourself,” cried Lancaster, going over to a side table and taking up a decanter to pour himself out some brandy. “I know you’d give anything to be in my place.”

“Tell you what,” said Trevanna, with an ugly look. “I’ll play you for her—if I win, I marry her.”

“Hold your tongue,” retorted Adrian, grasping the stem of the decanter in a paroxysm of rage.

“I’ll back this thousand against Olive Maunders,” observed Trevanna, ignoring the menacing look of his friend. “Will you play?”

“No.”

“Then go to the devil,” shouted Philip, losing control of himself and flinging the cards he was holding into the face of Adrian. “Take that.”

The hot blood flamed in Lancaster’s face, and with a stifled roar of anger he threw the heavy decanter he was holding at Philip Trevanna’s head. It struck him full on the temple, and without a word the young man fell like a log on the floor, while the decanter, smashing into a thousand pieces, was scattered over the carpet, and the contents diffused an odour of spirits through the room.

There was a dead silence for one awful moment, broken only by the steady tick of the clock. Suddenly a woman in the street laughed shrilly, and the sound seemed to arouse Adrian out of the lethargy into which he had fallen. A red mist floated before his eyes and his limbs seemed paralysed. Even when he strove to cry out his voice died away in a hoarse whisper, and he stood with a terrible look of anguish on his face staring at the overturned card-table, the broken pieces of glass, and the figure lying at his feet so still and death-like, with a thin red stream of blood flowing from an ugly wound in the temple.

Once more the woman laughed, and Adrian rapidly sprang to the windows, in a stealthy manner, closed them and pulled down the blinds so as to shut out this terrible sight from the eyes of the prying world.

A sullen roll of thunder startled him, and with a hurried glance around he crept towards the still form of his friend.

“Philip,” he whispered, kneeling beside Trevanna’s body, “Philip.”

No answer! Adrian opened Trevanna’s shirt and placed his hand on the heart—it did not beat—he leaned his face downward to the slightly parted lips; there was no breath, and then, for the first time, a sense of what he had done seemed to break on him.

“Dead!” he whispered with ashen grey lips, in a paroxysm of terror, clasping his hands. “Dead!— I’ve killed him.”

He arose slowly to his feet, looked vacantly round the room, at the still, white face, at the stream of blood, then staggering to a side table he snatched up a bottle of whisky, and without waiting to fill a glass placed it to his lips. The fiery spirit put new life into him, and as his blood coursed swiftly through his veins, he braced his muscles, shook his head to clear the clouds which seemed to fog his brain, and nerved himself for action.

“I can’t stay here,” he whispered to himself, putting one hand up to his throat, “they would arrest me for murder—I would be hanged—Oh, God, the disgrace—poor Olive!”

The storm so long threatening had burst at last over the city, and the rain was pouring down with tropical violence, while every now and then, through the interstices of the Venetian blinds, gleamed the blueish flash of the lightning, and the deep roll of thunder which followed seemed to the ears of Adrian like the voice of an accusing angel denouncing him as a murderer.

There was no time to be lost, for at any moment someone might come up to his rooms and discover his crime; he would have to fly—but where could he fly to? where, in all this great city, was there a refuge for a murderer? Still, he dare not stay; he could give no plausible explanation, the evidence of his guilt was too strong; the police would come up, he would be arrested, then the inquest, the trial, the verdict—with the rapidity of lightning the possibility of these things flashed across his mind—and with a hoarse cry he sprang past the body on the floor into his bedroom.

There he put on a heavy ulster, which, reaching nearly to his feet, effectually hid the evening clothes he had no time to change. Then he put on a soft hat, pulled it down over his eyes, caught up a heavy stick and stole out again into the sitting-room, half thinking that it was all some hideous dream. But no, it was only too true—there on the floor lay the body of the man he had killed, and he, Adrian Lancaster, was a murderer.

The clock struck twelve with a silvery chime as he slowly pulled the dead man’s cloak off the back of a chair, and with a sudden movement flung it over the body as if terrified to look upon his handiwork. He turned out the gas which was flaring in the pink globes, and then crept towards the door in the darkness, carefully avoiding the place where the body lay. Once outside the door, which opened with a loud creak as if to denounce him, he locked it, and dropping the key into his pocket stole stealthily downstairs out into the stormy night, feeling that on his brow burned the mark of Cain, which, from henceforth, would make him a hunted fugitive on the face of the earth.

He walked slowly down the street towards Piccadilly, not heeding the direction, but only longing to get as far away from the scene of his crime as he could, and when a hansom suddenly drew up at the side of the pavement he felt a sudden convulsion of terror at hearing the voice of the driver asking if he wanted a cab. For a moment he hesitated, then, without a word, sprang in and flung himself back among the cushions, closing the doors, as if he could thus hide himself from the eyes of Justice.

“Where to, sir?” asked the driver, peering down through the trap-door in the roof of the cab.

Where to, indeed? Was there any sanctuary in this mighty London where he could hide? No, he could think of none; but with that instinct of self-preservation which is strong in the breast of every human being, he wished to fly as far away as he could, so said at a venture the first name that came into his head.

“Hampstead!”

“Right sir,” said the driver, and closing the trapdoor with a bang he let down the glass and drove off.

The wheels spun round, the lights of the gas-lamps flashed dully in through the blurred windows, and the man shrinking back among the cushions clenched his teeth and stared out at the night, painting with vivid fancy on the curtain of the dark the hideous scene from which he was flying.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Recluse**

The rapidity or slowness with which time passes depends entirely upon the feelings, and although the drive to Hampstead occupied only an hour, it seemed to Adrian Lancaster as if centuries had passed since he left his chambers. Between his past life of carelessness and ease and this one of agonizing feelings, a great gulf had widened which he knew would ever more separate him from his former state. A short time ago, he was a pleasure-loving man, rich, honoured and courted, but now he was a hunted fugitive—a social outcast, scorned of all men and pitied by none. The shock had been so great that he did not yet understand his position, but lay back among the cushions in a kind of dull apathy, the whole journey seeming to him to be a kind of hideous nightmare.

Suddenly the cab stopped, and the trap-door in the roof was opened by the driver.

“This is Hampstead, sir,” he said in a hoarse voice, “and the limit of the radius.”

“Very good,” replied Adrian dully, “I will get out here.”

He jumped out on to the sodden ground, turning up the collar of his coat, for the rain was still coming down heavily, and gave the cabman ten shillings in gold.

“I have no change, sir,” began the driver. “I—”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Adrian, waving his hand. “Good night,” and he tramped off into the darkness, while the cabman, with a muttered expression of thanks, drove back to town.

It was a lonely road, with a high fence on each side, topped by trees, and, beyond, great houses all in darkness, as the inmates had apparently gone to bed. Adrian had no idea where he was, but walked slowly along the muddy path with downcast head, and his hands thrust well into his pockets. His boots were more adapted to Piccadilly than to country roads, and the cold chill struck through the thin soles, but he paid no attention, mechanically walking onward without heeding where he was going. Above, the heavens were slightly clearing of their masses of clouds, and a few stars showed brightly in the cold blue, while the trees on each side shook their branches complainingly in the cold wind, and heavy drops of rain fell from their moist leaves.

At last he found himself walking along under a weather-stained brick wall, on the top of which grew luxurious ivy, and towards the end a low door appeared, which stood slightly open. Half thinking that it would admit him into some park where he could conceal himself, Adrian, with no very definite purpose in his mind, pushed it wide open and entered.

He found himself in dense darkness, standing in a path which apparently ran through a belt of beech trees whose branches meeting overhead shut out the midnight sky. With outstretched hands he carefully advanced, following the windings of the path, and carefully avoiding collision with the trunks of the tall trees on either side. At last he emerged into a wide lawn, half ringed by dense masses of trees, while at one end stood a large house with many gables and turrets standing black against the clear sky beyond.

Adrian recognized it as one of those old country houses which still remain in Hampstead, isolating themselves in sullen pride amid their wide parks, although enclosed on all sides by rows of red-brick villas and desirable residences. The long drive, the frightful excitement through which he had passed, and the dampness of the night were all telling on him physically, and he longed to find some place where he could lie down and rest. With this idea he stole across the lawn towards the house, and on turning the corner of a great beech tree which stood high up in a little knoll, he saw a bright light shining through an open French window. With stealthy steps and bated breath, he stepped up to it, keeping in the shadow beyond the stream of light, and on looking through espied a large comfortably-furnished apartment, with a man seated in a chair near a table covered with a white table-cloth, on which was spread a comfortable supper. Hardly knowing what he was doing, but only anxious to have someone to talk to and relieve his overburdened mind, Adrian boldly stepped into the room, a tall, sombre figure with muddy boots and wet with rain.

“Sir,” said Lancaster, taking off his hat, “will you permit me to—”

Suddenly he broke off his speech with a low cry for the figure in the chair, that of an old man wrapped in a comfortable dressing-gown did not stir, but remained in the same position with still limbs and closed eyes. Adrian at first thought he was asleep, but his case was too urgent to permit him remaining till the man awoke, so stepping forward he touched him on the shoulder. To his dismay, the figure did not stir, and on looking closely at the still face, the closed eyes, and the rigid limbs, Lancaster saw that he was dead. This fearful sight in connection with the horrors he had already undergone was too much for his nerves, and with an ejaculation of terror he put on his hat, and strode rapidly towards the window with the intention of seeking safety once more in flight.

“Stay!”

Adrian faced round rapidly with a thrill of horror, for it was the man whom he had thought dead was speaking, and who was now standing up with outstretched hand.

“Do not be alarmed,” he said in a full rich voice, with a reassuring smile. “I am not dead although you thought I was. Sit down for a few moments, and tell me who you are, and what you want here.” Adrian was too astonished at this reception to make any remark, and still felt inclined to retreat, but his host seemed to exert some mesmeric power over him, and he mechanically sank down into a chair near the table, letting his walking-stick fall on the floor. The unknown was a tall, massive looking man, with boldly cut features and a head of grey hair, worn rather long. He also had a heavy grey beard which swept his chest, and his hands were long and slender with sinewy fingers; but what attracted Adrian’s attention most were his eyes—dark brilliant eyes which had a look of power in their depths, and seemed to dominate everything with their piercing gaze. The expression of his features was calm, a terrible calm such as is seen upon the faces of Egyptian sphinxes, giving the onlooker the idea of some dread power concealed under the placid exterior.

“My name,” observed this man in his musical voice, resuming his seat, “is Doctor Michael Roversmire, and I shall be very glad if you will kindly explain your presence in my house, but first take a glass of wine, as you seem quite worn out.”

The young man, whose face looked worn and ill in the mellow light of the lamp, took the glass pushed forward by the doctor and drank off the contents. The generous liquor did him good, for it took away his feeling of fatigue, and as he replaced the glass on the table he felt able to reply to the question of his host. A feeling of caution, however, dictated his answer as he felt too much afraid of this calm man with the brilliant eyes to reveal all the events of the night.

“What my name is does not matter,” he said in a somewhat defiant manner, “but for the rest I was walking along the road and finding the garden door open, I entered. Coming into this room I saw you sitting apparently dead, and was going away to seek assistance when you called on me to stop.”

“A very fair explanation,” said Roversmire, calmly fixing his gaze steadily on the young man, “but one that does not satisfy me—what right had you to come into my garden at this hour, and why are you in such a dishevelled state? Gentlemen don’t usually walk about country roads in evening dress.”

“I came from town” replied Adrian sullenly.

“That’s more like it—but you’re not telling me everything. I could compel you to do so but at present prefer you to exercise your free will.”

“I won’t tell you a thing.”

“Reflect,” said the doctor, a faint smile curling his lips, “you are in my power. I have only to touch a bell and my servants will come in—I can give you in charge as a burglar and then, once in the clutches of the law, who knows what truths may be revealed?”

Adrian drew a long breath and looked earnestly at his host, who on his part eyed him in a masterful manner, which seemed to compel him to answer even against his will. He sank back in his chair with a groan, feeling that in this room he was utterly powerless and at the absolute disposal of Dr. Roversmire.

“Come,” said the latter quietly, “why set your will against mine? you are sure to be overpowered. I do not need to summon aid to enable me to retain you here; although apparently you can escape with the utmost ease through yonder window, yet unless I give you leave you will not be able to do so.”

Adrian cast a frightful look of anguish at this man who seemed able to unveil the whole of the events of the night, which he was desirous of concealing, and made an effort to rise but in vain, for his limbs felt paralyzed and refused to obey his will, so he remained seated in his chair waiting for Roversmire to speak.

“You see,” said that gentleman with a slight laugh, “you can do nothing contrary to my will, so your best plan is to tell me who you are and why you came here—perhaps I can help you.”

“Impossible.”

“That depends,” replied the doctor placidly. “I possess powers, as you can see for yourself, which can do more for you than ordinary assistance—now there is no time to lose—tell me your name.”

“Adrian Lancaster.”

Roversmire’s face flushed, and with an effort he preserved his composure, but it was evident that the young man’s name conveyed some meaning to him for he muttered to himself:

“Adrian Lancaster—the man she loves—this is better than I thought—he will be of service to me and while helping him I may teach her a lesson she sorely needs. I must learn all this youth has to tell me.”

He gazed steadily at the young man, and Adrian felt that in another moment he would reveal all he wished to keep secret, when by a powerful effort of will he checked the impulse.

“No! no!” he said thickly. “I won’t tell you— I dare not—I dare not.”

“You must,” replied the doctor, in a relentless voice. “Judging from your speech you are in great trouble. I alone can help you, and to do so I must learn all the events which have brought you here—speak!”

“No! no! no!” cried Lancaster, with a terrible contortion of his face, “I refuse.”

It was all in vain, however, setting his feeble will against that of the other, for little by little he felt the influence of the master mind dominate his own until at last all his resolution gave way with a rush, and in a quick, hurried voice, he told his tormentor all the events which had happened since he was playing cards with Philip Trevanna.

“Is that all?” said Roversmire, when Lancaster stopped in his recital from utter exhaustion. The young man made a motion with his head to signify it was, and the doctor, seeing that the effort had exhausted him both mentally and physically, made him drink another glass of wine, and then sitting down again in his own chair began to talk in a slow, deliberate manner.

“Judging from the explanation you have given me, you are in a very unpleasant position—however the man may be only stunned.”

“No — no,” interrupted Lancaster hurriedly, clasping his hands, “he is dead—I feel sure I killed him—oh, if I could only undo what I have done.”

“That is impossible,” said Roversmire a little sadly, “whatever we do always bears fruit either for good or evil, and we must abide by the consequences of our own acts—of course you killed Trevanna in a fit of passion, but I’m afraid such a plea will not hold good with a jury.”

“Do you intend to give me up?” cried Adrian in a voice of anguish.

“By no means—I was only putting a supposititious case—far from wishing to give you up for a crime committed in such an irresponsible manner I am going to save you.”

“But how?”

“That I will explain, but in order to do so I must tell you my history—it will sound like a romance to you, but luckily I shall be able to prove the truth of it to you by putting you in my own place.”

“In your own place,” said the young man in amazement.

“Exactly!” replied Roversmire gravely, “literally in my own place; as it happens I want to do something for which I must have assistance and you are the very person I want to assist me.”

“Then the garden door—”

“Was standing open on purpose. I thought sooner or later it would catch some bird, but I tell you frankly I expected a rough customer—say a burglar—not a gentleman like yourself who is—”

“A murderer,” groaned Adrian, hiding his face in his hands.

“Do not call yourself hard names,” said Roversmire with a mocking smile; “you’ll find plenty of people who will do that for you, if they see you, and even if they don’t—the absent are always wrong.”

“But they must see me—where can I hide?”



"In a very curious place," observed the doctor, "and one where they will never find you. I intend you to vanish."

"And fly the country?"

"No, you will stay in London, go about everywhere, meet your friends, and lead whatever life pleases you."

"But how can I do this if I vanish? I will be arrested if I go out."

"No, you will not."

"I don't understand."

"Nor will you till you hear my story."

"I'm ready."

The doctor looked piercingly at the young man for a moment, and then gave a satisfied laugh.

"I think you'll do," he said coolly, "desperate diseases require desperate remedies, and if you want to escape the strong arm of the law, you will have to undergo a very curious experience."

"And that experience."

"Forms the sequel to the story I am now going to tell you."

## **Chapter III**

### **The Dissection Of A Soul**

"The history of my life which I am about to relate to you is known to no one, and I only reveal it now as it is necessary for the success of the experiment I contemplate making that you should know all about me. I am generally supposed to be a cosmopolitan as I speak many languages, have travelled a great deal, and physically resemble the natives of no particular country. As a matter of fact, however, I am of mixed blood, my father being an Irish adventurer, and my mother a pure-blooded Hindoo. This blending of the East and the West gave me on the one hand a strong physique, and on the other a reflective brain, so that I was eminently fitted for the strange career I chose to lead during the earlier part of my life.

