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# The Man Who Changed His Plea

by

**E. Phillips Oppenheim**

## CHAPTER I

The dignified-looking usher, holding his long black rod in one hand and dressed with the formality which his position demanded, after a few seconds of silent waiting leaned towards the Judge. The latter, wearing all the paraphernalia of his almost sacred office, had sunk a little forward in his chair and was watching through half-closed eyes the thickly packed crowd of men and women who had risen to their feet in anticipation of his departure. The echo of the prisoner's shout which had rung through the court a few seconds before seemed to be still vibrating in the air.

"Your Lordship," his attendant murmured.

The Judge seemed to wake from a moment's silent reverie. At the sound of the usher's voice, however, he was no longer distraught. He rose to his feet in dignified fashion, a fine figure of a man, bowed to the court, and with slow majesty followed his guardian angel down the steps and into his retiring-room. His valet, who was waiting there, and the junior ushers busied themselves in removing the emblems of his high office.

"An unusual case, Robinson," he remarked to his clerk, who was standing by.

"Very unusual, my lord," was the respectful answer.

"In my twenty years of office," continued the Lord Chief Justice, whilst he submitted himself to the ministrations of his attendants, "I have never overcome my repugnance to wearing that ghastly signal of a human being's approaching doom. Today I was particularly glad to be spared the ordeal of donning that hideous black cap and addressing the prisoner. I ask myself with some curiosity, Robinson," he added, turning to the clerk, "whether Sir Frederick had any previous intimation that the prisoner was contemplating this action?"

"I have no idea, my lord," Robinson replied. "It came as a great surprise to the court generally."

"A changed plea during the course of a trial for murder," the Judge continued, "is not an unheard-of event, although it is unusual. I remember it twice in my own career. Some previous intimation to the judge, though, should be obligatory. In this case, however, as there seemed to be no element of doubt as to the

prisoner's guilt, it did not make any difference. Otherwise, the official trying the case would naturally have liked a little further time for consideration before pronouncing his decision."

"If your Lordship will excuse my saying so," the clerk ventured, "the sentence pronounced by the court was the only one possible under the circumstances. I think perhaps a cup of tea—"

The Judge assented.

"Kindly see that all preparations are made for my departure. I will sign the necessary papers and return home as soon as possible."

"Sir Frederick Leversen has sent in a message to know if he can have a word with your Lordship," the chief usher announced. "His son, Mr. Samuel Leversen, is with him, too."

"I will receive no visitors here this afternoon," was the terse reply.

In his capacious leather armchair, Lord Malladene, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and without doubt a future Lord Chancellor, sipped his tea and looked thoughtfully into the embers. That he was a little disturbed in his mind became obvious to Robinson, who knew him well. The latter, who was a perfect reflex of his master's moods, became uneasy.

"Your Lordship will forgive my remark, but bearing in mind your well-known aversion to applying the capital sentence, the ending of today's trial has been most satisfactory," he suggested.

Lord Malladene nodded slightly, but the frown remained upon his face.

"In a sense you are right, Robinson," he admitted, "yet there was one, to me, jarring note. I disliked the prisoner's sudden cry as he left the dock. He seemed to fling it back as a last hope. It made one wonder what was in his mind when he changed his plea. 'I lied,' he called out; 'I am not guilty!' That was very foolish of him, Robinson."

"It was just an impulse, your Lordship," the clerk replied. "I should forget it."

The Judge rose to his feet. The frown remained.

"I would forget it if I could," he said.

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It was the height of the Season, and London was very full; the pavements were crowded, but the newspaper-sellers, although they were pushed off the kerb in many places, still held their own and sold their papers. They had sensational news to offer.

## FAMOUS MURDER TRIAL: RESULT

was on the sheet they waved backwards and forwards, and men and women on every side, passers-by of every description, who were anxious to know the fate of Richard Lebur, produced their pennies and turned

to the stop-press news. It was the first subject of conversation exchanged by men home from their day's work, meeting at the club, or lingering over the cocktail bar.

"So they found Lebur guilty," someone observed in the bar of the Sheridan.

"Don't see how they could do anything else!"

"Read your paper, my dear fellow," his companion enjoined. "There was no trial after all. He asked permission to change his plea."

"You mean that he admitted his guilt? Foolish thing to do, it seems to me."

"Did it to save his neck, I suppose," the other remarked. "They have to show a little extra consideration to a man who saves his country the expense of a long trial. There could have been but one end to it if they'd fought it out to a finish."

"And that?"

"He would have been found guilty and hanged."

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"I'm sorry for his wife," a peeress acknowledged in reply to her host's opening comment at a fashionable dinner party. "She is little more than a child, but she is making a name for herself as an artist. She is to have a small show of her own soon, I believe, at the Mona Gallery."

"Can't think what she married such a fellow for," her companion muttered.

"I never met either of them," the lady observed. "The girl is quite striking-looking, I've been told."

"I've met her once," a woman on the other side of the table interposed. "She has just that touch of the unusual that most of these artists affect."

"She is a very beautiful picture herself," declared an elderly lady, who was known as an art critic.

"It seems a ghastly pity that she should have married a man of Lebur's type," the host pronounced. "He and his father own picture-galleries, I know, and I daresay it was because of the son's leanings towards art that they came together, but the man's a rotter."

"Well, he's got it in the neck now," another reflected. "Penal servitude for life! Just think what that means. Never a moment when you can walk about the earth a free man again, look into the shop windows, drop into your club for lunch, and pay a call on your best girl during the afternoon. I'm not sure that the other isn't better."

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In a large, rather untidy studio, on the second floor of a block of Chelsea flats, a young woman was seated close to a high, bare window opposite an easel, upon which stood the unfinished study of an old man. All the appurtenances of her craft were laid out upon a small oak table within easy reach. She showed no inclination, however, towards work. Occasionally she gazed down to the river, now and then looking up to watch the drifting clouds. She was quite alone, and from her frequent glances into the street below it

seemed as though she might be waiting for someone. In time her patience was rewarded, for the bell which rang from a landing entrance to the studio pealed softly. She rose to her feet, walked to the door, and opened it.

"I'm glad that you have come," she said simply. "Please sit down. I am quite prepared to hear what you have to tell me."

A small, fragile old gentleman, dressed in sober black and wearing an almost clerical-looking felt hat, sank into an easy-chair. With both hands upon his stick he leaned forward and watched her draw up a stool opposite to him.

"You have not heard?" he asked. "You did not send for a paper?"

"No," she admitted. "I preferred to hear it from you, here, just like this."

"Your husband, at the last moment, changed his plea, with permission from the Judge. He changed it to 'guilty'—and instead of leaving this world, my dear, by a disgraceful death, he was sentenced to penal servitude for life."

"Penal servitude for life." She repeated the words almost mechanically. "That means that he will never be free again?"

"Never," her visitor gasped. "Forgive me if I seem affected," he added, for there were tears in his eyes, "but after all, you must remember that he was my son. He was an evil man, an unrighteous son, and an unfaithful husband—but he was my son, and when he was young I loved him."

She held out her hand and took his.

"My dear," she murmured, "I am so sorry for you. Believe me, I am sorry."

"It is generous of you," he confessed quietly. "I was a wicked man to let an innocent girl like you marry a man whom I knew to be evil; but you are so pure, so sweet in yourself, I thought the beauty you would pour into his life might change him. I was wrong. I was wicked ever to take the chance. Leaving all that out of consideration, dear Pamela, what has happened now is for the best. He is out of your way; he is where he can do no harm in the world. I pray God only that he may repent."

"I am very, very sorry," she said. "You are a good man, Simon Lebur; you should have had a good son to comfort you in your old age."

"And you," he groaned, his cold white fingers responding to the pressure of hers, "should have had a good husband who would have made your life a happy one. I thank God that his mother is dead, that there is no one to sorrow with us. I am on my way now down the short footpath that leads to the end of this world, and I am very glad that it should be so. You are left to suffer, my child, but I have come to beg you to cast this trouble from you and to stamp out the memory of it from your life. They say that I come of a stern race—perhaps I do—but my heart softens for those who deserve it. You deserve happiness and you will find it. You have a great gift and you will make use of it. You will become famous! Soon I shall show your work all by itself in my principal gallery."

She said nothing, but the light was burning again in her eyes. She glanced towards the canvas.

"I will bring the great critics to you; they will take the word of Simon Lebur, and they will know genius when they see it. Never let this cloud hang over or darken your life. I am an old man," he added, leaning

over and smoothing her hand, "but I look upon you as my child. The allowance I made my son, when I forbade his presence at the galleries, will come to you, and when I die, all that would have been his will also come to you. Forget your misery, dear, and these terrible days—live amongst the immortals. I stand on the earth and I look upwards, but God has given me one gift and one gift only. I know those who will take their place amongst the great dead, the masters who poured joy upon the world, Michael Angelo, Fra Lippo Lippi, Raphael—you, too, have their genius, my child. God bless you. I have lost my son, but I am proud of my faraway daughter."

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## CHAPTER II

Inspector Charlesworth held a card which his orderly had just presented to him between his thumb and first finger and eyed it disparagingly. There was nothing about it with which he could find fault, but he had an instinctive dislike of it.

"Who is this?" he asked gruffly. "What does he want?"

"Five minutes' interview was all he asked for, sir," the constable replied. "His face seems sort of familiar, but I have never seen him before that I know of. He said nothing about his business."

"Show him up," was the brief command. "I don't want to see him really; I'm busy. Telephone me about anything you like in five minutes."

"Very good, sir."

The visitor was duly ushered in a few minutes later. He turned out to be a young man of medium height, slim build, excellent carriage, blue-grey eyes of good quality, clean-shaven, a few freckles, and a touch of sunburn. He was dressed quietly but with exceedingly good taste. The Inspector grudgingly motioned towards a chair. His visitor, he decided, was not a person to be ignored.

"Mr. Martin Campbell Brockenhurst," he said. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"That's quite a long story," the other replied.

"Then you'd better go and tell it to someone else," was the caustic answer. "This is the busiest department of Scotland Yard just now and I've no time to give to strangers."

"I," the visitor observed, "am not a stranger."

The Inspector looked at him shrewdly.

"Have we ever met before?"

"Once. You are not likely to remember it. It doesn't matter, anyway. I want a job and I can be very useful to you."