"My father went out to India when it was ruled by the H. E. I. C. and, being an unscrupulous man, determined to make money in the easiest way he could. A chance soon presented itself, for my mother, the daughter of a high priest of Brahma, fell in love with his handsome face, and yielding to his protestations of love, gave up her country, religion and parents in order to fly with him, which she did, carrying with her no inconsiderable amount of wealth, principally consisting of gems stolen from the treasury of the temple.

"My parents came to England and, shortly after I was born, my mother, unable to bear the rigour of the English climate, died, while my father shortly afterwards followed her to the grave, being assisted there, as I strongly suspect, by a Hindoo servant who resented his treatment of my mother. This servant, by name Lai Chunder, then returned to India, taking with him the remnant of the stolen jewels and myself, the offspring of the illfated marriage. The jewels were restored to the temple of the offended god, and I was given in charge of my grandfather, the high priest, while Lai Chunder, having lost caste by crossing

the ocean, was purified before the shrine of Brahma and then sent forth as a fakir to do penance for the rest of his life.

“Seeing that I was partly Irish, and the offspring of a man he hated, my grandfather was not at all prepossessed in my favour, and I have often wondered that he did not kill me by some subtle means known to his sect, but whatever power may have withheld his hand, he did not do so, but at first tolerated my presence and afterwards grew very fond of me. My mixed blood prevented me from becoming a priest, but my grandfather taught me all the lore of the temple, and being a remarkably quick child I soon picked up a great deal of curious knowledge. The East, as you know, has always been much more accomplished in esoteric learning than the West, seeing that the Asiatics study the operations of the spirit, while the Europeans confine themselves mostly to the material wants of man, so that having a vein of Eastern mysticism in my blood coming from my mother’s side, I became deeply versed in occult science.

“As the years rolled by, I was initiated into the most profound mysteries and by subjecting my body to the ordeal of fasting, as practised by the fakirs and yoghis of Hindostan, I gained a wonderful command over the spiritual part of myself. Unluckily, my grandfather died just as I was attaining the last secrets of Eastern psychology, and, his influence being withdrawn, his fellow priests determined to kill me as one knowing too much of their secrets and dangerous to the brotherhood. Fortunately, however, my learning stood me in good stead for I discovered my danger and fled from the neighbourhood. This would not have saved me, seeing that the priests had at their command secrets which, if used, would have annihilated me physically by disintegrating my body, and sending my soul forth to the infinite without its fleshy envelope.

“At this critical stage of my career, however, I chanced to meet my old friend, Lai Chunder, who was still engaged in his life-long penance, and by his power I was protected in a great measure from the malignity of the Brahmins. Lai Chunder was a man who had a marvellous knowledge of those secrets of psychological science for which the self-complacent savants of Europe profess such profound contempt. For them the Hindoo trinity of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer, instead of being the visible emblems of a subtle religious system, are merely the proof of a gross idolatry. Thanks to my Indian blood, my initiation into the secret brotherhood, and my acquaintance with the learned yoghi, Lai Chunder, I was enabled to pierce the painted veil which hid the shrine from the eyes of the common people and participate in the wonderful secrets of metempsychosis won from the spiritual world through long centuries of patient work.

“I remained a long time with Lai Chunder, submitted myself to prolonged fastings, to terrible ordeals which required a soul of iron to withstand, and after years of self-torture, months of motionless contemplations, and long weeks of ardent study, I arrived at a profound knowledge of the hidden mysteries of the spiritual world. The ordeal was a frightful one, physically as well as mentally, but thanks to the tremendous vital powers I inherited from my father, and the subtle intellect which was the gift of my mother, I survived years of anguish and suffering, attaining at last the wished-for goal. I could leave this tenement of clay at will, and could send my astral body whither I desired.

I could indulge in the dreams of a god, and partake of the joys of Paradise even before my body had perished from this earth. Willingly would I have remained away for ever and let my pain-twisted, scarred body return to the earth from whence it originally sprung, but the laws of the Universe prevented me; my time had not yet come, and I was forced to return at certain intervals and re-incarnate myself in this body which I now wear.

“One secret Lai Chunder withheld from me—a secret which I ardently desired to learn, namely, how to incarnate my own soul or that of another human being’s in a separate body. I have seen my master leave his own body apparently lifeless, and re-incarnate his soul in a corpse; the dead arose, walked, talked, and lived under the animating influence of the soul of Lai Chunder, and then returned to its former lifeless

condition when the animating soul came back once more to its accustomed tenement. This secret was withheld from me, as Lai Chunder considered I had not achieved a sufficient degree of purification to be blessed with such a boon, so in order to gain this last secret I travelled to Thibet and took up my abode with the mystic brotherhood who have their home in those distant wilds. I remained some years with them, and, at last, having attained the highest degree of spirituality possible for a denizen of this planet, I returned to Lai Chunder, whom I found on the point of death. His hour had come, and his soul was about to leave his emaciated body for the last time. Previous, however, to his departure, being satisfied with my efforts to deserve knowledge, he initiated me into the last secret of all, and then his soul departed from this earth for ever, to return to the spirit world from whence it originally came.

“When this took place I eagerly tried the effect of my newly-acquired knowledge, and, leaving my own body, I projected my soul into the shell of Lai Chunder. The experiment was entirely successful, for in the guise of Lai Chunder I arose and walked, while at my feet my former tenement remained motionless and empty. The laws of the universe, however, forced me to return once more to my own body, and having done so, I buried the mortal part of the yoghi in the earth to resolve into its original elements, and then left India for Europe.

“I did this as I was still an object of enmity to the priests, and although I now possessed spiritual powers equal to their own, was unwilling to come into collision with them in any way. I had plenty of money, and, as far as material wants were concerned, I was amply provided; while, of course, my life-long studies gave me complete command over the spiritual part of myself.

“I only arrived in England last year, and established myself in this house, which I found convenient to the city and also isolated enough to permit me to live my own life without comment. I have one servant, whom I hired when I first settled down, and he serves me sufficiently well—that is, he does everything necessary for my material wants, and speaks to no one about the life I lead. I frequently leave my body for days, and soar, untrammelled, through the wide expanse of the infinite—I have strange visions, wild dreams, unexplainable ecstasies—and my only regret is, that being bound by the laws of the universe, which are fixed and unalterable, I have to return at certain intervals to this body. Of course, my servant knows nothing of my trances, as his knowledge of me is bounded by the life I lead in this house.

“Curiously enough, in spite of my years of spiritual training, my material desires were not yet conquered, and six months after my arrival in this country I fell in love. What attracted me most about the young lady I became attached to, was not her beauty of face and form, although in both of these she was pre-eminent, but the strong masculine spirit which inhabited her feminine body. I was introduced to her through the medium of her father, on whom I called to deliver a letter of introduction from a friend in India. Finding that my material nature had surrendered to the spell she had cast over me, I determined to marry her and initiate her into the mysteries of occult science, so that, like myself, her soul would be able to leave her body and fly side by side with mine through infinite space. She, however, was already in love with a young man about her own age, and, not finding my ancient years and my scarred and emaciated body sufficiently attractive, refused to marry me—so, after many trials, failing to shake her resolution, I gave up all thought of attaining my object and returned here to await in patience the period of my solution, when my soul will at last leave this body and reside for ever in the unseen world which it loves.

“You may imagine that, now the only being I ever loved has so disdainfully trampled on the affection I offered her, I have no wish to stay on the earth longer than I can help. As I told you, however, the laws of the universe do not permit me to leave my body until the period appointed by God. Although I am now sixty years of age, and my body has been exposed to tortures and privations which would have killed an ordinary man, yet I still live on, and, so far as I can see, there is no probability of my dying for some years. Ardently desiring, however, to cut short my period of earth-life, I sought for some other solution of the enigma besides death. I could not die, and I dare not kill myself, for suicide is terribly punished in the spiritual world as soul-murder, but by means of my communings, while in the spirit, with the inhabitants

of distant spheres, I have discovered that if I can obtain a soul willing to inhabit my own body and work out its allotted years, my own soul can leave the world for ever.

“This solution perplexed me very much, as I did not know where to find a man who would be willing to leave his own body and incarnate himself in this withered trunk which goes by the name of Dr. Michael Roversmire.

“I thought, however, that chance might send me someone willing to do what I wanted, and the garden door was left open by me so that some stranger might be drawn hither by my strong desire for his services. Had it been a burglar, I would have offered him the choice of being arrested for his attempt to rob my house, or of being incarnated in my body, enjoying my income and working out the balance of my life.

“Though some weeks have passed, no one came however, but to-night you presented yourself, and I think you will be an excellent subject for my purpose. You have committed a murder, and in your own body are in danger of being hanged. I therefore propose that you should conceal yourself in my frame and work out my allotted span of life, so that my soul can leave the world without sin and mingle for ever with the pure spirits who inhabit the unseen universe.

“You see, therefore, that if you are agreeable to my plan, I can secure you from all earthly harm by incarnating your soul in my body. As Adrian Lancaster, to-morrow will see you in prison, and a few weeks, possibly on the scaffold, but concealed in the personality of Dr. Michael Roversmire, you will be able to defy everyone and lead whatever life you desire.

“Now I have told you my story you can ask me whatever questions you please, but I think I have put the question plainly before you, and it remains with yourself whether you will accede to my request and incarnate yourself in my body or, as Adrian Lancaster, run the risk of arrest and an ignominious death at the hands of the law.”

## **Chapter IV**

### **A Curious Transformation**

Adrian listened to this strange recital in silent astonishment, and in spite of the trouble in which he was involved, felt inclined to regard the whole as the whimsical outcome of a madman's brain. He had heard a great deal about occult science, theosophy, and spiritist belief, but, engaged in a frivolous life, had not paid much attention to their teachings and looked upon them as the religions of charlatans and quacks. But here was a man who far outstripped the powers which theosophists and spiritists professed to exercise, arrogating to himself the functions of the Creator in dealing with souls. The whole narration was too fantastical for belief, still he was in such desperate danger that he gladly seized any chance that promised safety, and proceeded to interrogate Roversmire in order to find out if there was anything tangible in the weird belief he held.

“If I accept your offer,” he said slowly, “and permit you to incarnate my soul in your body, what becomes of my own?”

“It will remain, to all appearances, dead, until your soul again returns to animate it.”

“I will go back to it again, then?”

“Yes!—I think so. My body is sixty years old, yours is, I should say, about twenty-six years, and as things stand now, there is every prospect that you will outlive me. When, therefore your soul inhabits my body,

such body will die at my allotted time, and your soul, having no habitation, will be forced to return to your own body in order to work out its period.”

“But, suppose I am incarnated in your body for years, will not my own decay?”

“No—because it is not dead—only asleep. If, however, it is fated that you should die before myself, your body will begin to decay, and then you will remain in mine till the period fixed by God for solution, and your soul will then mingle in the world of spirits as if you had died in your own frame.”

“I understand,” said Adrian thoughtfully; “it is a curious idea.”

“It is a very fortunate one—for you,” replied Roversmire quietly.

“Where will my body remain during the time I am incarnated in yours?”

“In this house,” said the doctor, rising and going over to the fireplace. “As there was danger that my body might be meddled with by ignorant people during the periods my soul was absent, it was necessary to place it in safety, so I sent my servant away for a few weeks and had a secret chamber constructed, about which he knows nothing. When I want to assume my astral body I tell him I am going out of town for a few days so that he may not think my disappearance strange. Then I enter into my secret chamber, leave my body there and go where I will, knowing that my fleshly envelope is safe till I return. When you entered to-night, however, I left my body sitting in yonder chair, but your presence warned my spirit of danger to the physical part of myself, so I returned in time to stay your exit.”

“Where is this secret chamber,” asked Adrian, rising, now more inclined to believe the fantastic story of the doctor. “Can I see it?”

“Certainly, it is important you should know it as you will have to leave your present body in it for safety. Look!”

He touched a spring in the mantelpiece, whereupon the whole of the fireplace swung round on a kind of pivot, showing that the back was hollow and that a narrow flight of steps led downward into darkness. Roversmire lighted a candle which stood on the mantelpiece, then taking it in his hands, bent down and entered into the cavity, beckoning to Adrian to follow. The young man did so, and as soon as they were on the verge of the steps, the doctor, touching another spring in the stone wall, caused the fireplace to swing back again into its place.

“You see, anyone in the room could not tell we were hidden here,” said Roversmire, smiling. “Come downstairs and I will show you the secret of the pyramid.”

Somewhat bewildered by this strange experience, Adrian followed the doctor down the narrow stairs guided by the glimmering light of the taper. They went down for some distance, then found themselves in a small square vault, with room enough for three people to stand in it. Roversmire again touched a spring and one part of the wall slid slowly aside, showing a space beyond in utter darkness.

“Another precaution, you see,” said the doctor, pointing to the third spring. “Anyone who found the first secret would never guess the second. Come!”

He advanced into the vault, and going towards one end of it turned an ivory handle fixed in the wall, whereupon the whole apartment was irradiated with a powerful electric light. Adrian gave an exclamation of surprise and put his hands over his eyes as they felt quite painful in the sudden glare after the dense darkness, only lighted by the candle.

It was a moderate-sized apartment, circular in shape, with a domed roof of pure white, painted with signs of the Zodiac, and from the centre blazed the electric light hidden in a large semi-opaque globe. The walls were hung with strange tapestries of brilliant colours, whereon were depicted the animal gods of Egypt and the fantastic deities of India, while the floor was covered by a thick, soft carpet with a bizarre pattern in blue, yellow and red, the outcome of some opium-confused, oriental imagination. At one side of this queer place was a low couch covered with a magnificent tiger skin, and near at hand a mother-of-pearl inlaid Moorish table, whereon stood a decanter of red wine and some glasses, together with a plate of white bread.

“The existence of this is only known to ourselves,” said Dr. Roversmire, casting a satisfied look around, “and here you can leave your body until such time as it is fated mine should die, when your soul will of course return to its former dwelling-place, but as the body left so long without action or food will be weak, you will find the wine and bread of great service in restoring your vital powers.”

“But suppose your body dies soon and I have to return to my own,” said the young man miserably. “I will then be arrested.”

“That, of course, will be your own look out,” retorted the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. “I provide you with a hiding-place for a time, and if my body dies and you lose your city of refuge—well, it is not my fault; but I think you can rest assured that unless some accident happens or you commit suicide, my body will continue on this earth for a few more years, and by the time it dies the whole affair of this murder will have blown over and you can re-animate your own body, go out of the county and live on my money, which I freely make over to you.”

“Are you rich?”

“Yes, I think you will find plenty of ready money standing in my name in the International Bank, and moreover in my desk is a small box of gems which are worth a great deal; whatever income you may possess now, I don’t think you’ll suffer by the change into my body.”

“But are you not sorry to give up all this wealth?”

Dr. Roversmire laughed in an amused manner, as if Adrian had asked a childish question, which, indeed, he had, from the doctor’s point of view.

“Sorry,” he echoed, “sorry to exchange this weary body for an astral one—sorry to give up the gross pleasures of earth for the pure delights of the spiritual world? No, I am not sorry; the change to me will be like that of a beggar man passing suddenly from abject poverty to kingly affluence.”

“But reflect,” said Adrian earnestly, “if I accept your offer, think of what I am—I have committed a crime. According to my own showing I am not a good man; my soul in your body may commit many foolish actions, and yet you will be held guilty of them.”

“My body will, not my soul,” replied Roversmire coolly. “Whatever you do in my body will have to be expiated by your own soul since it is your freewill that acts and not mine—as to my personality, which you seem afraid of harming, it does not matter to me in the least—I have no relations on whom your actions in my body would bring disgrace; you can do what you like with my shell—I am only concerned about my soul.

“But how about your past life?”

"I have told you all my past life, but should you need to know more there are plenty of papers in my desk which will tell you every action of mine since my arrival in England; with my Indian life you have nothing to do, as no trouble will come from there; my reputation is that of a savant and a recluse; when you occupy my body you can indulge in whatever pranks you like, but I warn you, that however youthful your soul may be, the body is old and weak, and if you play with it you will kill it and thus lose your city of refuge sooner than you expect, so your safety rests entirely with yourself."

"It's impossible to undo the past," said Adrian gloomily, "and although I committed the crime in a moment of passion, I will never cease to feel remorse."

"That is part of your punishment," said Roversmire seriously. "I can give you a new body but not a new soul, so whatever acts of evil you have done in your past life the remembrance will always cling to you; but if you expiate your crime on earth by prayers and repentance in my body and in your own, it will purify your spirit for the world beyond. Now I think everything has been explained, so if you will lie down on that couch I will release my own soul and accomplish the transformation of yours into my body."

"One moment," cried Adrian, as he sat down on the couch, "how can I sign your name to cheques and imitate your handwriting?"

"You will do so mechanically," said Roversmire, who was lighting a fire in a small brazier; "writing is an operation of the body, not of the soul. I cannot give you my learning, as that pertains to the soul and I take it with me, but all material knowledge I possess or physical dexterity I have acquired will be yours, to use as you will—now, are you ready?"