"God bless my soul!" the Inspector exclaimed. "Are you crazy, man, to walk in here and ask an Inspector at Scotland Yard for a job? Do you know what a policeman, even, has to go through before he can commence regular work here? What sort of a job you might be wanting I can't tell. We have a first-class Chief Commissioner at present," he concluded, with a very obvious note of sarcasm.

"I wasn't thinking of anything so important just for the moment," the other replied with an unexpectedly humorous smile. "Have to work your way up here, as I know, Inspector—and you can work as hard as you damn well please sometimes, and you don't get up."

The Inspector stared at his visitor.

"What do you know about it?" he demanded. "You come here as a stranger."

"Not I," was the prompt retort.

"You said you came here looking for a job."

"So I did, and I hope I'll get it. I've more chance now that you say you don't know me."

The Inspector leaned a little forward in his chair.

He studied his visitor more carefully. The other met his scrutiny without flinching. The Inspector would have hated to admit it, but he was puzzled. There was something familiar about this young man, so debonair in appearance, with an air of such confidence, but beyond that his memory failed him. The telephone bell rang, according to orders. He lifted the receiver with an irritable gesture.

"Another five minutes, constable," he said. "I shall be through by then."

"Five minutes is a very short time," the visitor said.

"Get on with it, please," the Inspector begged. "I've seen you before somewhere. If you wanted to puzzle me, you've succeeded. I don't remember where. Your card tells me that you are Mr. Martin Campbell Brockenhurst, of Albany, Piccadilly. The name of your club may, of course, mean nothing, but if it is genuine it is, I believe, a very good club. What have you come here for, what do you want from me, and where did I see you before?"

"I came to the Yard—not this department—seven years ago," the young man replied. "I had one ambition only in life: I wanted to be a detective. I found that I could only arrive at that position by serving my time in the ordinary Force. I served it, but when I had finished I applied for a job as a detective. I was put on a waiting list—I stayed on it for two years—then I resigned. I came into a little money and changed my name according to the will of the relation who left it to me. I travelled, returned to London, watched some of your detectives at work, and I came to the conclusion that, however obstinate you and your colleagues may be down here, you are still clever enough not to refuse a good thing. I am a good thing. I speak four languages, I can make myself up in seventy different ways, and if I am not a gentleman I have learnt to look and behave like one. I can wear dinner clothes, which very few of your detectives can, or I can wear sports clothes, which none of them can. I want to remind you also, sir, that I have done five years' service in the Force. You can look up my record and you will find it faultless. I am made up this morning so that not a soul here recognized me—and even you could not remember that I have sat in this room before. Put me on the staff."

The Inspector smiled thoughtfully.

"Campbell—P. C. Campbell you used to be. Jove, you were a sergeant, weren't you?"

"Could have been," the young man replied, "but it wasn't what I wanted."

The Inspector nodded.

"I remember. You were a little hot-headed about this matter. I wonder, do you think you really have any gifts which would help you to compete with my trained men, beyond the fact that you can wear your clothes and have the tricks of better birth and education?"

"I am dead certain of it," was the calm reply. "Put me on the staff, give me a somewhat roving commission, such as Nicky Grant used to have. Put me on a case when you want to, but if there is nothing doing, let me go and find a case of my own and work it up for you. I can't do any harm and I shall probably denude the criminal world of at least one malefactor."

"If you go looking for them and talking like that," the Inspector commented, "you'll probably end in the Thames with a stone tied round your ankle."

Again the caller smiled.

"I know other languages besides those that are spoken amongst the criminals here or the dockside loiterers or any of those gallant strivers after a dishonest living," he remarked. "Would you like a little Cockney slang? Here goes."

The Inspector stood thirty seconds of it, then he banged his fist upon the desk.

"Shut up," he implored. "Have you ever been on the stage?"

"No; but I could be any time I liked."

"I believe it," the Inspector observed.

The telephone rang again.

"Two minutes only," the Inspector replied rather shamefacedly, hanging up at once.

"Does that mean that you're not going to employ me?" the young man asked.

"Not at all," the Inspector replied. "You're hired."

The visitor rose to his feet. A faint smile was his only sign of satisfaction. He gathered together his doeskin gloves, his malacca cane, and his obviously Scott's hat. The Inspector, who was about the age of his visitor and had social ambitions, made up his mind that before long he would obtain from this young man the knowledge of where he purchased these sartorial accessories. That air of calm and easy assurance was an unpurchasable heritage which he knew he could never acquire.

"Be here at four o'clock this afternoon," he directed his caller. "Ask for Inspector Mulliner, room 13 c. He will go through all your records and I shall also have looked you up properly by that time. I will have a talk with Mulliner and we will either put you on a job at once or let you do as you suggest—go off on your own. Before you do that I shall have a few words to say to you."

"Delighted to look in for a chat at any time, Inspector," was the civil rejoinder.

The Inspector scowled.

"You will have to remember," he pointed out, "that there is discipline to be observed—discipline and nothing else around here."

The young man's deportment seemed suddenly to stiffen.

"You will have no fault to find with me on that score, sir," he declared as he prepared to take his leave.

At the last moment he hesitated. He turned back to confront once more the Inspector's frown.

"I'm sorry, sir," he confided, "but there is one thing I think I should tell you."

"Be quick about it then."

"During the short period that I spent in the Service as an ordinary P. C.," he went on, "I had just a little to do with one case which interested me enormously. I have never forgotten it, and I shall always remember assisting at the arrest of the guilty man and being in court at the time of the trial. This is not gossip, sir; I am telling you for a reason."

"Whose case was it?" the Inspector asked with faint curiosity.

"It was the case, rather famous in those days, of Simon Lebur's son, Richard. He was tried at the Old Bailey for the murder of a man called David Culpepper."

"Yes, that was quite a famous case," the Inspector acknowledged. "I remember it perfectly. The criminal changed his plea at the last moment—a most unusual thing in an important case."

"I felt a curiosity about certain points in that case," Martin Brockenhurst confided, "which has kept me guessing all this time. Then it happens," he went on, with a little less assurance than he had previously displayed, "that during my years of travel, after I came in for my money, I ran across one of the principal people concerned in it."

"Why are you telling me this?" the Inspector asked.

"Because in my spare time," Brockenhurst explained, "I should like, with your permission, to work on this case a little."

"What earthly good could you do?" the Inspector asked. "Lebur has got penal servitude for life—and serve him jolly well right, I should think. The two men had the misfortune to share a mistress and the retreating lover shot his rival in the hallway of her house with his own revolver. The case was proved up to the hilt."

"Yes, I know all about that," Martin agreed. "The circumstantial evidence, of course, was irresistible. On the other hand, there are certain very curious points I should like to look into, and, if I didn't allow it to interfere with any other case I might be working on, I thought you wouldn't mind my trying to solve one problem in particular."

"Waste of time, I should think," the Inspector remarked. "But provided you aren't too official about it and work in your own time, I don't know that I should have any objection. I should require a report from you, though, to be completed and filed with the others. I can't allow you to go working upon a case, even if it is one we've abandoned, entirely on your own."

"That's quite understood, sir," Martin promised with a little sigh of relief. "I'll start work next Monday, if you're agreeable."

"Whenever you like," the Inspector agreed. "Of course, I shall look upon you to a certain extent as a free lance, and your pay will not be on a very large scale."



"Whatever it is, sir," Martin replied, "it will go to the Police Orphanage. I'm ashamed to say so, but I'm afraid I should be considered almost a wealthy man."

"Get out, you rascal," growled the Inspector, who had not paid his income tax.

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## CHAPTER III

It seemed rather a curious coincidence that Lady Diana Malladene should have chosen the same day to open the new premises of her famous night-club as that on which Martin Brockenhurst rejoined that mighty army of men who do their best to support law and order in the great city. It was some time before she recognized the solitary stranger to whom her maître d'hôtel had given one of the best tables in the room, and even then it was still longer before she could believe her eyes. She sought help from one of her old friends, Ronnie Foster, who was reputed to know every man and woman in town by name, reputation, or lack of reputation. The young man in question was seated on a stool at the American bar, engaged in the somewhat melancholy consumption of a whisky and soda.

"Ronnie," she said, "don't look just now, but who is that man seated by himself at Number Three table? He signed in as Martin Brockenhurst, but it can't be the Martin Brockenhurst we used to know."

"God, I should hope not," was the scared reply. "I heard he'd joined the police and afterwards gone out to Kenya. That was a long time ago."

"There are a good many of us," Diana said, pulling a little viciously at the petals of a flower someone had left upon the counter, "who will wish that he had stayed there. But I can't get away from it. I'm good at recognizing people, you know, and I believe that's Martin Campbell Brockenhurst."

"What's he doing here?" the tired-looking young man, with crow's-feet about his eyes, and at that moment a somewhat startled expression, asked nervously.

She shook her head.

"I don't know," she answered. "All I can tell you is that I shall go crazy in a few minutes if I don't find out whether it's he or not. Why, I was desperately in love with him for a week or so when we were children."

"Go and ask him," her companion suggested anxiously. "You're hostess here. What the hell they let him in for I can't imagine, if it's he."

She indulged in a little gesture of contempt.

"He'd get in wherever he wanted to," she answered. "All the same, I'll go. If I faint, come to my assistance."

"Anything you like," was the gloomy reply. "But unless he's spotted me already, don't tell him I'm here."

There was a lull in the dancing. Diana glanced at herself for a moment in the mirror which she had drawn from her handbag, accepted and swallowed the aspirins which the barman handed to her in a silver spoon, took a long drink from her wineglass, and crossed the dance-floor. Brockenhurst watched her speculatively as she approached. He gave no sign that he expected her to pause at his table or address him;

he just looked out at her with the bland, incurious regard of a polite stranger. But when she came to a standstill he rose slowly to his feet, knocked out his cigarette and deposited it in the ashtray.

"Lady Diana Malladene, I believe," he said with a slight smile.

"Whatever are you doing here?" she gasped.

"No harm, I hope," he answered. "Won't you sit down?"

She sank into the place opposite to him and he resumed his seat.

"No harm," she repeated, almost under her breath.

"Do I look like a destroying angel?" he asked. "There was a time, wasn't there, when we had many mutual friends, and there was a time when we knew a good deal more of this side of London life, Diana, than anyone of your tender years—you were very young then, you know—ought to know."

"You disappeared," she muttered.

"I disappeared," he echoed.

"Why? You were still going strong; you weren't like most of us, half broke."

"No," he admitted thoughtfully, "it wasn't that. I'd just had enough of the life. I wanted something—what shall I say?—cleaner."

"There were a hundred different stories about you," she went on, her voice gradually becoming a little steadier. "Most people declared that you had gone to the Colonies, then a lot of people said that you were working as a farmer on one of your own estates. Rumours—never anything came except rumours. You were the mystery of the London we used to fool about in; everyone asked for months and even for a year after, 'What has become of Martin Brockenhurst?'"

"Most of the time I haven't been so very far away," he assured her pensively.

"Why did you disappear?" she asked. "Was it...?"

There was a queer but commanding flash in those steel-grey eyes. She hesitated.

"Not my business, of course," she murmured. "I'm sorry, Martin, but I couldn't help asking a question that all London asked itself for so long a time. It was in Ascot week, and your horse, Golden Lass, won the Gold Cup. You weren't there; nobody knew where you were; the Gold Cup is still in the safe."

He looked thoughtfully ahead of him, at the gaily painted walls and the crowd of well-dressed visitors. Perhaps he saw farther than just across that heated, fashionable dance-club.

"No," he reflected after a moment or two, "I wasn't so very far away. May I follow the custom of the place, Diana? Will you drink a glass of wine with me?"

"Will I—? Oh, Martin, I don't think I can bear it. You know that this is my club—I am the hostess."

"Isn't it the correct thing to do to ask your hostess to drink a glass of wine? Antoine," he went on, summoning the maître d'hôtel who was standing close by, "open my bottle of wine, please. A glass for Madame."

The man was swift to obey. She glanced at his own glass.

"You have drunk no wine."

"Not yet," he replied; "but I am going to join you now and, believe me," he went on with the merest touch of sarcasm, "I may be still a very good customer. I have ordered and paid for a case to be kept in my locker, also a few bottles of what Antoine has told me is your priceless brandy."

"Don't make fun of me, please," she begged, and there was something very human in her quiet voice and drooped eyes.

"I didn't come here to do that, Diana," he assured her kindly. "Look up at me; you need not be afraid."

She raised her eyes, but nevertheless she was afraid. It was a queer thing, but they drank to one another in silence and without any toast—it was rather difficult to find an appropriate one.

"Cheer up, my dear," he enjoined, smiling. "You might be in the hands of a worse blackmailer. I want nothing from you; no word that I shall say will ever interfere with your complete and absolute freedom. You can continue with your bottle club, you can even crown your social success by marrying a duke, and my lips will always be closed. It's not you, Diana, I've come back to see—although if you always look as well as you do tonight a man might be excused for that—it's someone altogether different, and if you were to sit there till daylight, looking like an angel or a Delilah, you would never come any nearer to finding out who it is. If I ask you a few questions, they will be harmless ones."

She drank more of her wine, pulled out her cigarette-case and lit a cigarette.

"You are Martin Brockenhurst," she said, "but you are so far away. You've lost something, you've gained something, you've changed. I don't recognize you, Martin."

"I have been looking at a different kind of life from a new angle," he told her.

Diana Malladene was what all her friends called her, a clever, far-seeing, and shrewd young woman. That faint note of mockery in his voice penetrated through her senses.

"Tell me what you have been doing," she begged. "Have you been hiding in unpeopled deserts and filling your own mind with the ghosts and shadows of the people you have loved and hated? You have that look, somehow."

He shook his head.

"It is years," he said, "since we met, Diana, years since I have seen one of our old comrades, or enemies—what were they? One hardly knows. But during that time, I will tell you this much, I've lived amongst men and women; I've come closer to the real things in life than ever before."

She edged her chair a little closer to his. She affected not to notice how the shapely brown fingers were slightly withdrawn as hers fell upon them.

"No, Diana," he warned, "I am not going to tell you where I've been. If you find out it will be by accident, but I don't think you will find out. There are a few questions I shall ask you, and then good-night."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You may ask questions, then, and I may not?"

"Perhaps," he rejoined, "on reflection you will admit that I have the better right."

"As usual," she sighed, "you make me feel like a squirming child at a board-school. Who gave you the rod of the master always, Martin?"

"The rod," he answered, "exists only in the guilty mind of the listener. I have nothing to speak of against you, Diana. You are still, I should think, the most beautiful woman in London."

She leaned back a little in her chair and looked at him steadily.

"I am trying to imagine that you are some famous portrait painter," she said, "and I am myself. At any rate, I am glad I wore this particular frock tonight."

"Oyster pink," he murmured.

She bowed.

"I thank you for the memory."

"It is a beautiful colour," he went on, "and you are a beautiful woman. Quite as beautiful as you were when a certain picture of you was painted."

"Have you come back to tell me that once more?" she asked, lifting her eyes.

"I am not that much of a fool," he said quietly. "I can come back or go forth to gloat again on the beauty of the Fra Lippo Lippi Madonna, and I should find it as beautiful as it seemed to me twenty years ago. The eyes of every passer-by who knew what beauty was loved her, but she has not changed."

"It appears to me," Lady Diana said, opening her bag and taking out her mirror, "that this would be a very good place for a hiatus in our conversation. You have told me that I am still beautiful; that is all that matters. My skin I know is flawless, my eyes have that little glint of the violet in their blue, and the arts of the coiffeur would only be wasted on my yellow hair. I have survived time—one triumph at any rate, Martin. So have you, for that matter; but you didn't come here to mix words with me."

He shook his head.

"I came here," he confided, "to learn something of the lives of a few of those who were our friends years ago."

"To do them mischief?"

"Perhaps."

"And why should you think that I would help you?"

"I thought you might," he admitted, lighting a cigarette for himself, but also watching her. "There are reasons, you know, Diana, why, when I ask you in a pleasant and submissive manner, it would be almost better if you yielded to my simple request."

"There's one simple request," she said, "I should love to make."

"Well?"

"Dance with me for a few minutes."

He smiled enigmatically but certainly without distaste, then he laid down his cigarette and bowed.

"Why not?"

\* \* \* \* \*

They danced. She with the gracious sensuousness of the born *danseuse*, he with a sort of grim faultlessness of posture and movement that was yet in its way admirable. Now and then he leaned a little to the music and at such moments her eyes, lifted to his, shone with almost feverish eloquence. At the end of the dance he led her to her place, filled her glass with wine, pushed the cigarettes towards her and lit one himself.

"You always dance like that," she said. "If I had been a light woman or you had been in any way serious, what a nuisance I should have been to you."

"Nuisances are of different sorts," he said. "Now I am going to ask you a question."

"Do you think I don't know what it is?" she asked, lighting another cigarette.

"Well?"

"Broke to the world. No good coming here to look for him. They would never let him in."

"Oh, that one," he remarked. "I know all about Henry Guest, Diana. You see, I can utter his name quite calmly. He is, as you say, broke. Isn't that Ronnie Foster at the bar?"

The man on the stool caught Martin's eye, slipped to his feet and strolled across to them. Diana welcomed him with a friendly nod. He made no attempt to shake hands with the new member of the club, but he summoned up the ghost of a welcoming smile.

"So you're back in these parts again, Brockenhurst," he remarked. "Glad to see you, I'm sure."

"Thank you very much," the other replied. "London, as I am seeing it tonight, is a new city to me. Later in the week you must dine with me, Diana," he invited, rising to his feet, "and tell me about a few more of our old friends. I have a very small apartment at the Albany. I suppose I can find your name in the telephone book?"

"Berkeley 6699," she told him. "Don't ring up too early, Martin."

"It would give me great pleasure if you would dine with me on Tuesday evening. All our old places have gone, I suppose?"

"The Milan still retains its popularity," Ronnie Foster remarked.

"Let it be the Milan, then," Martin suggested.

"At half-past eight in the foyer?"

"I shall be there," he promised.

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## CHAPTER IV

The commissioner's whistle shrilled up the street and a moment or two later a Rolls-Royce coupé was driven noiselessly to the entrance in obedience to its summons. Brockenhurst motioned to the chauffeur to get out. The man, dressed in a quiet, black livery, stood at attention; he neither saluted nor spoke. Brockenhurst pointed to the empty seat.

"I will drop you at the Albany," he said. "See that the garage door is left closed, but unlocked. I may be late."

The man's salute was more like an Oriental bow than a Cockney chauffeur's gesture, but he made no remark, took his seat, folded his arms, and preserved unbroken silence. He was by no means a striking-looking person, but he had the yellow complexion and the narrow, black eyes of the Oriental. There was also a complete vacancy of expression which only the Orientals can obtain. He slipped from his place at the Albany, turned gravely towards his master, bowed and disappeared in the direction of a neighbouring garage. Brockenhurst turned slowly round, drove down St. James's Street, crossed the Park, and when he reached the Embankment, turned to the left and slackened speed. A few yards away from an empty seat he drew up and stopped his engine. He leaned over the side of the car and looked steadfastly up and down the river. A few yards higher up were some worn and disused steps, leading down to the water.

A certain rigidity of expression left him. He produced his cigarette-case, selected a cigarette, tapped it lightly on the panelwork and lit it with the aid of a small gold lighter. The Embankment was now nearly empty. At its far extremity he paused and slowly brought the car to a standstill. Here was a coffee-stall, an old man behind it cutting slices from a loaf of bread, two great containers of fizzling coffee, and a little half-starved crowd of men and women hanging around, nearly all with the same destitute expression which hunger and thirst had graven upon their faces. Brockenhurst got out of his coupé and strolled over to the counter. He walked quietly and without the least touch of arrogance in his bearing. Nevertheless there was a strange look on the faces of some of the loiterers as they watched him.

"Good evening, Joe," he greeted the old man behind the bar.

The man glanced at him but did not pause in his task of cutting up the loaf.

"So you knows me, Guvnor," he remarked.

"I was a customer years ago," Brockenhurst told him.

The man shot a warning glance at the newcomer. The latter's coat was buttoned up to his throat, he was wearing a muffler, and his hat was one of the soft black homburgs which have taken the place of more offensive night wear, but his voice had just that touch of refinement which is calculated to annoy the owner of an empty stomach.