"Yes," said Adrian, obediently lying down, "but I am engaged to marry a girl called Olive Maunders — how will that affect me in your body?"

"Of course she won't know you," replied the doctor with a peculiar smile, fanning the fire which was now at red heat. "You will have to wait till you reassume your own body before marrying her —but it is simply a question of safety for you just now, so you'd better leave love out of the question or you will lose your life, your love, and everything else."

Adrian gave a sigh of sorrow, and slightly turning his head, watched the preparations of the doctor. The fire was now burning a deep red, and the brazier was standing in the centre of a ring of white powder which had been strewn around it. The doctor bent down and touched this powder with his finger, muttering some words, whereupon a blue lambent flame sprang up and ran round the circle. Roversmire then cast some herbs on the fire, which he took out of a small silver box, and raising his arms chanted a kind of hymn in a low soft voice. The wild music, barbaric in the extreme, rose and fell like the rhythmical fall of waves on a lonely beach, and a thick white smoke curled upward from the brazier, spreading a pungent odour through the vault.

After a time Roversmire, looking strange and spectral amid the veil of smoke, paused in his chanting, crossed over to the young man and spoke solemnly:

"I am about to leave this world for that of the spirits and I leave your soul in charge of my body —make good use of it, for what you do will be of your own free will and must be expiated by your own spirit. Are you ready and willing to take this burden upon you?"

"I am ready," replied Adrian slowly.

"Then close your eyes," commanded Roversmire going over to the brazier. "Farewell, and may your crime-stained soul be cleansed by prayer, repentance and expiation."

In obedience to the instructions, Adrian closed his eyes and felt the acrid odour of the smoke titillate his nostrils, while the doctor resumed his measured chant. The strange melody which sounded like the wailing of a lost spirit seemed to recede further and further away as the senses of the young man became clouded by the fumes spreading through the apartment. Suddenly his whole body felt contorted with extreme pain, every muscle, every nerve seemed to be wrenched asunder, and in a paroxysm of terror he strove to cry out, but was unable to do so. Fire seemed to run all through his body, burning up his physical frame, and he writhed and twisted in an agony of torture, then a thick darkness seemed to descend on his brain and he remembered no more.

How long the thick darkness continued he did not know, for when he opened his eyes again he was lying on the floor near the brazier, from whence all the fire had died away. A cold air pervaded the vault, and raising himself from the floor, Adrian saw with a sudden thrill of horror that his body, pale and still, was lying on the couch while he himself, looking down at his limbs, saw that they were wrapped in Roversmire's dressing-gown. With a cry which did not sound like his own voice he walked to a mirror which was hanging on the wall and then recoiled with a shudder, for the face which looked from the glass was not his own handsome countenance, but the old, grey-bearded, wrinkled face of Roversmire, now no longer calm and placid but convulsed with terror and anguish.

The transformation had taken place.

Adrian, in the person of Dr. Michael Roversmire, walked languidly over to the table, already feeling in his limbs the difference between youth and age, and pouring out a glass of wine drank it up. Then looking at his own body lying so still on the couch, he folded the arms across the chest, lighted the candle, and after turning out the electric light, left the vault.

He soon found his way back to the room above, as his hands seemed to mechanically discover the secret springs, then putting back the fireplace into its original condition, he blew out the candle and replaced it on the table, then falling on his knees prayed long and earnestly.

He was safe so far, for his guilty soul now inherited the body of Roversmire, and his outward semblance, which would have caused his arrest, was safely hidden in the secret room below.

The events of the night had been terrible, and quite worn out with the anguish and misery his soul had undergone, he staggered to a couch, flung himself down on it and was soon fast asleep.

## **Chapter V**

### **New Wine In An Old Bottle**

When Adrian awoke next morning he half thought that the fantastic events of the night were but the outcome of some strange dream, but a single glance in the mirror soon disillusioned him as he saw reflected back the countenance of Dr. Michael Roversmire. It was true then—he had voluntarily placed his soul in the outward semblance of the old man, and would have to lead his life, be bound by his physical restrictions and be to all intents and purposes another person, until such time as the worn-out body died and he could return once more to his own frame. And then there would be the danger of paying the penalty of the crime he had committed. No! there was no safety for him save in the guise of age, and he would have to patiently endure this servitude which he had brought upon himself.

While he was seated on the couch in the disordered sitting-room, wondering what was the first step to take in his new existence, the door opened and a pale, lean man, quietly dressed in black, appeared. This was Dentham, the servant alluded to by Doctor Roversmire, and his appearance by no means impressed Adrian in a favourable manner. Tall, thin and supple, his movements seemed to have the sinuosity of a serpent,



and his pallid face, clean shaven and serious, looked cold and cunning under a sparse crop of thin red hair, giving the young man an uneasy feeling of repulsion, similar to that provoked by the sight of a noxious animal. The shifty grey eyes, habitually downcast, the thin lips twitching involuntarily at the corners and the air of self-restraint, all clearly pointed to the fact that this man had a cunning nature and would by no means be averse to performing any treacherous action for the sake of money. Adrian took an immediate dislike to his physiognomy, which dislike was not lessened when he heard the soft, hissing voice which issued from the thin lips.

"Have you not been in bed, sir?" he asked, closing the door softly after him, and coming forward to the centre of the room.

"No," replied Adrian, in a dull voice, feeling it incumbent upon him to keep up the character he had assumed, "I have been engaged in writing and just slept here for a few hours."

Dentham cast a swift glance at the writing materials lying on a desk standing near the window, let his cold glance dwell doubtfully for a moment on his master's face and then spoke again.

"What would you be pleased to have for breakfast, sir?"

"The same as usual," replied Adrian, who had not the slightest idea but that Roversmire might have been a vegetarian, and therefore felt afraid to say anything. "Meanwhile I'll go up to my room and have a bath."

"You will find everything ready, sir," answered Dentham, respectfully holding the door open.

Adrian did not know where the bedroom was, but did not like to ask Dentham, knowing it would look curious in his eyes, so left the room, trusting to chance to find it. Luckily he had not proceeded very far when he saw through an open door a sponge-bath filled with water, and guessing this to be Roversmire's bedroom, went inside, closing the door after him.

Left alone in the sitting-room, Dentham's manner underwent a rapid change and from wearing an air of cold self-restraint he became as eager and as anxious as a ferret. He glanced rapidly round the room, went across to the writing-desk, turned over the papers quickly with his lean hands, marked the two arm-chairs set opposite one another near the table, noticed that two glasses had been filled with wine, then suddenly caught sight of Adrian's stick, which he had thrown down the previous evening.

"I knew I was right" murmured Dentham to himself, pouncing eagerly on the stick. "It was the voice of a stranger. Someone's been to see him. I wonder what's up; this ain't his stick."

He looked carefully at the stick, a massive oaken staff, round the top of which was a gold band, marked with the letters "A. L.," which discovery seemed to afford him much satisfaction.

"I wonder who it was came," he repeated, twisting the stick round and round. "The letters of his name are 'A. L.,' and he's gone off again, leaving his stick behind him. That's queer! Rum old cove, my master. I can't make him out."

The fact was, Dr. Roversmire's peculiar mode of life had roused the curiosity of Mr. Dentham, who was of a very suspicious nature, and he was anxious to find out the reason of his master's solitary life, and if possible turn it to his own advantage. Up till the present, although he had watched the movements of the doctor closely, nothing had occurred to justify his suspicions that anything was wrong, but on the previous night he had heard two voices in conversation, and now that he saw two separate glasses of wine had been drunk, and had found the tangible evidence of the walking-stick, he became assured that his master had received a visitor during the night.

“Wish I’d listened,” said Mr. Dentham, in a disappointed tone. “I might have found out what was up. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised to find the old cove was a forger or a thief—there must be some reason for the way he lives, and if I find out anything, I’ll make some money out of it.”

He went off to his own room, hid the stick safely away, returning with a self-satisfied air to lay the table, fully determined to keep his eyes open and watch the actions of Dr. Roversmire so as to trip him up should he espy anything wrong.

Meanwhile Adrian had freshened himself with a bath, and changed his clothes for some which he found in the wardrobe, still, however, retaining the dressing-gown, as he did not want to make too sudden a change in his outward appearance. He intended to make a close examination of all Roversmire’s papers in order to get himself thoroughly conversant with the daily life of the recluse. It was curious that he should take so much trouble in learning all the tricks, manners and daily actions of his usual body, seeing that it was impossible anyone could comprehend the change that had taken place, and however strikingly he altered his habits it would be put down by every person to the well-known eccentricities of the doctor. Assuming a new body as a disguise is very different from assuming a new garb, and it was this very novelty that made Adrian so painfully careful, as it seemed almost impossible to him that no one should notice the transformation.

Having finished his toilet, he returned to the sitting-room and found the table spread for breakfast consisting of milk, eggs, watercress and fruit.

Dentham was in attendance, but Adrian speedily dismissed him, as he felt ill at ease under the stealthy glances which the servant bestowed upon him whenever he felt himself unobserved.

“I wonder if he notices any difference,” said Adrian to himself when Dentham had retired, closing the door softly after him, “Pshaw! of course not—it would be a clever person who could find the soul of Adrian Lancaster in the body of Michael Roversmire.”

He made a very good breakfast and was about to devote himself to the task of looking over Roversmire’s private papers, when he suddenly recollected his hat, cloak and stick, not wishing to leave them about, lest the keen eyes of Dentham should see them and an awkward explanation might ensue. Although he searched the sitting-room yet he could not find them; then suddenly recollected that he might have taken them down with him to the secret chamber. In order to be certain of this and set his mind at rest, he lighted a candle, touched the spring and having replaced the fireplace in its normal condition so as to obviate discovery by Dentham, descended into the vault, turned on the electric light and looked around.

The sight of his former body lying so still and deathlike gave him a momentary pang, and he could not help contrasting its handsome face and fine figure with his present uncouth exterior, for owing to the ordeals to which it had been subjected, the body of Dr. Roversmire was in a rather battered condition. Adrian saw that his own frame was still wrapped in the ulster, and the hat lay beside the couch on the floor, but although he hunted in every corner of the vault he could not find the stick. With a thrill of terror he extinguished the electric light and then in the darkness, feebly lighted by the glimmering taper, he seemed to feel the spiritual presence of the old fakir, who had doubtless returned to see how the occupant of his body was getting on. A cold breath of air seemed to break suddenly into the warm atmosphere of the vault, and Adrian half thought he saw a luminous cloud hovering near him. The half vision however soon vanished, and the young man put it down to the excited state of his mind. Still, the vault seemed to be occupied by some strange presence, and he hurriedly left this nether apartment and returned hurriedly to the upper room, which he luckily found still untenanted.

“Thank heaven that infernal servant didn’t discover my absence,” he thought, blowing out the candle. “I don’t trust him in any way, and the old doctor was more easily gulled than I should have thought possible if he believed in a man with such a treacherous face.”

At this moment the subject of his reflections entered the room and proceeded to clear away the breakfast things, at the same time handing the Daily Telegraph of the day to his master.

“By-the-way, Dentham, you did not see a walking-stick lying about here—an oak stick with a gold band round it?” asked Adrian unfolding the paper.

“No sir, I did not,” replied Dentham, telling the lie without moving a muscle of his pale face, “was it yours sir?”

“Yes! I carried it yesterday and left it lying about the room.”

“I did not know you were out yesterday, sir.”

“You don’t know a good many things,” said Adrian tartly, smoothing out the newspaper, “you can go.”

Dentham withdrew without a word and smiled subtly to himself when safe outside.

“Says it’s his own stick,” he muttered under his breath. “Oh, yes, I dare say—but your name don’t begin with ‘A. L.’ Dr. Roversmire—there’s something queer about all this; I believe he’s the head of a gang of forgers and one of ‘em came to see him. I’ll keep my eyes open in case there’s a row.”

Adrian soon dismissed the episode of the stick from his mind, as he did not remember all the events of the previous night and half thought he might have lost the stick in his journey from the garden door to the house. Meantime he looked at the paper anxious to see if there was anything about his crime of the previous night. As he anticipated there was a short statement, but owing to the late hour at which the affair had taken place, a very full report had not come to hand.

The paragraph was headed “A Curious Affair,” and it stated that a gentleman called Lancelot Alther, had gone up to Mr. Adrian Lancaster’s rooms early in the morning and found the owner absent, and a mutual friend, Mr. Philip Trevanna, lying half-dead on the floor. He had been stunned, but on administration of remedies had revived, although he could not give any explanation of the assault as he was now in a high fever, and it was doubtful if he would recover. Mr. Lancaster had disappeared and no trace of him had been discovered.

Adrian laid down the paper with a sigh of relief as he read the news.

“I didn’t kill him after all,” he said in a thankful tone, “he was only stunned, and it would have been better if I had remained and explained the affair, although in any case I would certainly have been arrested. At all events, even if he does recover, it’s too late now to do anything. I’m imprisoned in this body, and, unless something happens, will have no opportunity of becoming Adrian Lancaster again. I have indeed vanished completely from the world, and I don’t think all the police in London will be able to trace my whereabouts. I must just wait patiently for the chapter of accidents to redeem me—curses on me for a fool in accepting Roversmire’s offer so readily—I am lost to the world—to Olive and to everything else, and all by my own act. I’ll wait and see if Philip Trevanna recovers, then some chance may release me from this mask of old age, and I’ll be able to face my fellow men once more as Adrian Lancaster.”

## **Chapter VI**

### **The Tortures Of Hell**

There is no punishment that men can devise so terrible in its effects as remorse, Physical tortures cannot last longer than a certain period without wearing out the body, but remorse is a monster which feeds upon itself and, little by little, gains possession of the whole inner life, making outward things hateful to the sight. It was this feeling that Adrian experienced after he had surrendered his liberty to gain safety in the body of Dr. Roversmire. The memory of his crime was constantly with him, reminding him at every moment of the day that his soul was held in the bondage of an alien body, and that, even if Philip Trevanna recovered, he would be powerless to break the chain which fettered him. The deed, once done, could not be recalled, and, of his own free will, he had entered into a prison from which nothing short of a miracle could release him.

As the days went slowly by he strove mightily to adapt himself to the dreary, monotonous life which he was now leading. Roversmire had indeed been able to draw entertainment from his stores of knowledge, his vast experience, and his power of releasing his soul from his body whenever earthly things grew too irksome to him, but Adrian, having lived all his life in a frivolous world, had not a well-stored mind to draw upon, consequently being debarred by his strange position from his ordinary pleasures he did not know how to employ his time. Furthermore, the memory of his folly stung him sharply, and the forced inaction of the life of seclusion, to which he was now condemned, made his tortured soul writhe in its new dwelling-place with a hideous sense of impotence and weariness.

Day by day the papers informed him of the progress which Philip Trevanna was making towards recovery, and the astonishment excited by his own strange disappearance, but he was powerless to come forward, explain the circumstances of the affair, and resume his place among his fellow-men. He had sinned in permitting his temper to lead him to so nearly kill a human being, and this was his punishment—this dreary life of forced inaction, of agonising remorse, and of terrible self-reproach. Truly he was paying dearly for the one mad act of his life, and to his mind the punishment appeared immeasurably severe to the magnitude of the crime. Had Philip Trevanna died, he would have accepted his terrible situation with sullen apathy, looking upon it as a fit reward for taking the life of a fellow-man, but seeing that his friend was recovering, that the crime was unpremeditated, and that Trevanna had provoked him beyond all powers of endurance, it seemed bitterly hard that he should have to pass an indefinite period in a constant state of torture.

This unpleasant state of things was not rendered any more bearable by the presence of Dentham, who, Adrian knew, kept a constant watch upon his every action. What the man suspected he could not tell, but that he was suspicious of the life led by Dr. Michael Roversmire was certain, as Adrian felt rather than saw the stealthy glances with which he watched his goings out and comings in, gettings up and layings down. This, in itself, was enough to irritate a sensitive mind, but added to the appalling tortures the unhappy young man was constantly feeling, it drove him nearly to the verge of distraction, and he longed for something to happen which would give him, if not a release, at least change of life. At last an event happened which caused Adrian to make up his mind to leave his seclusion, and which also caused considerable anxiety to the enquiring mind of Mr. Dentham.

One day, about two weeks after the transformation had taken place, Adrian saw in the paper a notice of a reward offered for the discovery of the whereabouts of Adrian Lancaster.

“I’m wanted by the police, I suppose,” he muttered gloomily to himself; but this idea was soon dispelled when he read the last lines of the advertisement, which said that all information was to be given to O. M., The Nook, Marlow, Bucks.

“It’s Olive! Olive!” cried Adrian, throwing down the paper, “she wants to find out where I am and help me, God bless her; if I could only reveal myself to her—but it’s impossible. Dr. Roversmire is a stranger to her, and if I told her what had taken place, she would look upon me as a madman. What am I to do?—God help me, what am I to do?”

He walked up and down the room, plucking at his long grey beard as if he would tear from his young soul this mark of age.

“She could never love me as I am now,” he said, clasping his hands, “for that would be treachery to my memory, and this face is not the one to win any girl’s love—did not Roversmire himself say that the woman he loved refused to return his passion?—stay! perhaps if I look through this desk I may find out the name of the woman he loved, and go and see her—something may come of it, though I dread even to hope that things will turn out well.”

Sitting down at the desk near a deep, wide window, he unlocked it with the key which was placed therein, and began to turn over the papers in the hope of finding some clue to the name of this girl, whose rejection of Roversmire’s suit had indirectly led up to the catastrophe which had happened to himself.

He was about an hour looking through the papers, but found nothing likely to lead to discovery, until at length he found a locked book, which he immediately guessed was the diary of Roversmire.

“If it’s anywhere, it will be in here,” he said to himself, “but it’s locked—I wonder where the key is—it’s a very small hole, so the key must also be small. I don’t think I’ve seen any key that size, and yet—ah!” with a sudden recollection, “it’s on the watch chain.”

And so it was, a long slender golden key of Indian workmanship, with which Adrian easily unlocked the book, and was soon deep in the contents written in the small, clear handwriting of the doctor. For a long time he read steadily on, without finding what he was in search of.

The entries principally related to the writer’s life in India, the periods of his fasts, the statements of his feelings, the dates upon which he arrived at and departed from different places, and every now and then, wild rhapsodies, peculiarly Oriental in their poetic thought and imagery of the delights, ecstasies, and marvellous pleasures he had tasted of, when set free from his earthly body. Later on in the book, the doctor recorded his arrival in England, the disposition of his affairs with regard to money; the taking of his house at Hampstead, and the way in which he lived secluded from all men.

Then, at last, came a declaration of his passion, and at the sight of the name of the woman he loved, Adrian Lancaster gave a low cry, and letting the book fall upon the floor, arose quickly to his feet.

“Olive Maunders!” he whispered clutching his throat, “he loved Olive Maunders, and she never told me anything about him—oh, impossible—it cannot be true.”

It was true however, for on recovering his composure, and resuming the reading of the diary, he found the whole facts of the case, plainly set out. Dr. Roversmire had called at the town house of Sir John Maunders with a letter of introduction from a friend in India, and Sir John, having a leaning towards occult science, had been much taken up with the curious character of his guest. Roversmire saw Olive, fell in love with her, and recorded his impressions in a series of broken paragraphs, which were anything but pleasant reading to the fastidious mind of Adrian Lancaster, seeing that they were about the girl whom he intended to make his wife.

“... She is certainly a most beautiful woman, but it is not her outward form which attracts me, fair though it be as the lotus floating on the wave of the holy Ganges. The pure crystal of her body encloses

the still purer flower of her soul, a soul which possesses strong masculine characteristics . . . after the soulless women of the East, this discovery is to me a source of wonder and admiration.

“ . . . I have observed her narrowly, and am still constant to my first opinion; with such a strong soul as she possesses, Olive might go through the ordeal with unshaken firmness of purpose, and be enabled to release her soul from this clinging vestment of clay . . . I must explain as much as I can to her and see if she will make the attempt.

“ . . . All in vain . . . I have told her of my idea that she should marry me, that I should initiate her into those strange sciences of which the West knows nothing, and when she attains the mastery of the last great secret, we will float together, radiant spirits in infinite space.

“ . . . It is quite useless, not even this destiny I offer her can gain her love! and why? Because it is given already to some brainless dandy of to-day called Adrian Lancaster . . he is abroad now, and hence the mistake I made in thinking she was free—ah, it is unkind of Fate to thus mar the destiny of a fair strong soul by such a vulgar obstacle.

“ . . . By means of my astral body, I have seen Mr. Adrian Lancaster, who is at Monte Carlo . . . a handsome face certainly, but no brains, and if he has any, he never uses them . . he seems to me to lead a debauched life—ah, the pity that such a soiled soul should seek union with the stainless, spiritual part of Olive Maunders. It will be like fire and water coming together, and the mastery will be with the strongest.

“ . . . I have tried again and failed, her material part is stronger than her spiritual one, and she has set her heart upon marriage with Adrian Lancaster, so there is nothing left for me to do, but to retire peacefully from the field . . . I should like to teach her a lesson, and show her what she has lost in refusing to marry me . . well, time will show, and I may some day, have an opportunity of doing so . . . .”

There were several other entries about Olive and himself, but Adrian had read enough, and closing the book with a frown, locked it up again in the desk. It was clear Dr. Roversmire had not held a very good opinion of him, and Adrian could not help acknowledging to himself that the view taken by the savant was a correct one. He had brains in plenty, but had never exercised them— never mind, there was yet time. The experiences he had undergone, while in the body of Roversmire, had not been without a salutary effect, and he would benefit by them, when he returned to his own body. But when would he return? Ah! that was the question; at all events, he would go down to Olive Maunders, and find out from her demeanour towards him, if she really was true to Adrian Lancaster, or if her ambition had caused her to look kindly upon Michael Roversmire. The entries in the book were plain enough—she did not love anyone else but himself, still the demon of jealousy was gnawing at Adrian’s heart, and only a personal interview could satisfy him on the subject.

He rang the bell, and Dentham appeared with such rapidity that Adrian felt convinced he had not been far away. However, listen as he might, he could not learn anything likely to endanger the safety of Dr. Roversmire, so Adrian asked at once for what he wanted.

“Have you a Bradshaw?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Dentham, and thereupon vanished, quickly returning with the book in question.

Adrian took it, and Dentham was about to retire when his master called him back.

“Wait a moment, I may want you,” he said, without raising his eyes from the Guide, whereupon Dentham wondered greatly what could have occurred to alter so suddenly the general habits of the old doctor.

Adrian soon found out that there was a train late in the afternoon to Great Marlow, and laying down the book open on the table, rose to his feet.

“I am going to my room, Dentham,” he said abruptly. “You can come in shortly to pack my portmanteau—I shall be going away for a few days.”

“Going away,” echoed Dentham when the door had closed on the tall figure of his master. “Where to, I wonder; there’s something queer about this—why, he’s hardly been out of the house for the last six months, and now he makes up his mind to be off in half a minute. I’ll have a look at this and find out where he’s going to.”

The Bradshaw was lying on the table, still open at the place to which Adrian had referred, so Dentham had no difficulty in discovering that Dr. Roversmire was going to Great Marlow, in the county of Bucks.

“What does he want there?” mused Mr. Dentham, laying down the book—“more mysteries.”

Here he caught sight of the paper crumpled up on the floor, where Adrian had thrown it, and picked it up.

“He’s been asking for the papers a lot lately,” said the astute valet to himself, “I wonder if there’s anything in this that’s got to do with his going to Marlow—I’ll see.”

He looked carefully over the paper, and at length came upon the advertisement for Adrian Lancaster’s whereabouts.

“That’s it,” said Mr. Dentham in a satisfied tone, “it’s the only mention of Marlow in the paper, and he only made up his mind to go there since he read the paper; and now I think of it,” muttered Dentham sagaciously, “the walking-stick I picked up as he said belonged to himself, which was a lie, had the letters A L on it—now A stands for Adrian and L for Lancaster, and Adrian Lancaster’s disappeared. I wonder—now I do wonder if the voice I heard that night was Mr. Lancaster’s, and what his walking-stick is doing in this room—jumping at conclusions this is, I’m afraid, still, something may come of all this, but I shan’t move till I’ve got more to go on.”

He put the paper in his pocket, intending to place it beside the stick, which he had securely hidden, and then went off to pack Dr. Roversmire’s portmanteau with a self-satisfied smirk on his white face.

## **Chapter VII**

### **The Woman He Loved**

Certainly there is no more delightful retreat on a hot July day, than one of those picturesque cottages standing in an expanse of verdant turf, cool to the eye and soft to the feet, down by the silver wave of Father Thames, near Marlow. By the bend of the river, just above the quaint old town, one of these red-tiled domiciles was, as “The Lock to Lock Times” informed its readers, occupied by Sir John Maunders, his daughter Olive, and a party of friends, who had fled from the noise and dust of London to the pleasant cool of the country.

“The Nook,” as it was called, was a cosy little place, of somewhat incongruous architecture, the present proprietor having purchased it as a cottage and added wings, gables, turrets and oriel windows to the original erection, until it had assumed quite an imposing appearance. Nothing ancient about it certainly, no Tudor battlements, Georgian frontages nor Norman towers, for it was eminently Victorian in its appearance, and all its arrangements both without and within had all the latest improvements conducive to comfort and luxury. There was a deep verandah round the red brick front, with wide French windows

giving access to drawing-room, dining-room and smoking-snuggery, all of which were furnished regardless of cost by the most famous upholsterer in London. From the verandah a velvety smooth lawn spread like an emerald carpet down to the river banks, where there was a boat-house and a flight of broad steps to the water, near to which steps two handsome boats of cedar were generally moored for the convenience of Sir John's guests. Between the river and the house were four huge beech trees, whose foliage made a pleasant shade, and under which were plenty of rustic seats and tables, while a lazy-looking hammock of net swung from a giant limb.

On this hot July afternoon one of the tables was spread for afternoon tea, presided over by Olive Maunders, and Sir John who sat near her, while all around were the guests, mostly young men and women with a sprinkling of chaperones. Sir John, a genial-looking old gentleman, was always delighted to surround himself with young people, as he said they made life look bright to him, and certainly there was plenty of laughing and talking as the party on the lawn chatted about the events of the day, listened to the voice of the wind stirring the leaves overhead or watched the boats floating past on the sunlit river, with their loads of young men in flannels and pretty girls daintily costumed in river fashion.

Teddy Rudall, a fashionable journalist, society verse writer, and know-everybody-about-town young man was seated in a wicker chair, playing his banjo and singing a nonsensical impromptu ditty suggested by the situation:

Oh, London's summer I like it not,  
In June the season becomes a bore,  
The last sensation is quite forgot,  
The last new lion has ceased to roar  
Pleasure is over and bills come in;  
The girl I worshipped has married a peer,  
I'll leave this town with its life of sin,  
And not come near it—until next year.

Oh country's summer I much prefer,  
For perfume blows from a thousand flowers,  
Delightful breezes the still leaves stir,  
Nightingales sing in the twilight hours.  
Phyllis has captured my worn-out heart,  
But only a moment 'tis hers I fear,  
I'll love her and love her until we part,  
And not come near her—until next year.

What a fickle person you are, Mr. Rudall," remarked a pretty blonde when the song came to an end.

"I always am—in poetry, Mrs. Manson," replied Rudall, idly touching the strings of his banjo, with an amused smile on his boyish face.

"And what about real life?"

"Depends very much on the lady."

Everyone laughed at this rejoinder except Olive Maunders, who sat staring at the river with a frown on her handsome face.

"It's a case of 'Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may' with Rudall," said Sir John in a jovial manner.



“Herrick,” observed Mr. Rudall meditatively, “was a philosopher, and if by rosebuds he meant ladies, I’m not at all averse to following his example.”

Olive Maunders evidently found the conversation too frivolous, for she suddenly arose, and without saying a word went up to the house, and retired into the drawing-room. Sir John looked after her with a rather pained expression on his face, and, seizing the opportunity afforded by Teddy Rudall beginning another song, he slipped away to look for her.

She was seated in a lounging chair, leaning forward with bent head and clasped hands, the frown still on her face. A striking looking girl, tall and slender, with a handsome resolute countenance of a pronounced brunette type, and her small head, with its coils of smooth black hair, was well set on her sloping shoulders.

“Why did you run away so suddenly, Olive?” asked her father, sitting beside her, and taking one of her slim hands in his own.

“I grew tired of the conversation,” said Olive in a clear sharp voice; “it is so frivolous, and there is such a lot to be thought of.”

“My dear, you must not brood too much over Trevanna’s accident.”

“I’m not thinking about Mr. Trevanna, but I am about Adrian. Where can he be? It is now a fortnight since he disappeared, and nothing has been heard of him.”

“Oh! he’ll come back again as soon as he hears Trevanna is getting better. I expect he thought he had killed Trevanna, and is keeping quiet.”

“But now that Mr. Trevanna is getting well, he has exonerated Adrian entirely. They were both foolish, no doubt, but nothing was so bad as to make Adrian hide himself like this.”

“Perhaps the advertisement you put in the paper will bring him,” suggested Sir John, thoughtfully.

“I hope so,” replied Olive quickly. “If he’s anywhere in England he must have seen it by this time, but he seems to have vanished altogether. Why cannot your occult science discover him, father?”

“I’m not well enough up in theosophy to try any experiments of that nature,” said Sir John, ruefully, “but I’ll tell you who might find out where Adrian is.”

“Some detective, I suppose,” retorted Olive. “Nonsense, they never make any discoveries worth talking about, out of the pages of shilling shockers.”

“No, not a detective,” answered her father, quietly, “but a dealer in mysteries—Doctor Roversmire.”

“Charlatan!”

“I don’t think he’s a charlatan; he knows more about the unseen world than you think.”

Olive Maunders looked at her father in a puzzled manner, then, rising from her seat, walked to and fro hurriedly, with her arms folded behind her back.

“I can’t make you out, father,” she said lightly. “You are so sensible in some things, and in others—well! I really don’t know how you can believe in this theosophical rubbish.”

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy!”“

quoted Sir John, with a smile.

“Oh! I know that quotation,” answered his daughter, shaking her head; “it is always quoted by people who believe in the supernatural as an unanswerable argument, and so it is in one sense, but, of course, I did not see enough of Doctor Roversmire to know what his pretensions are, so I can’t say a word against him.”

“You did not like him, Olive?”

“No, I certainly did not.”

“Yet he admired you?”

“So much so that he did me the honour to ask me to be his wife,” replied Olive, gravely, “but, of course, I am engaged to Adrian. Ah, poor Adrian! I wonder where he can be?”

“Wait and hope.”

“I’m tired of waiting and hoping,” said the girl, petulantly. “There was enough about this affair in the papers already, and I want Adrian to come forward and defend himself from the malicious tongues of busybodies. Philip Trevanna will stand by him.”

“Well, I’m sure I don’t know what to advise,” said poor Sir John, helplessly, “unless you ask Doctor Roversmire.”

“A drowning man will clutch at a straw,” observed Olive, after a pause. “I do not believe much in Doctor Roversmire and his relations with the supernatural world, still, if I could see him, I would ask him to use his knowledge for the benefit of Adrian. Do you know where he lives, father?”

“At Hampstead, I believe.”

“Then I will write to him, to-night. Mind you, I don’t believe any good will come of it; still, I’m so anxious to find Adrian that I’d consult even a fortune-teller.”

She spoke in a scoffing tone which appeared to wound her father, and he was about to remonstrate with her upon her levity when a servant entered and gave her a card. Olive glanced carelessly at it and then started in surprise as she handed it to her father, for the name inscribed thereon was that of Dr. Roversmire.

“Your prophet of theosophy must certainly have had an intuitive instinct he was wanted,” she observed idly.

“At all events he could not come at a better time,” replied Sir John, with a smile. “Ask Dr. Roversmire to come in.”

The servant departed, and Olive and her father looked at one another in silence, while from the garden sounded the gay voice of Teddy Rudall singing the last four lines of a ballad.

Lift not thou the future’s curtain,  
Though the present be not gay;

Only present hours are certain,  
Laugh and love and live to-day.

“There’s a good deal of philosophy in that,” said Sir John sagely.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **The Man She Hated**

Dr. Roversmire entered the room in a hesitating manner, as if not quite sure of his reception, but his mind was soon set at rest by the cordial manner in which he was met by Sir John Maunders, who advanced towards him with outstretched hand.

“My dear doctor,” he said in a hearty voice, “this is indeed an unexpected pleasure and, moreover, a curious coincidence, as we were just speaking of you”

“I hope the conversation was favourable to me,” said the doctor, advancing towards Olive and clasping one of her cool slim hands, “how do you do, Miss Maunders?”

“I am quite well, thank you,” she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand from his warm grasp. “Have you been away from London?”

“Yes, I’ve been to Monte Carlo,” began Adrian mechanically, then suddenly recollecting that his personality was lost in the body of Dr. Roversmire, he went on hurriedly, “that is—no—I have not been out of town further than Hampstead.”

“And why have you not been to see us for such a long time,” said Sir John. “We have not had a visit for months.”

“I’ve been living very quietly,” replied Adrian, with an effort, “making experiments.”

The fact was he did not know exactly what to say as he was quite ignorant of the relations existing between Dr. Roversmire and Sir John Maunders, and, moreover, was woefully ignorant in all matters of theosophy in which Sir John was quite an adept. Besides, the sight of Olive Maunders’ calm, sweet face had woke the deepest passions of his soul as he reflected how near and yet how far away she was to him. He saw her face, he heard her voice, he touched her hand and yet for all the satisfaction he obtained he might have been miles away, separated as he was from her by this mask of ancient seeming, in which his ardent young soul had become incarnate.