"I'm an old customer, Joe, and I am standing treat," he continued. "Serve out all you can and as quickly as you can. Gentlemen, and you, ladies," he added, lifting his hat as two flamboyantly dressed young women joined the gathering, "pray accept the hospitality of an old patron of Joe here. Get to work, my friend," he went on, turning to the man behind the counter. "You can add it up afterwards."

Joe grinned as he obeyed orders.

"There's something about yer voice, sir," he admitted, "that comes home to me. I'll grant yer that. Yer wouldn't be the first one of my old customers that struck it rich and come back to see old Joe. There was a policeman once on this beat who talked a bit like you."

"Never mind who I am," his generous patron enjoined him; "get on with serving the stuff. It's beginning to rain, and you don't want to have your customers getting wet through, waiting for their food. Here, give me that knife and fork; I'll cut up the ham for you."

With his cigarette a little in the side of his mouth and his hat, through contact with one or two others, a little on the back of his head, Brockenhurst carved up a ham with a speed and dexterity almost unbelievable. He piled it on to the top of the bread as fast as Joe could cut it. Suddenly the latter slackened in his work.

"It isn't a wise thing you're doing, you know, Guvnor," he warned him, leaning over the counter. "They've got their eye on you, some of these chaps. It's a pity you let 'em see that notecase."

Martin Brockenhurst grinned pleasantly. The expression with which he had looked into the black waters of the river had vanished.

"I don't think there's one of your customers would stick a knife into the back of their host, Joe," he said. "Besides, I've spent a winter or two in Chicago, and this place is a kid's toyland compared with that."

"Chicago," one of the loiterers on the outside of the circle repeated. "Are you a gunman then, Guvnor?"

"It isn't my profession exactly," Martin answered, glancing round with a good-humoured smile, "but I did take a few lessons in Chicago. I'm handy with a knife—see this."

With a sudden twist of his wrist the knife with which he had been cutting the ham flashed up into the air. There was a startled little cry amongst the crowd. In a second or two it came glittering down, a straight line of steel with the oil-lamp of the stall flashing upon it as it passed. The two girls screamed, the men were stupefied. Brockenhurst was continuing to cut the ham with the fork nicely balanced in his right hand and the knife in his left.

"It's a good trick that, you know," he said, continuing his task. "I had a few lessons from an American juggler—at least, he was an American by birth but he'd learnt his tricks in the Philippines. The catching of the knife coming down is easy enough, if you give it the right twist in the throw, but you've got to be devilish quick to change and get the knife in your left hand and the fork in the right when you've finished, though I'm better with a gun, perhaps."

"My God, Guvnor, you're hot stuff," one of the men growled from the outside of the crowd. "If I were one of the larky 'uns, like young Samuel here, and out for making summat on the push-push, you're the sort of gent I should leave alone."

"Who're you calling one of the larky 'uns?" his companion grunted menacingly. "As for the gent here, I can see it in 'is eye that 'e's going to 'and round a bob or two for us to get a can of beer or a drop of the hot stuff at the widow's."

"Hear, hear," someone in the crowd declared with enthusiasm.

"Well, I'm afraid, my young friend," Martin regretted, throwing the ham bone, from which he had stripped every handful of meat, to a hungry dog who was skulking round, "that you've got it wrong. I'm not quite that sort of a mug. There's a pound or two of tobacco there," he added, pointing to the shelves. "Hand it out, Joe—you're welcome to that; but no money passes except between Joe and me."

"What about us?" the girls cried, pushing their way towards him. "We can't eat baccy. You drive us home in that motorcar of yours, Guvnor, and we'll give you a drop of the real stuff, all free and for nothing. It's nothing but a step or two."

"Alas," Martin regretted, "tonight I am unable to accept your hospitality, dear ladies. I came to have a little private conversation with my friend Joe, but I have met so many old friends that the time has passed over-quickly. Hand out your stuff, Joe," he went on, turning to the owner of the stall. "Let 'em have the tobacco and fix your price for the lot. I want a word in your ear."

Joe scratched his head.

"To tell you the truth, Guvnor," he confessed, "you're fairly making me dizzy with all this adding up."

"We'll cut it short," Brockenhurst suggested. "Threepence each you said for the sandwiches. Well, there aren't more than a hundred of them, we'll say thirty shillings for that. Now, how about the ham?"

Joe leaned forward with his elbows upon the stall.

"That there ham, Guvnor," he declared earnestly, "cost me a sovereign and a half if it cost me a penny. I could have made fourpence on the bone, too, any day."

"Joe, my friend," his customer said reprovingly, "you are getting grasping. A man of your generosity and disposition should never rob the dog of its bone. We'll say four shillings for the bone, though—it was worth that to the dog. Now, you can't have served more than a hundred cups of coffee at tuppence—what about a fiver for the lot?"

The man squeezed himself an inch or two farther forward; his voice was hoarse with anxiety.

"I say it's a go, Guvnor," he agreed. "But for the love of Mike, keep that notecase of yours hidden. That's Tim Jordan in the background, the old middle-weight, you know, and that's Slimpy Dick whispering to him. Those other two were bad enough, but that Jordan, he's a killer; he'd kill a man for what you've got in that notecase."

"He won't kill me," was the confident reply. "There's the fiver, Joe. And good luck to you," he added.

He withdrew the fiver from the case without ostentation but with no attempt at secrecy. Then he laid an insistent forefinger on Joe's hand.

"Listen, Joe," he confided, "I want a piece of information from you."

"Gawd! This isn't police work, is it?" the stall-keeper gasped.



"Not a bit of it," was the scornful reply. "The piece of information I want won't bring any harm to anybody. I want to know what has become of Sarah Rose."

It was a warm night, with mists blowing off the river, but it was not warm enough to account for the sweat on Joe's forehead. He groaned audibly, his voice seemed blocked with some undescribable emotion.

"Gawd, Guvnor," he muttered, "you come here and ask me that! And you dressed like a prince, too, and a pocket-book full of notes, one of which would have saved that girl. I dunno, sir, I dunno where she is."

The man whom he had referred to as Tim Jordan and his friend Slimpy Dick were peering into the interior of the coupé. The girls, too, were standing looking at it; one of them caressing the mascot, but Martin was apparently taking no notice of them.

"You'd better try and remember, Joe," he suggested quietly. "Now let me put it plainly to you—there's a hundred pounds for news of that girl and there's a police cell for anyone who knows and keeps his mouth shut."

Joe sank down on to his stool.

"I believe you're nothing but a bloody dick, still," he muttered.

"Bloody dicks don't have a hundred pounds to offer," Martin said quietly. "I won't tell you why, Joe, for it's not your concern, but I want that girl."

"Girl! She was a lady, she was," Joe scowled. "She was as good as the likes of you for all your motorcar and your banknotes, Guvnor. Put that in yer pipe and smoke it."

Brockenhurst raised his hat.

"That may have been so," he agreed. "I salute her. I wish no harm to her, but I want to know where she is, Joe."

"You want her to tell you what she knows and nobody else knows," the old man cried savagely. "You want to ruin all that she's given her life for. I was something of a scholar before I came down in the world, young man. I knew something of France; I've read books. Did you ever hear of Joan of Arc?"

"I have," Martin admitted.

"She was a Joan of Arc," Joe declared, "and not for your damned lettercase or your bloody car would I lift a finger to help you find her. She's earned all she's got and that's all there is to it."

Martin stood quite still for a moment or two, watching the man's face. It was a queer position, his. He had had his own way with men most of his life, with men and women too. He had learned the trick of bending them to his will; he was used to success. This man's attitude, the stubborn rigidity of his words and expression, inspired him with a new sensation; he was brought up against failure, or at least temporary failure. Here, at this shabby, weather-beaten stall, with its torn tarpaulin top, its shaky wooden supports, its boards stained with the spilt libations of years—failure. Somehow or other it seemed to give him a fresh zest in life. It was a new sensation. He leaned over and patted the old man on the shoulder. The latter looked up wonderingly. He asked no question, but it was obvious that his anger was passing away, giving place to a growing curiosity.

"I'm not going to bother you any more this morning, Joe," his visitor promised. "I may come back again or I may see if I can find out all that I want to know without your help."

Joe's expression suddenly changed. He thrust his hand into his pocket and there was something gleaming between his worn fingers with their broken nails, something that looked uncommonly like a police whistle.

"You'd better look after yourself, Guvnor," he advised quickly; "they'll be off with your car in a moment."

Martin swung round. Mr. Tim Jordan had taken up an aggressive attitude in front of the car. His friend Slimpy Dick was inside, struggling with the self-starter. Four or five of the others of the crowd were hanging round, but most of them had hurried off with their gifts. The girls were undecided. They were hesitating whether to side with the gent and to stand being half-beaten to death by Tim Jordan and his friend or to jump into the car. They were saved from a painful decision by the swift development of events. Joe's police whistle was blowing and the gent, with half a dozen rapid paces, was standing before Jordan.

"Get out of the way," he ordered, "and you fellow in there, get out of my car."

That was the moment when for ever Tim Jordan lost his position as cock amongst the bullies of Swan Alley on the other side of the bridge towards Bermondsey. The way it happened was almost too quick for comprehension, but in less than thirty seconds Jordan was lying in the gutter, Slimpy Dick had been dragged out of the car and thrown half-way across the causeway, and the car, as though obedient to its owner, obeyed the touch of his forefinger and was ticking away harmoniously.

"Good night to all of you," Martin called out, looking out of the window. "Better make yourselves scarce or I may have to see you at Bow Street."

There were half a dozen policemen hurrying from different directions. Martin and his car had disappeared.

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## **CHAPTER V**

Inspector Charlesworth brushed away from his desk the papers he had been studying, drew his chair a little forward, and welcomed his visitor with, for him, a reasonable amount of cordiality.

"How are you, young fellow?" he asked. "I thought it was about time you brought us in a report."

The other nodded.

"Not much doing in the world of crime, Inspector," he observed in a depressed tone. "I answered your enquiries about Lady Diana Malladene's bottle party, didn't I?"

"You seem to think that she's kept within the bounds of the law."

"Everything was correct while I was there, at any rate, and I stayed late," was the reassuring reply. "It's the Law that's so stupid about these places. Why does it allow men or women to pitch upon an unlicensed room and, because they bring the stuff in, open a drinking-den? It's absolutely easy to keep it legal, but why does the law that makes it legal exist?"