Olive Maunders, on her part, was struck by the change in the manner of her former admirer. The look of calm, conscious superiority which she had been accustomed to admire, much as she disliked the man, was gone, and in its place was an expression of anguish and a look of haunting dread in the dark eyes. His voice also, formerly so rich, smooth and flowing, was broken and rough, as if the owner had lost all power of controlling his speech.

“I’m very glad to see you, Dr. Roversmire,” said Olive, looking at him keenly, “as I wish you to help me.”

“I will be delighted. What is it you wish me to do.”

“Find Adrian Lancaster.”

Adrian recoiled as if he had received a blow. She asked him to find himself, quite ignorant of the strange transformation which had taken place, and he—what could he do in the matter? He was unable to produce his own body, void as it was of any vital principle, and yet, if he told the truth, he would be looked upon as a madman.

As these thoughts flashed rapidly through his brain, he saw at a glance the precipice upon which he stood and resolved to gain time by dexterously temporising so as to form some plan of action. Sir John had strolled outside on to the lawn so he was quite alone with Olive, and could speak freely.

“Adrian Lancaster,” he said smoothly. “I don’t think I have had the pleasure of meeting him.”

“No! At the time you were visiting us in town, he was away on the continent, but although you do not know him personally, I dare say you have seen his name in the papers of late.”

Adrian pretended to think for a moment.

“Yes, I fancy I have,” he replied, anxious to learn from Olive’s lips the true condition of Philip Trevanna, “did he not attempt to commit a murder?”

Olive arose to her feet rapidly, with a look of anger on her expressive face.

“No he did not,” she answered in a clear, vibrating voice. “Mr. Trevanna is now getting better, and has made a statement which completely exonerates Mr. Lancaster from any such intention.”

“Thank God,” thought Adrian thankfully, “at all events my character will be cleared even although I am unable to defend myself.”

Mistaking his silence for disbelief, Olive went on to explain the circumstances of the case.

“Mr. Lancaster and Mr. Trevanna were playing cards and Mr. Trevanna insulted his friend by flinging the cards in his face. Hardly knowing what he was doing, Mr. Lancaster threw a decanter at Mr. Trevanna. It struck him on the head and stunned him. Thinking he was dead, Mr. Lancaster left, very likely to get assistance. Mr. Trevanna is now recovering and blames himself severely for provoking Mr. Lancaster’s anger as he said Mr. Lancaster kept his temper admirably for some time under the grossest provocation.”

“And Mr. Lancaster has disappeared?” said Adrian,

“Yes, he has vanished completely and in spite of all enquiries cannot be found.”

“Are you sure he went to seek assistance, or— fled?” asked Adrian in a measured tone.

“You wrong him by such a thought,” said Olive loyally. “Adrian Lancaster is not the man to fly from the consequence of his own misdeeds—no! I believe he went to seek assistance, and—and—”

“Never came back,” said the pseudo Roversmire cynically.

Olive lifted her arms with a gesture of despair.

“It ill becomes you to speak in this way,” she said severely. “What do you know about the impulses of youth? you are an old man, cautious, cold-blooded and calculating; he was warm, impulsive and hot-tempered. If, in a moment of anger, he thought he had committed a crime, was it therefore a very wonderful thing that he should go away secretly for a period so as to gain time to explain the matter,

instead of waiting to be arrested? I blame him for his folly as much as you do, but I pity and love him all the same.”

Adrian’s heart smote him as he saw how nobly she defended his pusillanimous conduct, though to be sure it is easier to be brave even at the cannon’s mouth than to await in cold blood for a certain arrest and a possible ignominious death.

“But I thought you said he went to seek assistance,” he observed deliberately.

“And I say so again,” she retorted angrily, “why do you measure and clip my words in this pedantic fashion?—he might have changed his mind—if he has erred in acting upon the impulse of the moment, no doubt he is now being severely punished for it.”

Poor soul, she little knew how severe the punishment was.

“He is hiding in some distant place, I suppose, that in itself is punishment for a noble-hearted gentleman like my Adrian to have to conceal his face from his fellow men—punishment indeed—I tell you, Dr. Roversmire, he has, I am certain, already undergone worse punishment than any the law can devise.”

In her castings round for apologies for Adrian’s conduct, she had accidentally hit upon the truth, and the soul of the man she loved hidden in the body of the man she hated, writhed under the lash of her words. He had, however, to act the part of a cold philosopher, such as was in keeping with Dr. Roversmires general conduct, and crushed down his rising emotions with a powerful effort.

“I understand and appreciate all you have said,” he observed calmly, “but what do you want me to do?”

“Tell me where he is,”

“How can I do that?”

“By the aid of your science—chicanery—readings in the stars—or whatever else you practise under the title of theosophy. What is the good of you pretending to supernatural powers if you cannot exercise them in an emergency like this?”

Here was a dilemma—Adrian had not the slightest idea of the sciences which Dr. Roversmire was supposed to know, and he was quite unable to answer this girl, who stood looking at him with piercing gaze.

“Perhaps you already know where he is?” she said with sudden suspicion.

“I!” he echoed in apparent surprise, “how should I know?”

“It may be that, although you have never seen him, you do not like him,” she went on feverishly, not paying any attention to his answer. “You did me the honour to ask me to be your wife—I declined as I loved Adrian Lancaster—perhaps you hate him on that account—I don’t believe in your spells and juggling tricks, still—still—tell me,” she demanded, with a sudden outburst of anger, “do you know anything about the disappearance of Adrian Lancaster?”

He made a gesture of dissent, for although he was burning to reveal himself, yet the dread of future consequences kept him silent.

“Is it true that you can disintegrate your bodies? I have heard that you profess to do so, if so have you disintegrated Adrian?—oh, what am I talking about? it is madness, insanity, this playing with the supernatural—I do not believe in the powers you say you possess—Adrian is in hiding, afraid of the consequences of his folly—when he sees my advertisement, he will return—I’m sure he will.”

“I’m afraid not,” said Adrian sadly, knowing how impossible it was such a thing could happen.

“What do you know about it?” she cried fiercely, wheeling round on him with a look of suspicion in her eyes, “he could not have come to you for concealment—he did not know you—such things cannot occur in real life.”

Adrian took a sudden resolution, and rising to his feet, advanced towards her and seized her by the wrist.

“Listen to me, Miss Maunders,” he said gravely, “there is more in this occult science than you dream of, the age of miracles is not past, they are happening every day—your lover thought he had committed a crime and disappeared—he vanished into the night and the darkness hides him—you want to know where he is—I cannot tell you—he has no doubt been punished as you suggest—how, it is impossible to explain—but I will go to work and perchance may restore Adrian Lancaster to your arms.”

“And your reward for this?” she asked disbelievingly.

“Your love,” he said softly, forgetting for the moment who he was.

Olive Maunders tore herself from his arms with a cry.

“No! no! anything but that,” she said with an expression of anger. “What would be the good of your returning Adrian to me if I lose him again, by becoming your wife?—be generous, Dr. Roversmire, you are a learned man far above me in knowledge and wisdom, if you can do what you say, I will ever look upon you as my friend.”

“I ask for bread and you give me a stone,” said Adrian sadly; “well, so be it, I will try and find your lover and in return I ask your—friendship.”

He held out his hand and she clasped it in both of hers.

“I must go back to town,” he said after a short silence. “Say good-bye to your father for me.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked quickly.

He turned towards her in some surprise.

“I am going to try and find Adrian Lancaster,” he replied quietly, and with a bow left the room at once, while she stood staring idly at the brilliant group on the lawn, and wondered how they could laugh and jest so carelessly while her life’s happiness was at stake.

## **Chapter IX**

### **The Philosophy Of Mr. Dentham**

So Adrian, after his one glimpse of the woman he loved, left Paradise and returned with a heavy heart to his solitary existence at Hampstead. He had, it was true, promised to restore the lost sheep to the arms of the gentle shepherdess, but how this was to be done he did not know. There were two ways in which he

could regain his identity, either that he should be killed in his present body by accident or that he should commit suicide. The former of these methods seemed unlikely to occur, as the number of people who meet with accidents is really very small, and as to the latter, although he was no coward yet he shrank with a vague dread from putting an end to his present existence.

It was true that Roversmire had informed him, that his soul would return to its own tenement, but suppose he was wrong and the soul, powerless to enter its former habitation, should remain suspended like the coffin of Mahomet between heaven and earth? The last case would be worse than the first, and Adrian, in spite of what was at stake, could hardly be blamed for preferring his present condition, unsatisfactory as it was, to a possible chance of leaving the world altogether.

One thing, however, he had learned by his visit to Marlow which gave him a feeling of satisfaction, and that was the certainty of Trevanna's recovery. He was at least guiltless of blood, and moreover the explanation of Trevanna exonerated him from any malicious intent, so that when his soul returned to its former body he would at least be in a position to hold up his head as he had been accustomed to do.

The devotion displayed by Olive in defending his character had touched him deeply, and he was now anxious to recover his lost position and reward that devotion as it deserved. But, in spite of all his desires and the dreariness of his present position, he felt quite powerless to make a move in any direction. He wandered about the house, read a great deal, smoked occasionally, and sometimes went down to the secret chamber, where he found his body was still preserving a life-like appearance with no signs of decay or change.

"Dentham," he said one day, anxious to find out what suspicions were harboured by his crafty servant, "are you quite sure you did not see that walking-stick I spoke about?"

"Quite sure, sir," replied the valet promptly, "perhaps the gentleman took it away."

"What gentleman?" asked Adrian sharply.

"The gentleman that owned it, sir."

"It belonged to me," said Adrian, looking keenly at him, "I told you that before."

"Would you mind describing the stick to me again, sir," asked Dentham innocently.

"An oaken staff with a golden band and initials."

"Your own initials, sir, M. R.?"

"No—A. L.—the stick was given to me by a friend and I did not get them altered."

"Indeed, sir, I'm afraid I didn't see it."

"Very well, you can go," said Adrian shortly, and as the door closed behind the man he muttered quickly:

"That man suspects I came to the house on the night, and he thinks as Dr. Roversmire I've hidden Adrian Lancaster. Good heavens!" he cried, suddenly springing to his feet, "if he thinks this and finds out the body, I, as Dr. Roversmire, may be accused of making away with myself as Adrian Lancaster, and then there will be trouble—but it's impossible—even if Dentham does suspect, he'll never find the connection between that stick and the disappearance of Adrian Lancaster. I am a fool to torture myself like this—a fool—a fool."

He walked rapidly up and down the room, wildly excited by the possibilities he was conjuring up, and then going to the desk, took out Roversmire's diary to find out if possible some mode of escape from his unpleasant position.

Meanwhile Dentham, in the security of his own chamber, was busily engaged in reading a letter he had just received, and which appeared to give him great satisfaction, judging from the smile on his unpleasant-looking face. The letter read as follows:

"If the person who wrote to Miss Olive Maunders offering to give information as to the whereabouts of Mr. Adrian Lancaster will be at No. 40, Beryle Square at three o'clock on Thursday, he will see Miss Maunders, and obtain a reward if his information leads to the finding of Mr. Lancaster."

"He! he!" chuckled Mr. Dentham, folding up this note and putting it safely in his pocket, "it was a good move, writing to that young lady—she's sweet on Mr. Lancaster, I'll bet—and though I don't know where he is exactly, I daresay this stick will put her on his track—Lord! I wonder what old Roversmire's done with him—he was always up to some tricks. I don't believe in these jugglers myself—perhaps he's killed him to read a fortune in his inside, like them coves in history."

Dentham was so excited with this idea that he walked up and down his chamber chuckling.

"I thought he was a forger or a robber—but he ain't. No!—he's a murderer, and that's worse nor either of the other two. I'll go to this young lady to-morrow, and I'll show her the walking-stick—that 'll show Mr. Adrian Lancaster's been here, at all events, and if they search the house perhaps they'll find him, though I don't say," said Mr. Dentham sagaciously, "that he'll be alive. If I get any money out of this I'll chuck the old cove—this house gives me the horrors; I know he's got a Blue Beard's chamber somewhere—well, I'll go tomorrow—my information's worth a fiver at all events. I'll dare to ask the old 'un's leave to get away—he wouldn't give it to me if he know'd what I was up to."

The bell rang at this moment, and he was summoned to Adrian's presence.

"Bring me some wine," said Adrian, looking up from his book.

"Yes, sir," replied Dentham, and retreated. "Drinking, eh," he thought as he went to the pantry; "I wouldn't if I were you—you might let out something about that gentleman whose stick you collared—oh, he give it to you—yes, I daresay—my gracious, what a wicked old chap he is, to be sure."

When he had placed the wine on the table and poured out a glass for his master, he waited a moment, and then spoke.

"I beg pardon, sir, but might I ask leave tomorrow for a couple of hours?"

"What for?" asked his master abruptly.

"I've got to go into Town, sir—to see a doctor; I ain't well—perhaps you could do something, sir?"

"No; I don't practise medicine. Go into Town, if you like, but mind you're back again in two hours."

"You can depend upon me, sir," said Dentham quietly, and then sneaked out of the room, chuckling to himself.

"He don't practise medicine, don't he—why, I don't believe he's a doctor at all—well, I've got what I wanted, and if I put the police on to the old cove he won't like it."



Here Mr. Dentham made a pause, struck with a brilliant idea.

“I’ll get the money for putting the police on to him,” he said in a satisfied tone, “then I’ll come home and tell him of his danger if he pays me well —so I’ll make money on both sides, and they can fight it out between them—that’s what I call philosophy.”

At all events, it was a very paying philosophy, and Mr. Dentham passed a happy night, dreaming of the golden harvest he would reap by betraying his master to Olive Maunders, and then by telling the doctor the lady’s plans.

## **Chapter X**

### **Teddy Rudall’s Ideas**

Number Forty, Beryle Square, was a handsome-looking Town residence, but, the owners now being away from London, it had rather a desolate appearance. The boxes of brilliant flowers, that had preserved a many-coloured fringe outside the windows, had all been removed, and, the shutters being up, the house had a lonely look, which was infinitely dreary. The old woman, who looked after it in the absence of its owner, was a grimy-looking party of unprepossessing appearance, addicted to the wearing of a crushed crape bonnet, a withered-looking black dress, and a large apron which had once been white. She made a daily tour of inspection through all the deserted rooms, and cherished dire suspicions of crafty burglars hiding behind doors and under couches. Mrs. Bickles was the name of this ancient damsel, but, as a matter of fact, she had never been married, but assumed the appellation which she thought was more in keeping with her dignity.

This bright July afternoon, was the day upon which Dentham was due at 40, Beryle Square, to give his information regarding Adrian Lancasters whereabouts, and Mrs. Bickles was seated in the kitchen, moralizing over a glass of ale, and the remnants of the frugal meal, which she dignified with the name of luncheon. Like most old people, she was very garrulous, and in default of a better listener, talked to herself when alone, so she ran no chance of interruption, but had it all her own way.

“Victuals,” moaned Mrs. Bickles, wiping her mouth after a drink of beer, “is that dear, as never was. I’m sure it costs a forting to buy as much as ‘ud keep a cat alive, and as for summat to drink, what with their Billees in Parlymint, and their chargin’s out of it, I might as well live in the Sara Desert.”

She sopped up the gravy on her plate, with a piece of bread, and immediately attacked the baker, from whom she had bought it, as an excellent object to rail at.

“It’s that heavy,” said the lady viciously, referring to the bread, “as lead is feathers to it—on my stomick it lies like a pavin’ stone, and the indigressings I suffers is nightmares in ‘emselves. I’m getting as thin as a lamp-post—a shadder of the h’old days—ah well!” she concluded philosophically, finishing the beer, “it don’t take much to fill a coffing as I’ll soon be occipying.”

At this moment the front door-bell rang, and with a grumble at being disturbed at her meal, Mrs. Bickles took a large key in her withered claw, and crawled upstairs in an aggressive temper.

“Why can’t they holler down the airy,” she whispered, pushing back the bolts from the door, “it’s a policeman or a post, I know—what with ‘urrying up and skipping down, my legs is ashaking like aspinalls.”

She unlocked the door, and threw it open, when, much to her surprise, Olive Maunders stepped inside, followed by a young gentleman dressed in an irreproachable tweed suit, with a flower in his button-hole

and a smile on his face. Mrs. Bickles with many curtseys began to apologise for her delay in opening the door, when Olive cut her short in a peremptory manner.

“What is the most presentable room in the house?” she asked, “I have come up on business, but leave again by the afternoon train.”

“The dorin-room’s muffled up,” explained Mrs. Bickles, in a thoughtful manner, “and the dinin’ ain’t fit to receive compingy—I won’t say as what the best bedroom needs dustin’, but I think the libery is most decent.”

“Very well, then, the library will do,” replied Olive, walking towards it, followed by her escort, “and if anyone calls to see me in about an hour, show him in.”

“Yes, miss,” said the charwoman, with many genufluxions, “but there ain’t anythin’ to eat.”

“I don’t want anything, thank you,” answered Olive, and disappeared with the gentleman into the library, leaving Mrs. Bickles looking after them in astonishment.

“Now what’s up, I do wonder,” she said apostrophising the door through which they had vanished “is it police, or pleasures?—it can’t be divorces ‘cause they’re both single—if her par only knowed as she was making appointments with male parties in the ‘ouse, it mightn’t be to his likings—well it ain’t no biziness of mine,” pursued Mrs. Bickles cheerfully, taking her way down to the nether regions, “their moralses and their quarrelses is their own businesses.”

Meanwhile Olive Maunders was seated on a holland-covered chair in the library, talking earnestly to Teddy Rudall, who sat in a similar chair, with a puzzled look on his genial young face.

“I want you to understand plainly why I have asked you to come up with me to-day,” explained Olive deliberately, “I put an advertisement in the paper concerning Adrian Lancaster, and it is about that advertisement I am here to-day.”

“Has it been answered?” asked Rudall, with a look of interest.

“Yes—and in extremely bad English too,” replied the girl, handing him a scrap of blue paper, “read it please, and see what you make of it.”

Thus adjured, Teddy took the paper, and smoothing it out, read as follows in his slow, languid voice:

“The writter of this knows somthing of Mr. Adrian Lancaster—if there is muny, he will come and tell all he knowes, without pregyduce—” adres D. Manor Court, Yew Street, Hampstead.”

“Extraordinary document,” commented Teddy, handing it back to Olive, “particularly the last words. I don’t know which to admire the most, the legal knowledge, or the spelling—well, did you answer this?”

“I did, and told D., whosoever he or she may be, to call here at three o’clock to-day.”

“Oh! it’s nearly three now,” said Teddy, glancing at his watch, “and what do you want me to do?”

“Depends entirely on what I learn from ‘D’ ” replied Olive, folding up the letter and putting it away. “I did not tell my fater, as I don’t want to do so until I find out something definite about Adrian.”

"I'll be delighted to do anything I can," said Rudall heartily, "I feel awfully sorry for Adrian— it would have been much better if he had stayed and faced it out."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Olive sadly, "but you see he acted on the impulse of the moment. Adrian was always so impulsive."

"Why speak of him in the past tense?" asked Teddy lightly.

Olive rose to her feet, and folding her arms behind her back, walked up and down the room slowly.

"I suppose I shouldn't," she replied, after a pause, "he is no doubt all right, and only hiding himself till he knows how things are with Mr. Trevanna. Can you blame him?"

"Not for pitching into Trevanna," said Rudall coolly. "I don't know anyone with a more aggravating manner than that sweet youth. He admits throwing the cards in Lancaster's face, so I don't wonder Adrian retaliated, but I think it was a pity he did not stay and face it out."

"You've said that before," cried Olive, angrily.

"No doubt, and I dare say I'll say it again," returned Teddy, smiling. "It's my opinion, although I dare say if I were in the same predicament, I should act the same way, but what puzzles me is that Adrian did not himself reply to your advertisement. He knew he'd be quite safe with you, and besides there was a paragraph in several papers stating that Trevanna was getting well and had exonerated him."

"That's what makes me fear Adrian is dead," said Olive, turning her pale face towards him.

"Dead!—nonsense," cried Teddy hastily. "Why should he be dead? He wouldn't commit suicide, it is unlikely he has met with an accident, and no one would harm him, for he hadn't an enemy in the world."

"No, that's true. Adrian has no enemy, but there is a man who does not like me, so out of revenge he might harm Adrian."

"A man who does not like you?" repeated Teddy in surprise.

"Yes; Dr. Roversmire," she answered, coming up close to him, and laying her gloved hand on his arm. "He wanted to marry me, and I refused him because I loved Adrian. Suppose he wanted to remove Adrian from his path."

"The supposition is too idle. But suppose he did, what then? Do you think he would murder him?"

"No," she said, in a low voice, "but Dr. Roversmire is a theosophist, a believer in occult science. He comes from India, where they say these people have strange, unholy powers. What if he had lured Adrian to his house at Hampstead, and disintegrated his body."

Teddy Rudall smiled at this, for he was a matter-of-fact young man, very sceptical of the powers asserted to be exercised by the theosophists.

"That's a lot of nonsense, you know," he said lightly. "That theosophy is all bosh. I've been to lots of their meetings, and it's the same kind of rubbish as table-turning and mesmerism. You surely don't believe in it?"

"I did not, but since Adrian has vanished so strangely I confess I feel a little afraid."

“Of Dr. Roversmire?”

“Yes; he called to see me last week, and from the way he spoke I feel sure he knows something of Adrian.”

“At all events, you may be sure there is no disintegration business about it,” said Teddy decisively, “for these gentry can scatter their own body to the winds, but they can’t do it with any one else’s.”

“But he might have got rid of Adrian by some other means?”

“Adrian isn’t the sort of fellow to allow himself to be got rid of easily,” retorted Rudall soothingly.

“Come, Miss Maunders, that wretched Indian juggler, whom I remember having seen here, has upset your nerves with his mad talk. I’m certain Adrian is all right and this ‘D’ who is coming here to-day will no doubt be able to tell us where he is.”

“I hope so,” began Olive, when suddenly there came a ring at the door, and they looked quickly at one another.

“Here is the answer to your advertisement,” said Teddy gaily. “Now then, Miss Maunders, don’t bother your head about any theosophy or supernatural interference. We’ll soon find out where Adrian is and give him a good rating for making such a fuss over nothing.”

## **Chapter XI**

### **A Modern Judas**

Being directed to the library by Mrs. Bickles, the gentleman who hid his identity under the letter “D.” soon made his appearance, and closing the door softly, stood in front of Olive and Teddy with his hat in one hand and in the other a walking stick wrapped up in brown paper. Mr. Dentham looked despicably mean as he stood there with his pinched white face and his closely cropped head of red hair. Neither the lady nor gentleman were impressed with his appearance and exchanged glances during a silence which Olive was the first to break.

“I presume this is from you?” she said, handing him the note written on blue paper.

“Yes, mum,” replied Dentham, casting a flickering look on it from under his white eyelashes. “I saw the advertisement about Mr. Adrian Lancaster and came to see about it.”

“What do you know about Mr. Lancaster?” asked Teddy sharply.

Dentham shot a sudden glance of suspicion at the young man, and then assumed a cringing, fawning air which made Teddy long to kick him.

“Not much, sir,” he replied in his silky voice, “but I do know a little.”

“Tell us what you know,” said Olive quickly.

Having laid down his hat and the brown paper parcel, Dentham’s hands were free, and he made use of the opportunity of rubbing them slowly together, speaking meanwhile in a deprecating tone.

“I think, mum, there was some mention of a reward.”

“The reward will be forthcoming if your information prove to be of any use.”

“And the amount, mum?” began the valet, still washing his hands with invisible soap and water.

“Will depend entirely on the information,” replied Olive disdainfully.

Dentham looked at her stealthily, and scratched his chin with one lean finger, evidently debating in his own mind if it would not be better to make terms before parting with his information. Teddy saw this was his feeling, and, although as a rule a good-tempered fellow, felt thoroughly enraged at the mean spirit displayed by this unpleasant-looking individual.

“Come, my man,” he said sharply, “do you hear what the lady says? Tell us what you know about Mr. Lancaster and you will be paid accordingly.”

“How much, sir?” demanded Dentham in a tone of covert insolence, whereat Rudall completely lost his temper, and was about to step forward with no very amicable intent, when Olive stopped him.

“If your information is worth anything, I will give you fifty pounds,” she said quickly; “half before you leave this room, and half when Mr. Lancaster is found.”

The eyes of the spy sparkled, as he had not anticipated being paid so well. He was not certain of the whereabouts of Adrian Lancaster, but he knew what he had to tell would certainly gain him twenty-five pounds, so he was quite content to sell his information for that sum.

“Very well, mum,” he said with a pleased smile, “I’m sure I’m agreeable—I’ll tell you all I know, but first, mum, will you look at this?”

He took the stick out of the brown paper and handed it to Olive, who flushed violently as she examined it.

“It’s Adrian’s!” she cried.

“Jove! so it is,” remarked Teddy, taking it from her, “here are his initials on the band.”

“I knew I was right, mum,” said Dentham with a gratified grin. “When I saw him looking at your advertisement about Mr. Lancaster, I said to myself, this is his stick, ‘cause the letters of the name are the same.”

“Who was looking at the advertisement?”

“Doctor Roversmire, mum.”

Olive gave a cry, and her face grew pale as she clasped Rudall’s arm.

“I knew he had something to do with it,” she said in a terrified whisper. “Go on, tell me everything from the first.”

“Very well, mum,” replied Dentham, and began his story without further delay.

“My name is Dentham, mum, and I am servant to Doctor Roversmire, who lives at Hampstead. I always thought him queer, as he lived such a quiet life and behaved in such a strange way. He said he had come home from India, and when he engaged me, said I was to attend to my business of looking after him and

make no remarks, so as he paid me well, I didn't mind. He stayed in a great deal, sometimes going away for a few days, and the longest time he was away was six months ago, when he was away some weeks—I don't know where he was."

"I can tell you," interrupted Olive quickly, "he was here, in this house, as he was a friend of my father's."

"He never said where he was, mum, and as I had been told not to ask questions, I did not know what he was up to. When he came back he never went out for longer than a few hours, and used to send me to bed while he sat up waiting. I don't know what he waited for as no one ever came near the house, and I couldn't find out what his little game was. At last, about three weeks ago, I was on my way to bed when I heard the murmur of voices. I couldn't make it out at all, but as I couldn't go in and see and it was none of my business, I went to bed. The next morning I found my master had passed all the night in the sitting-room and was quite upset; he used to be quiet enough, but ever since that night he has been quite changed—so excited—like—I found that stick and took it to my own room."

"What right had you to do that?" asked Teddy sharply.

Dentham wriggled and looked down.

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, sir, I thought as my master was a forger, or a coiner, or a burglar, and that his visitor was a pal of his, so I thought if I kept the stick I might find out something about his goings on."

"Did Doctor Roversmire ask about the stick?" demanded Olive.

"Yes, mum, several times; said it had been given to him by a friend of his, but of course I knew it hadn't."

"And how did you connect the stick with the disappearance of Mr. Lancaster?" asked Teddy, who was more upset by the story than he cared to show.

"Well, sir, master is always looking at the papers after the morning on which I found the stick. About a week ago, after reading the Telegraph, he asks for a Bradshaw and said he was going out of town; when he left the room, I looked at the Bradshaw and saw he had looked up the trains to Marlow; then I thought something in the paper might have put it into his head to go there. I found your advertisement, mum, and seeing you were at Marlow, knew I was on the right track; then the letters on the stick were those of Mr. Adrian Lancaster's name, who was being advertised for, so I wrote to you and that's all."

"You are a very ingenious gentleman indeed," said Teddy grimly, when this recital ended, "quite an amateur detective. Well, Miss Maunders, what do you think of this story?"

Olive had resumed her seat and was leaning her head on her hand, deep in thought. She started when Teddy addressed her and looked up quickly.

"It seems to me that Adrian went to that house," she said quickly, "as the stick is certainly his and could only have been left there by him—there is no doubt he was Doctor Roversmire's visitor—why, I do not know, as he was quite unacquainted with the doctor and with the fact that I knew him. At all events, it is plain he was there on the night in question, but here all trace seems lost—did he stay there, or did he go away again?"

"He stayed," said Dentham solemnly.

"How do you know?" asked Rudall. "Did you see him in the house afterwards, or hear any noises to lead you to suspect that Mr. Lancaster might be concealed there?"

Dentham shook his head.

“No, I neither saw nor heard anything,” he replied quickly, “but it was a wet night when he came, and after I found the walking-stick I searched for his footmarks. I traced them more or less clearly from the garden-door up to the window of the room in which I heard the voices. He must have left the same way if he left at all; but all the footmarks pointed towards the house, and none away from it, so I’m certain he did not go away.”

“You’re quite a detective,” said Teddy, with a smile, “and, certainly, your explanation is a very ingenious one, so let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Mr. Lancaster did not leave the house—so far so good. Now the next question is, did he leave the room?”

“No,” asserted Dentham again.

“Why not?” asked Olive.

“Because I was lying awake listening to the voices, and although I could not make out what they were saying, yet if either my master or Mr. Lancaster had left the room, I should easily have heard them doing so.”

Teddy Rudall looked puzzled.

“Well, if Lancaster did not leave the house nor the room, he must be concealed in it—or else have vanished into thin air, which is, of course, impossible.”

“I’m not so certain about that,” said Olive, looking up, “remember what we were talking about.”

Teddy shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“Occult science, theosophy, and disintegration,” he said glibly. “Oh! nonsense—all that stuff is humbug.”

“I believe my master’s a devil,” asserted Dentham, suddenly, with a scared look.

Both the others stared at him in silent astonishment, but there was a look of apprehension on Olive’s face that showed that she shared to some extent in the ideas of the servant.

“How so?” demanded Teddy, with a disbelieving smile.

“Because I’ve left him in the room, sir, and locked all the windows before leaving; sometimes I’ve come back and found him gone, with the windows still locked, and the shutters up. He couldn’t have got out of the windows, and he couldn’t clear by the door, because I was generally in the passage, and would have seen him. Now, sir,” finished Dentham, triumphantly, “where did he go to?”

“I think the true explanation is this,” said Rudall, quietly. “He has some secret chamber or exit in the walls of this special room to which you refer. Have you examined the walls?”

“No, sir.”

“Then, depend upon it, my theory is a correct one,” said Teddy, in a complacent tone, “there’s a sliding panel or a masked door, which either leads to the outside of the house, or to some secret room. I think the latter, because if he had let Mr. Lancaster out by the secret way we should have heard from him long ago. My opinion is that he is keeping Adrian concealed in the hidden room I refer to.”

“But why?” asked Olive, quietly.

“You, yourself, gave me the explanation,” said Rudall, quickly; “it is a case of revenge, I fancy. Now in order to find out anything we must search this room.”

“But how, sir?” asked Dentham. “Master never goes away from the house, and we can’t look if he’s there.”

“Oh! I can manage that,” said Olive, decisively. “I’ll get my father to write a letter asking him to come down to Marlow—during his absence we can search the room; if we find anything we can demand an explanation, and, at all events, I shall certainly make him tell me why Adrian called to see him on that night.”

“Yes, I think that will be the best thing to be done,” said Teddy, thoughtfully. “Well, Miss Maunders, we had better go down at once to Marlow, and get your father to write the necessary letter. As for you,” he added, turning to Dentham, “go back to Hampstead, and keep a watch on your master. “Don’t arouse his suspicions, but if he tries to clear out wire us at once.”

“And the money, mum?” said Dentham in a whining tone, as Olive arose to her feet.

She took out her purse, and handed him two ten-pound notes and one five-pound in silence.

“Your information is well worth it,” she said quietly, as he took them with a servile smile, “and if we find Mr. Lancaster in the house of Doctor Roversmire, I will double the reward.”

“Don’t be too generous, Miss Maunders,” said Teddy, suspiciously. “We know nothing definitely yet. Now we must go to Paddington at once, as there’s no time to lose.”

Olive consented with alacrity, and they left the house, secured a hansom, and were soon on their way to the railway station, leaving Mrs. Bickles to the solitude of the town house, and Dentham with twenty-five pounds in his pocket, very well satisfied with his day’s work.

## **Chapter XII**

### **A Perilous Situation**

Now although Dentham intended to betray the confidence both of Dr. Roversmire and Olive Maunders, yet it was an operation of some difficulty, as he foresaw on taking a quiet view of the situation. So far he had made twenty-five pounds out of the transaction, but he would not obtain any more money from Adrian Lancaster’s betrothed until the house had been thoroughly searched, and the unhappy young man found. If they did discover Adrian shut up in a secret chamber, as Rudall surmised, he would certainly gain the balance of the reward from Olive Maunders, but on the other hand he would obtain nothing from his master, as he would be unable to warn him and make terms.

“If he’s murdered Mr. Lancaster,” mused Dentham to himself, as he took his way homeward, “they’ll arrest him straight off, and then I won’t be able to give him the straight tip, and get paid for it; but then he’ll be away from the house if they find anything, so I’ll be able to wire the old cove at Marlow, and make an appointment in town—once I get a hold of him I’ll bleed him freely, or else hand him over to the law. Yes, that’s what I’ll do; they can’t put him in gaol straight off, so I’ll fix up things with him before they get a chance.”



Mr. Dentham was quite delighted with his villainous little scheme, and could not help admiring himself for the dexterous way in which he turned things to his own advantage.