"So long as there are a certain class of people who want that sort of thing," his superior officer pointed out, "it will continue to exist. Our prisons aren't large enough to receive all the men and women in the West End, young and old, who want to dance and drink a glass of wine after hours. Anyway, it's not our job to purify the city. It's the people who make the laws who must do that. Our job, the laws being established, is to keep people inside the boundary as well as we can."

Martin nodded and passed over a sheet of paper to his chief.

"There are three other cases," he announced, "which should be looked into, and there is a disorderly house in Smith Street which is an open scandal. They boast that they are sheltered by the police, and I should advise you to have a certain Superintendent Crisp watched and deprived of his post, as he certainly should be."

"Nephew of the Deputy Commissioner," the Inspector muttered. "That comes of employing new brooms, you sweep too damn clean sometimes."

"I leave it to you, sir," Martin rejoined dryly. "I haven't made a formal report myself. I simply tell you what you can find out if you care to. I am still working on the case which is my special hobby in my spare time."

The Inspector looked thoughtfully across those few feet of space between him and his visitor.

"You're a persistent man, aren't you?" he observed, and it seemed as if there was almost a faint note of uneasiness in his voice.

"Well, sir," Martin replied, "Scotland Yard has its list of famous criminals, most of whom have been brought to book and passed on. There is one amongst them, however, the most infamous of all from my point of view, who has not yet received his deserts and whom I believe to be still alive. That's why I stick to the Lebur tragedy."

"You never find a shred of encouragement anywhere?" the Inspector enquired.

Martin leaned a little further back in his chair, his eyes passed over the Inspector's head, he seemed to be looking intently at a blank space in the wall.

"Perhaps not, sir," he admitted, "and yet I have my fancies. Every now and then there comes a whisper in my ear from someone, the whisper of someone or other I come across. The whisper seems entirely a reluctant one, the man or the woman who has grudgingly vouchsafed it gets out of my sight as soon as they can—and yet, I am convinced that there is a purpose in every one of them."

"Go on," the Inspector invited.

"They try to lead me down blind alleys," Martin confided. "They are all out for getting me worked up on some false clue, and if I were to follow it right out to the end I should find something there which would probably mean the end of me and the man for whom I am working would die in his prison after all. It's the obvious falseness of these clues, if you understand me, sir," the visitor concluded, "which intrigues me. I may be wrong, but they seem to me as though they were meant for pitfalls."

"Well, be careful," Inspector Charlesworth advised. "If you'd only settle down to your work you might easily become one of the most important men in this establishment, Martin. It's just because you fasten upon a case like this and refuse to accept a reasonable verdict about it that your progress gets blocked now and then. If I were you I should leave your hobby alone. We have a man working here on the premises

with two secretaries and all the help we can give him, who is compiling a history of the famous crimes which have been committed during the last ten years. I had a chat with him only a few nights ago, and he told me that so far as he had gone—and he is nearing the end of his task—there is not a single one of the famous criminals who deserves one grain of sympathy. There is not one case in which a reasonable doubt exists as to the actual guilt of the man or woman who has been found guilty. He is calling it 'The Inevitability of the Law,' or something of that sort. Go and talk with him some time. He's up in room No. 18 when he works here, which is three days a week, and the rest of the time he works at his own home in Lincoln's Inn. Professor John P. Mason is his name, his records are kept even more scientifically than ours, because he has a study of the motive as well as a copy of the evidence. You'd find him interesting, I'm sure."

Martin picked up his hat.

"I'll look him up some day," he promised. "Meanwhile, I'll report whenever you send for me, Inspector."

\* \* \* \* \*

That night Martin kept his engagement and dined with Diana Malladene. The young lady, who possessed intuition as well as good taste, appeared in a perfectly plain black frock which followed the lines of her figure with almost indecent accuracy. She wore no jewellery, only a narrow band of black velvet at her throat. She watched Martin's eyes as she approached almost anxiously and breathed a sigh of relief as she noticed a glint of approval.

"Such trouble with my frock," she confided, as she strolled down the broad steps by his side towards the corner which he had selected. "Madame Léonie came round herself to insist upon some alterations, but I wouldn't have them."

"So far as mere man might criticize," he replied, "I should say that you have achieved perfection."

She breathed a little sigh of content.

"Madame had the impertinence to tell me that, so far as my gown went, although I designed it myself, I was offering a perfect replica of the Shaftesbury Avenue street-walker."

"Léonie is not always to be relied upon," he observed. "I remember a green dress she made for you once that was as near perfection as any dress could be, but she forgot altogether in blending the shades of the material that little glint of the snake in your eyes. She couldn't see it; she never would see it until I sent her to the Leicester Galleries to study McEvoy's picture of you. Then she tried to get the dress back, but she was too late."

She looked at him in amazement.

"Martin," she exclaimed, "you're incredible, you're absolutely impossible. She made me that dress eight years ago and you have lived through hurricanes since then. Why should you remember anything about a particular dress of mine?"

"It's odd," he admitted, taking up the menu, "what queer things lurk in the corners of one's memory."

She shivered a little and almost snatched her vodka from the salver which the waiter was offering.

"It's uncanny," she muttered. "How many things like that do you remember, I wonder?"

"I have never learned," he said calmly, as he toyed with his own wineglass, "the gift of forgetfulness. Mind you, it is a wonderful gift, Diana. Of course, I think the most important thing for anyone to search for in this life would be happiness; but if I were fool enough ever to set myself the definite task of attaining happiness, I should first of all demand that the cells of memory were closed in my mind."

"But this is horrible!" she exclaimed. "I can't live up to my part, Martin, if you're going to talk in that fashion all the evening. I know nothing of psychology, I don't care a bit how the world is run or by whom; all I ask is that things should turn out as I want them. I was flattered, although I was tremendously puzzled, when you asked me to dine tonight. There is no one in the world I'm prouder to be seen with, and I have another failing that I shall never mention to you as long as I live and that you will never know about—but if you're going to talk like that I shall say let's make it an early evening. I can't live up to it, Martin—not a hope. Everyone calls me clever, don't they? Well, I'm not. I'm cunning and it doesn't get me very far. I haven't the brains for your sort of mental philandering."

"Well, you've put me nicely in my place to start the evening," Martin observed. "Whom do you think I had a little conversation with last night?"

"That's better. Let's talk about our old pals."

"I don't know whether you'd call this one exactly a pal," Martin reflected. "It was old Joe, of the Embankment coffee-stall."

"That old mummy." She laughed. "Is he still alive?"

"I should say he was."

"What were you doing at the coffee-stall?" she asked curiously.

"Wait," he begged. "We haven't ordered dinner."

"Well," she remarked, carefully studying the menu, "there are none of your disclosures which could spoil my appetite. I am beginning to get quite used to the idea, Martin, that you are back in London and that one is likely to run up against you at any of these places. As regards our dinner, since we've anticipated with the vodka, I think we'd better have just a little caviare."

"And afterwards," he suggested, "a sole Marguery and a quail. A soufflé or maybe strawberries to finish with."

She sighed with content.

"I must say you know how to feed a greedy girl, Martin," she observed. "You always did."

"Only," he remarked suavely, "I hadn't always the money, had I? I lost a good many picturesque acquaintances through being poor."

"I often wonder," she speculated, "why you had so few friends."

"Friends are scarcely worth having," he rejoined. "They always disappoint one."

"Cynic," she scoffed.

"If ever you take to yourself a friend you lay up for yourself disappointment. Did I tell you why I went down to see Joe?"

She shook her head a little distastefully.

"Why bring in that old horror? It makes me sick even to think of his foul fingernails and broken teeth."

"And yet there were times," he reminded her, "when you sat on his stool and munched his sandwiches, drank his coffee and turned up your nose at a banquet like this. Just through that split piece of his canvas we used to watch for the line of daylight."

"One had slight reactions towards vulgarity sometimes," she remarked. "Life gets too finely drawn. It doesn't last long; one comes back to the æsthetic almost automatically. Now tell me, why did you go?"

"I went to ask him if he could tell me what had become of Sarah Rose."

The strains of the Merry Widow Waltz floated across to where they were seated. The girl wondered long afterwards whether it was a fit of kindness or simply an effort of good taste which made him suddenly absorbed in the music. He hummed it softly, his eyes upon the conductor. A harsh voice across the table almost startled him.

"Who was Sarah Rose?" she asked.

"Just a woman of the streets," he admitted, "concerning whose fate I had some slight curiosity."

"Why?" she demanded.

"It isn't a pleasant story," he told her gently. "I don't know why I mentioned the girl's name."

"Well, was your curiosity satisfied?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Not in the least. Perhaps he was telling the truth, perhaps he was lying through fear, or perhaps he was bribed to lie. At any rate, I came away no wiser than I went."

"Come and dance and forget all about the sort of girl who hangs about Joe's stall," she begged.

"Dance," he echoed. "Listen to the music, Diana. We'll dance the Merry Widow—and that will be wonderful."

They strolled to the dance-floor like any other couple, Diana Malladene recovered from her momentary fit of nerves, Martin Brockenhurst, as always, imperturbable. With set mien and full of courteous deference to his partner, he led her to her place afterwards, but she did not immediately sink into her chair.

"Martin," she begged, looking across at him, "please—"

He nodded and patted her hand with a little smile of reassurance.

"You make me feel like the barbarous barrister," he declared. "Quite right, Diana, I've been a brute. Finish your dinner in peace and comfort and let's talk about the people who have some importance in the world—"

your father, for instance. They tell me that he's certainly for the Woolsack. Fancy having a father who is Lord High Chancellor of England and who is beloved by everybody!"

"Father is desperately popular," she murmured, with a glint of affection in her eyes. "Don't you think he's broad-minded, Martin, to let me run a night-club as a hobby?"

"I do, indeed," he agreed. "I wonder what it feels like," he went on, smiling, "to be loved by everyone. That's a state I shall never arrive at."

"You can't be sure," she told him. "You could be if you changed a little—you're too broody, you know, Martin. You're so aloof, you're like Hamlet, all the time making speeches about things that don't really matter."

"Shades of Bernard Shaw," he muttered, "what about that soufflé?"

"You know me," Diana sighed, "the right soufflé is a thing I've never refused in my life. You know, I was popular once, Martin," she went on. "They used to call me the girl everyone loved—that is, my friends."

"We all love you now," he assured her. "I do, especially."

There was the slightest possible tremble in her lips. He noticed it and wondered.