“She said she’d double the reward,” he resumed, referring to Miss Maunders, “does that mean the twenty-five or the fifty? If she only doubles the twenty-five, I’ll only clear seventy-five pounds, but if she means the fifty, it will be a hundred and twenty-five in my pocket, that will be something on account, and if I can only get another hundred and twenty-five pounds out of the old cove, I’ll be able to sit down with three hundred clear, that will set me up for life and not much trouble either. Ah! I knew something would come out of the old cove’s way of living. Lord, what a scoundrel he is to be sure—it’s a wicked world, and the old cove’s about the worst in it.”

So mused the virtuous Mr. Dentham, who, while blaming the presumable wickedness of his master, concerning which he had no proof, was quite blind to the despicable part he was playing himself. But then Mr. Dentham called his baseness business, which placed the whole transaction in quite a different light, and, moreover, being without the least atom of conscience, he was quite at rest on the score of moral considerations, regarding his possible three hundred pounds as honestly earned money.

Adrian Lancaster, still hidden in the personality of Dr. Roversmire, was quite unconscious of the perilous situation in which he was placed. It was true he mistrusted Dentham, but he never expected the valet would be so dexterous in piecing evidence together and so establish a case against him. As to Dentham communicating with Olive Maunders, it never entered his brain that such a thing could occur, as he had said nothing to the servant, and, to all outward appearance, there was nothing to connect the so-called Dr. Roversmire with the disappearance of Adrian Lancaster.

The morning after Dentham’s satisfactory visit to town, Adrian received a letter from Sir John Maunders asking him to come down to Marlow and stay the night, as he wanted to speak with him on a particular subject.

“I know,” wrote the cheery baronet, “that you are kept busy with your philosophical studies, but all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, so if you give us the pleasure of your society for a few hours. I am sure it will do you good. I am sorry to say my daughter will be away during your visit, but may probably return before you take your departure.”

At this point, Adrian laid down the letter and debated seriously with himself as to whether he should accept the invitation, seeing that Olive would be absent. On the whole, after much consideration, he came to the conclusion that he would do so, as he was now in such a desperate state of mind over the difficulties of his situation that he determined to tell Sir John everything and ask his advice as to his future movements. He was afraid to reveal the secret of his transformation to Olive, as he knew how she scoffed at the powers alleged to be exercised by theosophists, and thought, with a great show of reason, that she would look upon him as a madman. But with Sir John it was very different, as Adrian remembered he had had a good deal of experience in occult sciences and knew many strange things which had occurred quite outside the laws of Nature, that is, the laws of Nature as seen by the world at large.

Under these circumstances, he would not deny that such a curious event as the transposition of souls might take place, and Adrian knew he would give him enough proofs of his own life to convince the baronet, however sceptical, that the soul of Adrian Lancaster was really concealed in the body of Dr. Roversmire. Then he would be able to ask Sir John’s advice as to the chances of getting rid of Roversmire’s body and resuming his own identity, for Sir John was acquainted with many votaries of theosophy who might be able to hit upon some solution of the enigma. Surely among theosophists there could be found some one equal in knowledge to Dr. Roversmire, who could undo the harm which had been done, and releasing his soul from this aged body, restore it once more to its proper habitation.

Having come to this conclusion, Adrian wrote a letter accepting the invitation, but declined to stay all night as he wanted to get back to his studies. The fact was that he was afraid during his absence something might happen to solve the difficulty, and he was unwilling to be absent should any chance of regaining his freedom present itself. The whole house was permeated with the influence of spirits, for, of course, Dr. Roversmire, during his tenancy of his earthly body had been constantly visited by his friends of the spirit world, and sometimes a weird feeling would seize Adrian as if he was in the centre of a crowd of ethereal beings whose bodies, impalpable and invisible, were pressing around him on all sides. He would have given anything could he have known of some invocation by which to communicate with them and find a means of release from his unpleasant position, but although he read most of the books in the house and all the favourite papers of Dr. Roversmire, no spell or ceremony presented itself by which he could do so.

There were times when the strange influence which brooded over the house almost proved too much for his nerves, and he longed to escape from this spirit-haunted atmosphere into the matter-of-fact frivolity of the outside world. By his prolonged fasts, by his terrible ordeals and his ascetic mode of life, Dr. Roversmire had rendered his body peculiarly sensitive to spiritual influences, and now that he had transferred this body to Adrian, the material soul of the unhappy young man felt strange to the subtle contact he seemed to feel with the unseen world about which he knew absolutely nothing. Dentham, of course, felt nothing, as his soul was too sensual and his body too gross to vibrate or come in contact with spiritual things, but Adrian's body being strange to him, was not under his control, and he felt as though he stood on neutral ground between two worlds, powerless to leave the one and equally powerless to enter the other.

"I'll go mad if this continues," he said to himself as he directed the envelope, "it is like putting a savage to live among people highly cultivated. I feel the influence, but cannot respond, so I have all the pain and none of the pleasures; an afternoon at Marlow will do me a lot of good and drive away all this phantasy of moonlight and spirituality."

So he sent the letter and told Dentham he was going to leave Hampstead the next day for a visit, at which the valet was highly delighted, and sent off a telegram that evening to Miss Maunders, telling her the house would be able to be searched the following day.

Olive, on her part, had told her father nothing of the revelations of Dentham, but had got him to ask Dr. Roversmire down to Marlow and then intimated her intention of going away. Sir John at first objected to this strange mode of proceeding, but was ultimately over-ruled by his clever daughter.

"I don't know what you mean to do," he grumbled good-naturedly, "but I'll be glad to see Roversmire, who is a very clever man, although you do not seem to like him."

"Whether I really like him or not depends entirely upon what I learn during the next few days," she replied.

"But where are you going to learn anything about Roversmire?" asked her father curiously.

"I'll tell you when I come back," responded Olive promptly.

"Well, have your own way," said the baronet with a sigh; "you certainly are an enigma."

"Of course," said Teddy Rudall, who entered at that moment, "she is a woman, and that answers everything."

## **Chapter XIII**

### **A Startling Discovery**

In due time Adrian, feeling depressed and dreary, departed by the early train to Marlow, leaving Dentham in charge of the house at Hampstead. He expected Miss Maunders and Mr. Rudall to call about mid-day, but, prior to their arrival, made an exploration of the sitting-room on his own account, with a view to finding out, if possible, the secret chamber, which Rudall said must exist. But Dentham, though crafty enough in small villanies, was woefully ill-fitted for such a task, and after an hour's hard work, during which he examined the most unlikely places, gave up the search in disgust. If he had calmly sat down and logically argued the matter out, he might have come to some satisfactory conclusion, but, instead of doing this, he hunted about in blind confusion, with the natural result that nothing came of his work.

"It's all bosh," muttered Dentham to himself, sitting on a chair and mopping his heated brow. "I don't believe there's any such place—it's my opinion the old cove's killed Mr. Lancaster, and hid his body in the garden."

His meditations were brought to an end by the arrival of Olive and Teddy Rudall, both of whom were in a state of suppressed excitement as to the issue of their plan to examine the house during the absence of its owner.

"I say, you know," said Rudall, when they were seated in the room for a rest preparatory to beginning their search, "we've no right to do this sort of thing without a search-warrant."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," replied Olive, with that sublime disregard for the majesty of the law, which the feminine sex sometimes display. "Dr. Roversmire will never know anything about it, unless we find something, and then he'll have enough to do in clearing himself, without bothering about the search."

"You don't think he'll come up unbeknown, mum?" asked Dentham uneasily, for he had a wholesome dread of his mysterious master.

"No! you can set your mind at rest on that point," said Olive decisively, "he has no suspicions of our visit here, and will stay down at Marlow till the evening—even if he did wish to return he could not arrive back here for at least two hours, and that will give us plenty of time."

"I hope so, mum," answered Dentham respectfully, rubbing his hands together; "but it's like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. I've hunted everywhere in the room, and can't find any signs of a secret door."

"No doubt you went blindly to work, without considering the situation," said Teddy cheerfully; "the first thing to be ascertained is how this room lies."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Dentham in a puzzled tone.

"I'll explain later on," answered Teddy, "but before doing so, we are agreed upon one thing, that Adrian Lancaster came to this room and never left it."

"To all appearances—yes," assented Olive promptly.

"I'd better state the case exactly," observed Rudall cautiously, "so that we may run no chance of making any mistake; the facts, as we have gathered them, are simply these—Adrian Lancaster disappeared from his rooms in Piccadilly about three weeks ago; we hear nothing of him till this man comes to us and produces a walking-stick, which we both recognise as Adrian's property—it was found in this room, so

the presumption is that on the night of his disappearance Adrian was here. Dentham heard the murmur of voices, and asserts positively that Lancaster could not have left the room by that door leading to the passage, or he would have heard him.”

“Yes!—easily,” said Dentham emphatically.

“On the other hand,” resumed Teddy learnedly, “the night in question was wet, and Dentham traced Lancaster’s footsteps more or less clearly from the garden door to that window which leads on to the lawn—but, although he looked carefully, he could find no footmarks leading away from the house, so that, having left neither by the door nor the window, it stands to reason he could not have gone at all. Under these circumstances the most logical conclusion is that he did not leave this room. We cannot see him, and, as none of us are foolish enough to believe in the theory of disintegration, he must be concealed somewhere in a secret chamber, the entrance to which is from this room. Now what we have to do is to find this entrance.”

“Yes, but how?” asked Dentham dispiritedly.

“First by finding out the position of this room,” said Teddy, rising to his feet and glancing round; “two sides of it are bounded by the outside walls, and as they do not appear to me to be thick enough to contain any hiding place, we may be certain that the secret door can be in neither of them—the third wall stands between this room and the passage, so that the same objection applies—now what about the fourth wall in the centre of which is built the chimney?”

“There is a room beyond; the same as this,” explained Dentham.

“In that case the objection applies to the whole four walls,” said Rudall ruefully. “What about the roof?”

“My bedroom is above it.”

“Humph! in that case Lancaster cannot certainly have gone heavenward—and the floor?”

“There’s a cellar below this!”

“A cellar!” ejaculated Teddy thoughtfully. “That looks more promising—let us examine the cellar.”

“I think it would be better to look at the floor first,” suggested Olive, “for Adrian can’t have got into the cellar without some mode of exit.”

The floor was of polished wood, consisting of narrow planks laid horizontally, and these were partly covered here and there with Turkish mats. Collecting these in a heap, Teddy and Dentham made a thorough examination, but were quite unable to find any trap-door through which entrance could have been gained into the cellar.

“Is the cellar open to anyone?” asked Rudall rising to his feet and dusting the knees of his trousers.

“Yes, sir,” answered Dentham quickly. “I’m out and in it a dozen times a day, there’s wood and coal stored there.”

“Doesn’t seem much use examining the cellar!”

“In that case I fail to see that there can be any secret hiding-place,” said Olive in despair. “You are quite sure, Dentham, you did not hear the doctor or Mr. Lancaster leave the room.”

“Quite sure, mum,” replied Dentham decisively, “my room is above, but I wasn’t in it, as I came out and looked over the stairs, so if either of ‘em left the room I’d have seen as well as heard.”

“Then,” observed Olive disconsolately, “this disintegration theory—”

“Is all bosh,” interrupted Teddy angrily. “I don’t believe in theosophy, and as I told you, even if they can disintegrate bodies they can only meddle with their own and not with those of other people—there must be some secret hiding-place to which the entrance is from this room.”

“But where?” demanded Olive, “walls, roof and floor all give no clue.”

Teddy fastened his eyes upon the chimney.

“What about the fireplace,” he asked, going over to it and surveying its cumbersome proportions.

“Oh, there’s nothing there, sir,” said Dentham with a wriggle of scorn.

“I don’t know so much about that,” replied Teddy, “see, there’s a half-burnt candle on the mantel-piece.”

“He always had a candle,” said Dentham, referring to his master. “Why, I don’t know, as there was lots of gas-light.”

“Always had a candle,” murmured Rudall thoughtfully, “humph—I dare say it was to light the way to the lower regions—what is under the flooring of the next room,” he added, turning to Dentham.

“Nothing, sir, except earth! the cellar below here was dug out, I think, sir.”

Teddy gave a cry of delight.

“Then depend upon it there is a secret chamber under the next room, and the entrance to it is from this chimney-piece.”

“Impossible!” said Olive, rising and coming forward.

“It’s the most reasonable explanation I can offer at all events,” said Teddy, “suppose we examine the fire-place.”

Dentham and Miss Maunders, now very much excited at the chance of a possible discovery, assisted, and Teddy began to make a minute inspection of the fire-place.

It consisted of an ordinary steel grate, surrounded by a bordering of encaustic tiles, and the mantel-piece was a heavy oaken one, elaborately carved with fruit and flowers. Although Teddy pushed and shook the grate it remained immovable and there certainly seemed no possibility that such a heavy mass could be moved at all.

“Perhaps there’s a spring,” suggested Olive, and began to feel among the carvings of the mantelpiece with deft fingers. The attempt proved successful, for by chance her fingers came in contact with the spring; there was a click as she pressed it, almost involuntarily, and the three present gave a cry of surprise as the whole of the grate swung round upon a central pivot, disclosing the space beyond.

"I knew I was right," cried Teddy in ecstasy, "this leads to some secret chamber, and I would not be surprised if we found Adrian Lancaster a prisoner below."

Olive turned pale as he lighted the candle and bending down crept into the black cavity. At first she feared to follow in his steps, but her love for Adrian prevailed and she cautiously entered also. Dentham, who was shaking in every limb with terror at this strange discovery, remained in the room, but when Teddy and his companion disappeared down the narrow steps his curiosity got the better of his fear and he groped his way in the same direction.

"Is this the secret chamber?" asked Olive in a disappointed tone, when they found themselves in the square vault.

"I don't think so," replied Teddy doubtfully, holding the candle above his head, "or surely Roversmire would have made it more comfortable."

"There may be another door," suggested Miss Maunders hopefully, "examine the walls."

Teddy did so, and running his hand rapidly down on the smooth surface of the stone, he felt a round button which he pressed with all his strength and immediately the blank wall before them seemed to disappear, showing only a dense black space.

"Dentham," cried Teddy on seeing this, "go and get more candles or a lamp." Upon which Dentham sped rapidly up the steps without being required to be told twice.

"Adrian," cried Olive peering forward into the darkness, dimly lighted by the glimmer of the candle, "are you there?"

No voice answered, and in vague terror the girl caught Teddy by the hand.

"Oh! do you think he is dead?" she whispered!

"I don't know," he replied blankly; "perhaps he is not here, or there may be some more doors to open. See, here is Dentham, with two more lights."

Olive took one of the candles, and headed by Teddy the little band went forward along the narrow passage and at length found themselves in the circular vault, which looked weird and spectral-looking with its strange decorations.

"Looks like the cave of a magician," said Teddy, slowly waving his light to and fro. "Hullo, what's up?"

His sudden exclamation was caused by Dentham, who had dropped his candle, and with chattering teeth, shaking limbs and pale face, pointed to a dark form extended on a couch. With a cry of terror Olive rushed forward and held the light close to the figure's face, and fell on her knees with a shriek.

"It's Adrian!—Adrian!—and he's dead."

"Dead!" echoed Rudall in an awed tone, "impossible."

"No, it's true; quite true," she shrieked, setting her candle down on the floor. "His limbs are cold, his eyes are closed, and I can't feel his heart beat."

“Roversmire may have thrown him into a trance,” said Rudall reassuringly, who in the face of this strange discovery was willing now to credit Roversmire with all kinds of superhuman powers, “here, Miss Maunders, take up your candle and hold mine—Denthams and myself will carry—the—I mean will carry Adrian upstairs to the light.” Almost overcome by grief, Olive was yet sufficiently mistress of herself to do what he asked, and arose to her feet, holding a light in each hand, while the tears she was unable to wipe away streamed down her pale face.

“Come on,” said Teddy, seeing that Denthams, overcome with fear, made no move, “take Mr. Lancaster by the head.”

“I dare not,” whispered Denthams, shrinking back, “he’s dead.”

“How do you know he is dead?” said Rudall, angrily, “he may be only in a trance—do what I tell you, or I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

On hearing this Denthams with manifest reluctance did as he was told, but gave a shudder of fear as he seized the inert feet of the figure on the couch. Teddy held up the head, and, preceded by Olive with the lights, the two men with great difficulty managed to carry the body upstairs to the sitting-room.

Olive’s courage sustained her thus far, but when she saw Adrian’s body lying on the floor stiff and cold, she let the candles fall from her hands and flung herself down in a paroxysm of sorrow.

“Oh, Adrian!—Adrian!” she wailed, clasping one cold hand, “he is dead!—dead!”

“Nonsense,” said Teddy roughly, kneeling beside the still form, “if he were dead, symptoms of decay would have set in long ago—he’s not dead, I tell you, but in a trance.”

The girl dried her eyes, summoned up all her courage, and arose to her feet.

“Are you certain he is not dead?” she asked breathlessly.

“It’s rather difficult to say,” answered Teddy, rising also and leading her to a seat, “but we’ll send at once for a doctor and, meantime, you must have a glass of wine. Denthams, get some wine for Miss Maunders.”

Denthams disappeared and, meantime, Teddy comforted Olive as well as he was able.

“I’m sure he’s in a trance,” he insisted quietly, “look how firm and healthy the flesh looks. If he were really dead he would not look like this after three weeks.”

Here Denthams returned with the wine and Teddy made the girl take a good glass of it.

“Denthams,” he said, when Olive grew more composed, “go down to the police station and send the police here. Then come back with a doctor as hard as you can.”

Denthams took the money Teddy held out towards him, and, putting on his hat, left the house chuckling quietly to himself.

“Yes, I’ll get the police and the doctor,” he muttered, as he walked rapidly down the road, “and I’ll telegraph to the old cove at Marlow. It’s just as I thought. He’s killed Mr. Lancaster, so as soon as he knows the body is found, I’ll be able to fix him up, and I won’t let him off unless he pays me jolly well.”

## **Chapter XIV**

### **Dentham Makes Terms**

Jintle's Hotel was situated in that very unfashionable neighbourhood, The Seven Dials, and Mr. Jintle, the proprietor thereof, was a friend of Dentham's. On the evening of the day upon which the strange discovery had been made at Hampstead, Dentham was seated in a small, stuffy back room of the hotel, talking eagerly to no less a personage than his master, Dr. Michael Roversmire, who had come up from Marlow to Jintle's by the four-o'clock train in answer to a telegram sent by Dentham.

Adrian was in a terrible dilemma, as he did not know which way to turn. The telegram which warned him not to go back to Hampstead or he would be arrested, had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt, and he had come up to town at once to see Dentham. That gentleman had gained his reward from Olive Maunders, and was now the happy possessor of one hundred and twenty-five pounds, but not satisfied with even such a sum, which represented wealth to him, he was now trying to make terms with his master. All his cringing manners had disappeared, and he sat opposite to Adrian with his elbows resting on the table and a look of coarse triumph irradiating his mean-looking face.

"I knew how it would be," he was saying in a sneering tone. "If you'd only trusted me about the young man I could have helped you, but now it's too late—unless you make it worth my while."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Adrian hopelessly, fully aware that he was in the power of this man and quite at a loss what course to pursue.

"What do I want you to do?" said Dentham jeeringly. "I want you to give me a cheque for two hundred straight off."

"And if I do that?" queried Adrian, fixing his eyes on Dentham's face.

"Well, I'll do my best to help you to get off," retorted Dentham with a silky smile.

"And suppose I refuse?"

"Oh, in that case, I'll go straight out and tell the police."

"Will you, indeed?" said Adrian with a grim smile, stroking his long grey beard. "And what about your warrant for my arrest?—you can't do it on suspicion."

"Now don't you try any larks on me," said Dentham in a bullying tone, "because I'm the only person who can help you out of this mess, and I won't unless you're civil."

"Oh, yes you will—for money," retorted his master coolly, "besides, I want first to be assured of the truth of your story."

Dentham was quite exasperated by the quiet tone in which the doctor spoke. He had expected to find a terrified man, who would give any sum to be placed in safety, instead of which, the proposed victim talked as calmly and sedately as if no terrible charge of murder was hanging over him.

"If what I've told you don't convince you, nothing will," he said sarcastically. "Ain't I said all your being asked to Marlow was a blind? I found out Mr. Lancaster had been with you on that night by means of the stick."



“Which you denied having seen,” interpolated Adrian quietly.

“That’s my business; you said it was your stick—which was a lie. Well, I answered Miss Maunders’ advertisement and told her all I knew.”

“In other words, you betrayed me.”

“You can call it what you like, but I had to look after Number One, and she paid me well for what I told her.”

“So now, having betrayed me and getting paid, you are going to betray her in the hope of a similar reward?”

“I always make hay while the sun shines,” retorted Dentham with an ugly smile, for he did not like his villainies to be put before him so plainly. “Whatever I did is none of your business, all I know is, this Miss Maunders and Mr. Rudall came to your house this morning, found Mr. Lancaster’s body where you hid it and called in the police; if I hadn’t sent that telegram to Marlow, you’d have gone back home and been arrested, but I saved you “

“For your own ends,” said Adrian with a dreary laugh. “Good heavens, what scoundrels there are in this world! So you think I killed Adrian Lancaster?”

“I’m sure of it,” replied Dentham promptly. “I saw it myself.”

“And where is it now?” demanded Adrian, leaning back in his chair.

“At Number Forty Beryle Square. Miss Maunders had it taken there with permission of the police this afternoon.”

“So there is a warrant out against me?”

“Yes; on a charge of murdering Mr. Lancaster.”

“And if I give you a cheque for two hundred pounds you will help me to escape?”

“I’ll do my best,” replied Dentham evasively.

“Do you know you are compounding a felony?” said Adrian, rising.

“Whatever I’m doing, it’s better than being a murderer; but I’ve not got any more time to talk, you know my offer and you can do what you like.”

“I must have time to think over it,” said Adrian calmly. “You can go away and leave me for a time.”

“Don’t you try to escape,” cried Dentham, moving towards the door, “‘cause you won’t I’ll keep a watch outside.”

“I may escape yet, in spite of you.”

“Oh, will you?” scoffed Dentham. “I daresay you’re a juggler, ain’t you? Perhaps you can get through the keyhole, but all your juggles won’t get you out of this mess, unless you pay me well,” and with this parting shot Dentham took his departure and closed the door after him.

Left alone in the dirty, ill-lighted little room, Adrian walked up and down, pondering over the situation. He saw plainly he was in Dentham’s power, and if he refused to accede to his demand, he would be at once arrested, tried—in the person of Dr. Roversmire—for the murder of Adrian Lancaster, and as the proofs were so strong against him, ultimately hanged. But it was not this prospect that made him shudder; no, it was something far more terrible, for he knew that his own body, being to all intents and purposes dead, would be duly buried, and then—Oh, God, how terrible!—when he was hanged as Dr. Roversmire, his soul would have to go back to find its original body, and find it!—where?—in the darkness of the coffin. He would be lying under the earth a living man, and would die by that most terrible of all deaths—suffocation.

The bare idea of such an appalling death made a cold sweat break out on his forehead, and leaning his arms on the mantelpiece he groaned with anguish. He would die two horrible deaths, first on the gallows, as Dr. Roversmire, and then in the narrowness of the coffin, as Adrian Lancaster. What was he to do—consent to Dentham’s offer and be saved, or give himself up and try to explain the whole affair?

Alas, he knew that if he did so he would be looked upon as a madman, and even if his life was spared, he would be put in a lunatic asylum. Sooner or later the life of Dr. Roversmire’s body would end, and then he would most certainly, by returning to his own, die a terrible death in the grave.

On the other hand he recognised fully the treacherous nature of Dentham, and foresaw that even if he did pay him what he asked, the valet would first make certain of his money by cashing the cheque, and then betray him into the hands of the police in the hope of further reward. There seemed no escape—on all sides he was hemmed in by perils, and he was the helpless sport of circumstances.

He raised his head from his arms and stared steadily at the old wrinkled face that looked at him from the dimness of the mirror. As Adrian Lancaster he had been accused of murder, and hidden his personality in the body of Michael Roversmire to escape, but now he was accused of murder as Michael Roversmire, and where could he hide now—where?

Like a flash of light a solution of the problem broke on his bewildered brain. The old man whose personality he had assumed had told him that if the body of Dr. Roversmire died by accident or suicide, the soul would have to go back to its own body. Well, he would do so—he would kill himself in the body of Dr. Roversmire and wake as from a trance in the body of Adrian Lancaster.

Yes, that would be the easiest way out of the difficulty. He shrank from the idea of suicide, but it was the only way to avoid two terrible deaths, by hanging and suffocation, so he saw that the only means of escape was to at once destroy the body of Roversmire.

Thinking that such a contingency might occur—although it had come sooner than he expected—Adrian had provided himself with a phial of deadly poison, distilled from some rare Eastern herb, which he had found in the medicine-chest of Dr. Roversmire. He always carried it about with him, and now, producing it from his pocket, held it up towards the light. It contained a dark, ruby-coloured liquid, which he knew was swift to kill, as he had found a full description of its effects in the diary of the old Indian fakir

“Thank God!” he murmured to himself as he removed the stopper, “this will save me. Roversmire said suicide was punished bitterly in the spiritual world, but he surely cannot blame me for taking the life of his body in order to escape two terrible deaths. No! I have bitterly expiated the sins of Adrian Lancaster in

this old body, and I will destroy it without fear of the consequence. It will at least restore me to my proper self and to the arms of the woman I love.”

At this moment the door was pushed roughly open and Dentham made his appearance in swaggering triumph.

“Well,” he said, rubbing his lean hands together, “have you made up your mind?”

“Yes, I have,” answered Adrian, holding the phial closely in his hand. “I have made up my mind not to give a scoundrel like you one penny.”

“Then I’ll have you arrested,” yelled Dentham, furious at seeing his chance of making money fading away.

“You will not arrest me,” replied his master with a strange smile, “for I will be far beyond the reach of your malice. Bring in your detectives as soon as you like, for they will only find a dead body.”

Dentham, seeing his intention, darted forward to stop him, with a cry of anger, but Adrian was too quick for him, and raising the phial to his lips, drank off the contents.

The valet recoiled as he did so, for an awful change passed over the face of his master—the thin hands plucked wildly at the grey beard, and with a choking cry Dr. Roversmire fell down on the floor—dead.

And the clock struck nine.

## **Chapter XV**

### **Resurgam**

When Dentham asserted that the body of Adrian Lancaster had been removed to Beryle Square, he told a lie, as the police refused to allow any such thing. A doctor had been called in, who pronounced life to be extinct, and the body was now lying on a couch in the sitting-room, where it was to remain until the inquest. Olive had refused to leave the house since the discovery, and in despair, Teddy, afraid to leave her by herself, had telegraphed to her father to come to Hampstead. Sir John immediately obeying the summons, had come up by the night train, and the three of them were now in the room, talking over the affair. Dentham had disappeared. The police were in possession of the house, and now Sir John was trying to persuade his daughter to come into town to the Metropole Hotel, and take the rest she so sadly needed.

In spite of the verdict of the doctor, Teddy Rudall firmly refused to believe that Adrian was dead, and declared with the greatest confidence that he was only in a trance. It was this statement that made Olive refuse to leave the house, as she half thought that Teddy might be right in his belief, and Adrian would come back to life again, so she was unwilling to be absent in case he should revive while she was away. The sergeant of the police, who was present, now insisted respectfully that they should all leave the house, as it was nearly nine o’clock, and he was unable to retire until they did. Under this pressure, Olive had consented to accompany her father and Teddy into town.

“I’ll come back in the morning,” she said turning to the sergeant, “and if he shows any signs of reviving, mind you send a messenger at once to the Metropole.

“Yes miss—certainly!”

“What nonsense, Olive!” said her father testily, for the unpleasantness of the situation was beginning to tell even on his genial temper. “I’m afraid there’s no chance of poor Adrian’s revival, he is dead—quite dead.”

“There I disagree with you,” interposed Teddy quietly, “he is in a trance.”

“But the doctor?”

“I don’t care what the doctor says—he isn’t the Pope, to be infallible—if Adrian were dead, his body would have decayed long ago.”

“I’m sure, papa, if you believe in theosophy you can see that Dr. Roversmire has hypnotised poor Adrian,” said Olive firmly, “I daresay if Dr. Roversmire were here, he could bring him to life again.”

“Oh, he’ll come back here, miss,” observed the sergeant confidently, “then he’ll be arrested at once and to save his own skin, he’ll do what he can.”

“I’m not so sure that Roversmire will return here,” said Sir John thoughtfully, “because he received a telegram to-day and went up to town by the afternoon train, in a very agitated state.”

“Who could the telegram have been from?” cried Olive.

“I daresay Dentham sent it,” suggested Teddy “for I don’t believe in that fellow at all—he’s away now.”

“When he comes back sir, we’ll not lose sight of him again,” said the policeman, “but now we really must go.”

Olive assented in silence, and moved towards the door, followed by the others. On the threshold however, she turned to take a last look at Adrian, and truly it was a strange scene which met her eye. On the table burned an oil lamp with a bright yellow flame, which only illuminated half the room, the rest being in a kind of semidarkness, and on the verge of this radiance was the couch, covered with a tiger skin, upon which lay the body of Adrian Lancaster, still arrayed in the ulster he had worn, with the quiet hands crossed on the placid breast, the eyes closed, the lips smileless, and a look of terrible calm on the white face.

Olive had placed a great bunch of tuber-roses in his hands, and the sickly odour permeated the whole apartment, while, as the group stood silently at the door, dead stillness seemed to reign around.

Suddenly from the black marble clock over the mantelpiece there sounded the hour of nine, in deep hollow tones, like the knell of a funeral bell. One! two! three! four! five! six! seven! eight! nine!—they rang heavily through the silence of the night, while the listeners, overcome by the strangeness of the scene, stood immovable, counting each sonorous stroke with mute lips. As the last died away in silence, there was an awful pause, as if the absence of sound made the quiet more ghastly, and then—

The figure on the couch stirred and sighed—the hands raised themselves off the breast, and the flowers fell with a muffled sound on the floor. The onlookers gazed at this awesome resurrection in paralyzed silence, and it was only when Adrian opened his eyes, and languidly tried to rise, that the spell broke, and Olive fell on the floor, while the three men rushed forward in a state of uncontrollable agitation.

“He lives! he lives!” cried Sir John, placing his arm under Adrian’s head, and cautiously lifting him to an erect sitting position.

"I knew it was a trance," said Teddy triumphantly, "poor old chap, he seems quite worn out," and with great presence of mind, he poured out a glass of wine, and held it to Adrian's lips.

While he was drinking it, the sergeant stood scratching his head in amazement.

"I never saw such a queer thing in my life," he said, staring at Adrian with a look of awe on his face, "it's like the raisin' of Lazarus."

Adrian, revived somewhat with the wine, spoke in a faint voice. "Olive," he whispered, "Olive." The woman on the floor heard the beloved voice, and, raising herself to her knees, dragged herself across the floor to the side of the couch and, with one cry of joy, clasped Adrian to her breast.

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#### EXTRACT FROM "THE MORNING PLANET."

"A curious case of suspended animation is reported to have taken place in London within the last few weeks. Most of our readers will remember the extraordinary disappearance of Mr. Adrian Lancaster, who, having quarrelled with a friend, left his chambers in Piccadilly and was not heard of for some time. He was ultimately discovered in the house of a Dr. Michael Roversmire, who appears to have made him the subject of some mesmeric experiment, for the unfortunate gentleman had evidently been cast into a trance, and was to all appearances dead. And now comes the curious part of the story. Dr. Roversmire, no doubt dreading the questions that might be asked him, disappeared on the discovery of Mr. Lancaster's inanimate form, and was found dead in a low public-house situate in the Seven Dials. It appears his valet, Dentham (who had given most valuable information to the police concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Lancaster), was with him at the time of his death, which took place, so he asserted to the landlord of the hotel, at nine o'clock. It is worthy of remark that, as the man who exercised the mesmeric power died at The Seven Dials, Mr. Lancaster, the person over whom such power had been exercised, revived, and has been in perfect possession of his faculties ever since. So we beg all professors of Mesmerism, Hypnotism or Occult Science to note that this power over their victims evidently ceases upon their death. Mr. Lancaster, who has been in a trance state for at least three weeks, steadily refuses to give any information of his experiences during that period, but we suspect the reason of such refusal is simply that he has nothing to tell, as his faculties were no doubt absolutely powerless to exercise themselves while under the evil influence of the hypnotic power of Dr. Roversmire.

"Dentham, the valet of the deceased, has disappeared, and is supposed by the police to have gone to America. Dr. Roversmire, whose death is ascribed to suicide (proved by the small portion of deadly poison found in the phial clenched in his hand and the appearance of the stomach after a post mortem examination), was a wealthy man, and, as no relatives or friends of the deceased can be found, nor to all appearances is there any will in existence, the whole property of the deceased will go to the Crown.

"We hear Mr. Lancaster is about to marry Miss Olive Maunders, the daughter of Sir John Maunders of No. 40, Beryle Square and The Nook, Marlow; and we heartily congratulate him on his narrow escape from the hands of such an unscrupulous charlatan as Roversmire seems to have been."

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So far the oracle of the Press, but no one ever knew the real truth except Olive, to whom Adrian told the whole story, and, in spite of her scepticism, she was forced to believe, if not the whole, at least a portion of the strange recital. With Philip Trevanna, who was indirectly the cause of all his strange experiences, Adrian became good friends, so much so, that Mr. Trevanna acted as his best man, and, in conjunction

with Teddy Rudall, saw the bridal pair off to Dover, from whence they departed to the Continent for their honeymoon.

**THE END**

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