"There was another nice lad in my days; he must be quite grown up now, Ginger Brown they used to call him. He was a gunner."

"Oh, Ginger," she sighed. "Didn't you know, Martin? I married him."

"Of course I didn't know," he assured her. "I'm sorry, Diana. Have I made a *faux pas*?"

"Not at all," she replied. "There was never very much sentiment about it, I'm afraid. He lost his head one night and I liked him just well enough. Our divorce case was quite a distinguished affair: no lurid details that anyone could grumble at, a quiet elopement for love's sake on the part of Ginger. A solemn case; I wore black and white, and I have a very nice little sum of pocket-money coming every quarter, which pays for my cigarettes at any rate."

A party of young people suddenly surrounded their table. There was a volley of incoherent introductions, everyone began talking very fast, speaking about vague absentees, every one of whom they called by their Christian names or nicknames. A few of them remembered Brockenhurst in a vague sort of manner.

"Africa, wasn't it, you disappeared to?" one man asked.

"Yes, I have been in Africa for some time," Brockenhurst assented.

"I thought it was the Far East," a girl remarked. "Surely a cousin of mine met you in Singapore?"

"Yes, I have also been in Singapore. I was there last March," Martin admitted.

He felt a touch on his arm. A little dark woman, almost old enough to have been the chaperone of the party, looked up at him, smiling.

"At least," she asked, "you remember me, I trust, Mr. Brockenhurst?"

"My dear Comtesse," he replied, bowing over her fingers, "I believe we are almost related, are we not?"

"You look so horribly young," she answered, "that I am ashamed to confess it, but I am your godmother."

"Don't I know it," he replied. "You were at the château near Mougins when I was born and you came there when I was a kid."

"And afterwards," she told him, "I visited you at that preparatory school for Eton where you were."

He offered her his chair, but she shook her head.

"I have this young crowd to look after," she explained. "Lady Julia comes of age in three days' time and she's going to be married then. You know her future husband, of course—Dick Foljambes, in the Lancers."

"Too much my junior, I'm afraid."

"We may meet later on," the woman remarked pleasantly. "I think these children mean to make a night of it. *Au revoir*."

The little party drifted away. Diana Malladene watched their disappearance with speculative eyes.

"Some of them will turn up at my place later on, I expect," she remarked hopefully.

He nodded.

"They look as though they were out for a night of it. Be careful, Diana; keep within the law. I can't see how you can possibly make enough out of it to run the risks you do."

"It isn't only the drink, Martin," she confessed. "I get a hundred per cent. for that, of course, but that isn't all."

He looked at her curiously.

"You don't serve many dinners," he remarked. "Those tiny little suppers can't bring you in much profit."

"I lose money by them," she assured him.

"Then how else do you make money out of the place?" he asked bluntly.

She shook her head.

"I'm afraid of you, Martin," she told him, lowering her voice a little. "You're such a mysterious person. You wouldn't get me into trouble wilfully, I'm sure. But—"

"Well, get on with it, Diana."

"I can't," she admitted. "I look at you, I remember who you are, and I am afraid."

"Afraid of me?"



She nodded.

"Of you."

"Quite right," he said, looking at her steadily. "I've changed my ideas since the old times. You'd better tell me if you're outstepping the bounds and I'll help to put you back again."

"Allah preserve me from being such a fool," she mocked. "All that I say, Martin, is keep away from the 'Evening Star.' It isn't the place for you. If I get into trouble, it's my own account. I've gone too far to turn back and I don't want serious people like you about the place."

"It isn't necessary for me to remind you, I suppose," he went on after a moment's pause, "that the days of the ordinary dress-coated detective from Scotland Yard, whose shirt bulged and who even stooped sometimes to a made-up tie, are over."

She laughed scornfully.

"I have three door-men, as I call them," she confided, "and I never knew one of them make a mistake yet. Do you mind, Martin?" she added, as she shut her bag with a little click, glanced at her watch, and rose to her feet. "I've loved our dinner. I'd give anything in the world," she went on, as her hand rested for a moment in his, "for a few really kind words from you, for even a glint of that old light in your eyes, and for just a little less mystery. It's no good hoping, I'm afraid."

He stood still for a moment. It seemed as though he was really considering the idea of taking her seriously. His reply when he made it, however, was quite indefinite.

"The mystery," he reminded her, "comes from you. Only the advice from me. And," he concluded impressively, "the advice is—chuck it."

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## CHAPTER VI

There is a certain evening light much beloved by artists who go in for indoor work and who do not disdain the aid of uncovered windows and the faint deference to conventionality which has a strangely searching effect upon the figures in modern canvasses and in the lines and expressions of human faces. No one knew this better than the girl who had turned away from her unfinished canvas to sit and gaze for long minutes out of the plain, uncurtained window towards the skyline, northwards. The departed sun seemed to have left behind some remnant of his lurid farewell in the distant skies. There was for a few minutes a fine light upon her delicate face, the slightly uplifted, pointed chin, the dark brown eyes from which the fervour of work had departed but upon which the faint joy of recent creation was still lingering. Perhaps, too, it displayed more keenly than any other light those lines of sorrow which gave her head that melancholy droop, which had drawn the girlish softness from her lips and then made sudden atonement in that Madonna-like sweetness which only sorrow can give. There was a figure in the background whom as yet she had not noticed, and he stood there almost without breathing, fascinated by the wonderful picture. Already that light was fading, so soon it would be lost, and with it the most poignant emotion he had ever felt since the blast of tragedy had prematurely turned a high-spirited lad into the tragical figure of a sorrowing man....

A few more seconds and it was passing. The girl, utterly unconscious both of that rapt, almost reverential scrutiny and the fading of the light which had shone down upon her face, rose slowly to her feet. She

pulled down the ivory knob of the blind, she touched the electric-light switch, but her fingers, which would have strayed to the bell, seemed to have become suddenly paralyzed. She drew a step back and looked at her uninvited guest.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"It seems strange that you should ever need to ask me that," he replied. "Here I am, Pamela, an unbidden visitor. I feel that I have broken in upon a sacred dream. If I did not know that you scorn the arts of the poseurs, I should have decided that you were sitting there in the light he loved, the grey sad light that broods over *Firenze*, and trying to charm Andrea del Sarto back to life again to finish your picture for you."

"It is you, then, Martin, really?" she exclaimed, moving a step forward. "At first you frightened me. You were so much like a dream picture, yourself. What am I to say to you?"

"Welcome," he replied as he moved towards her.

"Welcome it shall be then," she assented gently. "I shall stoop down from the sublime into which you have exalted me to the ridiculous. I shall ring for tea."

"Wait a moment," he begged. "This moment is too tense to break. You are not angry with me?"

"I could not be," she answered, shaking her head gravely. "You have kept your word nobly and in my heart I am glad that you have ventured now to break it. There—can I say more?"

His movement forward had something unreal about it, it was so swift, so unhurried, yet so perfectly natural. She rested in his arms for minutes while his lips touched hers lightly, almost reverently, passed to her eyes, her cheeks, once more to her lips. She drew away with a little smile which dispersed, if only he could have known it, lines which had lingered round her lips for many weary days and nights.

"Now," she declared, motioning him to a chair, "I shall really ring for tea."

She avoided the bell and had disappeared through the door which he held open without glancing upwards. She had been too late, however, wholly to protect herself. He had noticed the rush of tears into her eyes. She closed the door softly behind her and he stood for a moment like a man who had risked his life and soul in a great battle and had won. His little laugh had almost a note of classical music in it, as he walked with the air of a conqueror towards the chair in which he had been told to seat himself.

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The great commonplace world moved on. Things happened that might have happened anywhere. A neatly dressed maid brought in tea, there were hot muffins upon a heated plate, and she herself sat behind the Georgian silver teapot. She did not ask him whether he took sugar or milk in his tea; they both devoured muffins and she wiped her fingers upon his cambric handkerchief. They talked very little, there were a few casual references to what had become of the geniuses of a few years ago in painting and sculpture, and they agreed on the greatness of Epstein. Afterwards they sat upon a sofa, not very far apart, whilst the maid cleared away the tea and lit one of the wall-lamps. After her departure, there was a silence which almost cost him a heartache to break.

"You were difficult to find," he complained.

"I had to be," she answered. "Being found out would have been so painful. I hoped that you would keep your half-promise and I hoped even more energetically that you would break it."

He smiled.

"I had to break it," he confessed. "I have been in many countries, Pamela, but I have never forgotten."

Her fingers, which had been moving through the complicated meshes of some old-fashioned tatting, came to rest. She looked at him enquiringly.

"Since I settled down here," he said, "I have become a man of two purposes, one leaning upon the other. One is already fulfilled, you know what it is—I am here. Half the pain has passed out of my life."

She asked him a question, but her voice sounded like the far-off trembling of a voice from the skies.

"And the other?"

"It is," he confided, "to set you free if by any human means it can be accomplished."

She sat very still for several moments. Then her fingers resumed their restless motions. She was at work upon her tatting. She had not looked towards him once—but he felt the barrier. The man who had faced many ugly perils without flinching was silent now in fear, he was afraid of saying the wrong thing. He was afraid of seeing his tower of hopes collapse, afraid of the melancholy turn of her head, afraid of those few unchanging words. When she spoke it was like sunlight suddenly streaming into a dark place.

"You may try, Martin," she sighed. "I feel that it is quite hopeless; I have given up the idea of living any more like other women, of being set free from this haunting load of misery. Once I forbade you to move. I ordered you to go away and forget. You obeyed as I meant you to obey, you went away. You have come back and up to a certain great point I am glad. I do not know whether this will be any reward to you, Martin—if I were a vain person I might say to myself, 'It is perhaps a further persecution,' yet I will tell you this. I am just an ordinary woman and I would be happy to live an ordinary woman's life—with you."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him. She was very nearly sorry. It was a man's face, splendid in many ways. The set lines of purpose were there, the deep lines of self-control, but for the moment he was happy with a happiness which shone out of him, a deep glow of something more than content, the delirious joy of a man listening to music which he had been denied all his life or hearing suddenly the beautiful words of a reprieve from a sentence of death. For a moment she was afraid. She leaned across, laid her hands upon his shoulders, and kissed him gently upon the lips.

"For the moment, Martin," she whispered, "this must help you as it will help me—to meet life. If you think it is worth it, I shall not do what I tried to do before, stop your hand. I believe in the fate which should be his coming to every man. I trust your judgment as I would trust nobody else's in life. If ever the means should come, I will ask no questions. Martin," she added with a little break in her voice, which had seemed all the time such sweet and easy music, "you look so much happier. I am afraid—you look much happier and nothing may come to us after all. I cannot bear to think of you then."

"I am like the rest of the world," he answered confidently, taking her hand. "One chance of Paradise is enough for me."

## CHAPTER VII

Sir Frederick Leversen scrutinized his visitor through his horn-rimmed spectacles with a curiosity not altogether unmixed with a dash of suspicion. However, so far as he could see, Martin, although there was something about him vaguely familiar, was everything he should be socially, his smile was disarming and courteous. He thanked the great lawyer for the permission to approach him with the proper amount of gratitude.

"Very kind of you to see me, I'm sure, Sir Frederick," he said. "I shall try not to take up too much of your time."

"You had better not, sir," was the somewhat curt reply. "As you and the world know, I am a busy man. Your name here, I see, is Martin Campbell—did you bring any introduction to me?"

"I thought perhaps," Martin replied, with a half-apologetic gesture, "that I should not need one. My full name is Martin Campbell Brockenhurst."

The lawyer took off his glasses and polished them slowly with a white silk handkerchief, his complexion as pallid as the sheets of parchment upon his desk, but a moment later his bright, hard eyes were hidden behind his spectacles.

"The name of Martin Brockenhurst," he said, "recalls to me very disagreeable memories."

"I was afraid it might, sir. It was for that reason that I ventured to abbreviate it a little by using the name under which I was better known some half a dozen years ago. You may think that I have been long in coming, sir. There have been reasons for that. Now that I am here, I want to recall to your memory for a few minutes the greatest case that you ever handled."

"Why should I do this at your request, sir?" the lawyer asked, and his hard, dry voice seemed to breathe an underlying threat. "I am too busy a man to have my time wasted by answering idle questions or receiving unwelcome visitors."

"I may be unwelcome—but I am here," Martin said firmly, "and you will forgive my saying, Sir Frederick, that it will be to your interests to answer the harmless questions I have to ask."

"About the Lebur case?"

"Naturally."

"The case has been closed and finished with for six or more years now."

"Precisely," Martin agreed. "Still, the case cannot be considered absolutely dead whilst the persons chiefly concerned in it are still alive."

"That," the lawyer remarked hardly, "is not the legal view."

"Perhaps not," Martin admitted. "Still, you must admit, Sir Frederick, that there have been cases which have been reopened on the disclosure of fresh evidence—and reopened with a very unexpected result."

"Have you any fresh evidence?" Sir Frederick asked, with a slightly scornful smile. "There was a newspaper campaign about this case, I remember—someone tried to reopen it a few years ago. Are you trying to dig up the ashes of this?"

"Indeed I am not, sir," Martin replied. "My present inclinations are more in the direction of starting a campaign of my own."

"Is that your intention?" the lawyer asked scornfully.

"Not at the moment," Martin assured him.

"Well, since we've gone so far," Sir Frederick remarked, "and I am beginning to remember the details of the case to which you refer, ask me your questions and have done with it. I have an appointment at the House of Commons in half an hour. Still, since you are here, if you have anything to ask which deserves an answer, ask it."

"I shall do my best not to detain you," Martin promised. "My first question is this—how did you persuade Richard Lebur to change his plea?"

The lawyer sat for a moment as though thunderstruck. He made no reply. He stared at his visitor, his eyes seemed to have narrowed, certainly the pallor of his cheeks had become a shade more ghastly.

"What do you mean—change his plea?" he asked at last. "Richard Lebur knew that he would be found guilty, the evidence was utterly and entirely convincing. Under those circumstances, the accused man sometimes gets a word or two of hope, a little consideration from the judge if he pleads guilty."

"But was that your reason?"

"It might have been," was the terse reply. "But how do you know that the suggestion that the prisoner should change his plea came from me? The statement itself is false."

"The statement is true and it requires an answer," Martin declared. "Did you induce him to plead guilty with the hope of getting a lighter sentence?"

Black lightning flashed from Sir Frederick's angry eyes.

"I did not interfere with his own decision. He sent for me one morning just before the end and told me that he had decided to plead guilty. As a matter of fact, I was against it. I tried to persuade him to change his mind—he refused."

"May I ask you," Martin persisted, "whether he gave you any reason for his decision?"

"You may ask me," the lawyer replied, "but it was part of a privileged conversation between a man about to be tried for his life and his lawyer. Therefore, I shall not answer you."

"I am inclined to doubt," Martin said, "whether the question of privilege would apply in such a matter as this. At any rate—"

"Well?"

"I do not accept it."

The lawyer's thin, talon-like fingers played for a few moments with the paper-weight in front of him. He set it down with a little jerk.

"You have announced your purpose in coming, Mr.—shall I say Martin—as being to ask me a few senseless questions about a case long since dealt with. I have humoured you to the extent of listening to your first one. I have no answer to give you because no answer is possible. I did not advise my client to change his plea of 'guilty' in the case to which you are referring."

His fingers were busy again, this time they nearly reached the bell-push upon his desk, but Martin intervened.

"One moment, sir," he begged. "The first, and the vital one, of my questions you refuse to answer. Very well, I may possibly accept your plea as regards that, if you answer the second one to my satisfaction. Will you tell me, sir," Martin concluded, "when was the occasion, and at what hour in the day did you yourself see the murdered man?"

The lawyer's surprise this time was unmistakable. He sat with his mouth slightly open, gazing across the table.

"Did I understand you rightly?" he asked. "You want me to tell you the last occasion upon which I saw the murdered man?"

"Precisely," Martin answered with composure. "It is not such an extraordinary question after all, considering you were both members of the same club."

"The only extraordinary part of the whole affair," Sir Frederick declared severely, "is that I am sitting here, listening to you daring to come here and ask me questions which are none of your business."

He leaned over and stabbed at the bell.

"They will show you out now, sir, and I have only one request to make, and that is that you do not set your foot once more in my offices or presume to address me in any way. Jenkins," he went on, motioning to the attendant who had entered the room, "show this person out. Remember, if you please, that he is an unwelcome visitor and see that he is not allowed access to my presence again."

Martin accepted his stick and gloves from the man. He turned and smiled at the lawyer.

"I think perhaps, Sir Frederick," he admitted, "that yours was the best line to take. Yes," he added, as he turned away, "I think if I had been in your position it is the line I should have taken myself."

The lawyer made no reply. He had drawn a sheet of paper towards him and had commenced to write a letter. He did not even vouchsafe an upward glance as his visitor left the room.

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## **CHAPTER VIII**

Martin, a few evenings later, handed his coat and hat to the attendant and strolled across to where Lady Diana was seated at the cocktail bar of the "Evening Star" night-club. He hoisted himself on to a stool by her side.

"Here again, dear friend," she remarked. "I am flattered."

"You needn't be," he answered. "Most agreeable spot, this, and your cocktails are very nearly the best in London. The trouble with the two or three clubs to which I belong," he went on, "is that they will not move with the times. If you want a cocktail it must be mixed in an invisible spot, which I always associate with the kitchens, and brought to you in a more or less stately lounge upon a platter of good imitation Georgian silver. There isn't one of the committee of the few clubs I belong to who doesn't shiver at the sound of the word 'bar,' and an up-to-date young man in a white coat with a pencil behind his ear and a knowledge of all the idiosyncrasies of his regular customers is a thing unknown."

"A little chatty this evening, Martin," Diana remarked, looking at him curiously.

"I can't say the same of you," he answered. "What's the matter?"

Diana was evidently disturbed.

"You startled me, coming in so abruptly."

"You evidently weren't proud of your companion," he remarked, glancing curiously at the man who had slipped away immediately on his entrance. "Who is he, Diana? Out with it."

"He's nobody in particular," she answered. "He comes in now and then and I let him have a drink."

"Why did he shoot away so when I appeared?" Martin asked.

"Oh, he's an idiot," was the irritated reply. "He insists that he has seen you about Scotland Yard."

"Does he think that I'm a detective?"

"I suppose so."

Martin was looking straight towards the mirror in front of him, at the youngish man skulking behind a screen at the other end of the room.

"What's he doing, hiding behind the service screen there?" he speculated.

"Trying to keep out of sight of you, I should imagine. Don't bother about him, Martin; he really is of no account. He simply has this stupid idea that you're a detective and he's afraid of being caught with his little party over there. We're keeping inside the law, and always shall, and have nothing to be afraid of. What he said did put an idea into my head, though, Martin."

"Well?"

"You're back in England, but I haven't yet heard you mention either of your country places. In the old days you were never fond of town life, and if this young man is telling the truth, you've been seen once or twice lately about Scotland Yard. You're not still worrying about the Lebur case, are you?"

"What could have put that idea into your head, I wonder?" he reflected.

"Well, if you want to know—and I was going to tell you, in case it interested you—that young man who seems to have disappeared into the kitchens—Leversen is his name—had something to do with the case, hadn't he?"

Martin was suddenly alert. He had lost his bantering manner, he was undoubtedly serious.

"Leversen," he repeated. "He is in the family firm, I suppose? They were the solicitors in the case."

"Yes, he told me once that he had just been made a partner," Diana confided. "Anyhow, he always seems to have plenty of money to spend."

"Leversen," Martin repeated slowly to himself once more. "I'm getting an old man, Diana. I only half remember things. Worst sign of coming old age there is. A name strikes you like that with a sudden flash of familiarity, and you can't carry it home. Where's he gone, d'you suppose?"

She glanced at the table, where there was still a vacant seat.

"He's about somewhere, I should think," she replied. "It isn't a very chic crowd he's with, but they're quite decent people and they've piles of money. He wouldn't leave without paying his bill, I'm sure. I'm afraid—it's very low-down stuff in a respectable night-club, isn't it, Martin?—but I'm afraid he's behind that screen still. He wouldn't have the nerve to go down to my kitchens without permission."

Martin hesitated, then he glanced towards the screen once more, his eyebrows raised.

"Why, of course, if you want to go there, do," Diana begged. "The whole place is at your disposal. But I rather fancy, from the little I know of the man, you will find that he's vamoosed. High-class solicitors, Leversen and Leversen, you know. If he really believed what he said about you, I can understand his doing a bolt. He wouldn't want to be seen here."

She pointed to where a boy in the clothes of an assistant chef, except that he had hastily divested himself of his apron, had approached another man seated at the Leversen table, handed him a note, and immediately afterwards made for the service door. Diana slipped from her stool and beckoned him.

"What are you doing up in the restaurant, Adolph?" she asked him. "How dare you come up here in those clothes?"

"Monsieur Gustave, he ordered me, Madame," the boy answered. "There was the gentleman who come down, Gustave knew him and they talked together; he wrote a note and gave it to Gustave. Gustave handed it to me and told me to take it to that party; he said if anyone asked me questions, Monsieur Leversen was unwell and had gone home."

With a little wave of her hand to Martin, Diana crossed the floor and made her way to where the little party was seated. The members thereof were very uninteresting and obviously highly respectable.

"Leaving early, aren't you?" Diana asked a young man who seemed to be in charge.

"It is my elder brother, Madame," the young man replied hurriedly. "He left us for a few minutes and has sent word now that he is very unwell. My mother wishes to go back home as soon as possible. The money for the bill is on the plate there."

An older man in the party pushed the youth on one side.



"There is no reason why you should not be warned, Madame," he said. "Mr. Leversen has had private word that there might be a raid here tonight. We want to get out before anyone can take our names. We're all respectable city people and it would be bad for our business."

"I quite understand," Diana agreed. "You can leave as quickly as you like. Mr. Leversen can settle up any little differences in the bill another time, but I don't think you need be alarmed. Mr. Leversen himself seems to have left by the back entrance."

"We cannot run any risks," the elderly lady declared, as she took her cloak from the attendant. "No risks at all. My son is a member of one of the leading firms of solicitors in London and to have his name in the newspapers as having been at a night-club might do him a great deal of harm. I came just for the sake of the young people and I'm sure it has been very pleasant, Madame."

"Well, there you are," Diana said, standing on one side. "The door is wide open and you will find plenty of taxis. I will see that you are properly bailed out if anything unpleasant happens."

She shepherded the little party off the dancing-floor, then returned to Martin.

"Mr. Leversen," she announced, "has been taken suddenly ill and left by the back entrance. His name must not be seen in the papers because he is a partner in the famous firm of Leversen and Leversen."

Martin tapped a cigarette upon the counter.

"I wonder," he reflected.

"You have something else in your mind. Tell me about it," she begged.

"Nothing at all exciting," he assured her. "I was just wondering how much he had to do with preparing the brief in that famous case which half the people who go in for that sort of thing came trooping to the Old Bailey to hear."

"But why should he want to avoid you?" she asked wonderingly.

"I cannot imagine," was Martin's bland rejoinder.

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A little crowd of people had surged into the place. The hostess was called away to greet acquaintances, including a famous marquis who was giving a special supper. Martin returned to his table in the corner. He ordered a bottle of his own wine and a sandwich. There was some delay about the appearance of the latter and after half an hour's waiting Martin summoned Antoine, who was an old acquaintance. There was another slight delay, then the maître d'hôtel came hurrying across the room and presented himself with a very disturbed expression upon his usually serene countenance.

"What's the trouble about my sandwich, Antoine?" Martin demanded. "I ordered it three quarters of an hour ago, then when it didn't arrive I sent for you—and you haven't hurried particularly, have you?"

"You will pardon me, if you please, sir," the man begged. "An unfortunate incident has occurred down in the kitchens, and when your message came I was in doubt as to what to do."

"To have brought my sandwich would have been the obvious thing," Martin suggested.

"Perhaps that might not have been altogether satisfactory," the maître d'hôtel replied with a note of grimness in his tone. "I was called down into the kitchen by the chef a few minutes before your message came for me. I found the chef in great distress. I asked him what was the matter; he pointed to a broken plate upon the table and some scattered pieces of china in the stove. There were also some fragments of sandwiches lying about. It appears that there is a great goof of a young man who is employed down in the kitchens as a cleaner who passes things up sometimes to the regular waiters, and when I saw him he was lying apparently in a fit upon a sofa in the chef's sitting-room beyond—the chef will tell you all about it in his own words if you like as soon as he's finished with that soufflé."

"Thank you," Martin replied, "I don't want to spend my evening down in that atmosphere. You can tell me about it."

"Well, this young fellow—I don't know his name, but everyone calls him Billy—is always getting into trouble for picking up odd pieces of food and eating them, and your sandwiches were apparently too much for him. There were four of them, or perhaps more, on a plate, waiting for your waiter. He thought no one was looking, so he took one off the plate and took a huge bite of it. A few minutes later he was squealing like a young pig. He was in terrible pain and they pushed him into the chef's room there. Afterwards they sent him off to the hospital in an ambulance and, according to two of the men who were down there at the time, he was in a bad way."

"Where are the rest of the sandwiches?" Martin asked.

"No one can find them," Antoine replied. "I've told the chef that if they're not here in two minutes we must send for the police."

"Where is what you call the service table?" Martin asked.

"On the left, just as you enter the place," Antoine explained. "There are a few crumbs about in one particular corner, but nothing to be seen of any food; neither was the plate nor napkin visible."

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"The chef cut the sandwiches himself, sir," the man continued, "and the only other person to touch them was his assistant, Adolph, who carried them through. Gustave was in such a state when he saw the condition of the young man that he took hold of the ham and locked it up in one of the safes. He was obliged to go back then to the food he was preparing. He is doing a special supper for the Marquis tonight."

The chef himself came hurrying up the stairs and made his way towards Martin's table. The sweat was standing out upon his forehead and he paused for a moment to wipe it away.

"It was for this gentleman, the sandwiches, yes?" he asked.

"The sandwiches were being prepared for me," Martin acknowledged.

"Permit me to confess that it was I myself who cut them," the chef declared. "Antoine here, he tell me that they were for a special patron and friend of her Ladyship's. I gave them to Adolph to put on the table whilst I returned to my fire. A minute or two afterwards I heard a commotion and what sounded like the smashing of a plate. I cannot even turn my head. I was warming the special sauce for the Marquis and following his detailed instructions concerning it. It is, you understand, a small joint of his own venison that he brought in himself for this party of friends. Then I heard the groaning from behind and they came and told me that Billy had been taken ill. I said, 'Put him in my salon and leave him there; from this spot I

do not move.' As soon as there was a pause I hear the trouble. Billy has stolen one of my special sandwiches and declares that he is poisoned. I show you the ham, Monsieur."

The chef turned to a dish which he had been carrying. He held out the dish upon which there were slices of ham that had recently been carved. Martin examined it closely and nodded.

"Nothing wrong with that," he remarked. "Well, I've lost my appetite now, Chef; I'll drink my wine and eat a dry biscuit. I can get those at the bar. Your young kitchen-hand had better be sacked, I should think. You can't keep a young fool like that who goes about interfering with the customers' dishes."

"Sacked indeed he will be," the chef promised. "I offer Monsieur my most regretful apologies."

"It isn't of any particular consequence," Martin said indifferently. "The atmosphere down below is none too good, you know, and I imagine that the young goof, whoever he was, was feeling pretty sick before he took up the sandwich."

"They disgust one, these gamins," the chef observed angrily. "They pick up and eat discarded pieces of food from everywhere. In my kitchen there shall be no more of them; I will have the young women instead. They are not so greedy. I offer Monsieur once more my respectful apologies. I now serve up the great meal of the evening to *Monsieur le Marquis*."

The chef took his leave and Martin returned to his place. He sipped his wine thoughtfully. Later on, Diana left the large party on the other side of the room and came across to him.

"I wish you weren't so unsociable, Martin," she lamented as she accepted a chair and a cigarette. "The Marquis would so much like you to go and join his table."

"Very kind of him," Martin replied. "I would with pleasure if I had come across him earlier in the evening. I used to know the old boy many years ago—Cuxhaven he was then, always a good sort."

"He's a dear. What's my chef been up talking to you about?"

"Well, he came up to apologize about the sandwiches. He wanted to cut some more, but I decided to have a dry biscuit instead. How long have you had him, Diana? His face seems familiar."

"You might have seen him at some of the shooting-luncheons at home," she confided. "He used to come out sometimes and superintend the arrangements when we had any of the big pots."

Martin nodded.

"I remember him quite well," he acknowledged. "Look here, Diana, I wonder whether you would do something for me?"

"My darling," she answered, "don't you know that I'm your slave? I would kiss the light out of those terribly attractive eyes of yours if you told me to."

"I want something much simpler. I should like you to ask your secretary to give me in the morning a list of the registration cards of the men who are working in your kitchens, leaving out the chef."

"My dear Martin, what on earth for?"

"Just a fancy of mine. Here comes your secretary, with a face like a Chinese mourner at a funeral."

"He's always worrying me about trifles," she complained with a little grimace. "Well, what is it, Mr. Branson?" she said as he came to a standstill at her side.

"An unfortunate incident has happened in the kitchens, Madame," he announced. "If you could spare a moment the chef would like to tell you his version of it himself. He would have sent word before, but he has been very busy with some special dishes."

"Do you think that it is really necessary for me to go, Mr. Branson?" she expostulated. "Surely it is a matter with which you could deal."

"I'm afraid not, Madame," the man persisted. "If you could spare just a matter of five minutes."

She rose to her feet and excused herself with a little gesture of disgust to Martin as she floated away.

"If you knew how I hated going into those smelly places," she grumbled.

Martin sipped his wine and glanced at the late edition of an evening paper which had just been brought in. Diana made her reappearance in a very few minutes. There was a frown of annoyance upon her face.

"Really, Branson is a tiresome old bore," she exclaimed as she resumed her place. "It seems that one of the scullery boys, who has a habit of eating anything he can get hold of, has made himself sick and had pains, and they've been obliged to send him to the hospital. I don't see what concern it is of mine, anyway."

"You must remember, my dear," he told her, "that you have responsibilities. This affair of yours is not like Adelaide's hat-shop or Clara's dress salon. Those girls just entertain their friends, dispense cocktails, and never look inside an account book. But this is a real business institution; you're making money—ought to make a small fortune, I should think, if they don't change the law."

"But I do work," the girl insisted. "I work hard, Martin. I take care of myself in the daytime, never go to an afternoon cocktail party. I close this place regularly at three o'clock and I'm always in bed at four. I ride in the Park every morning, have another sleep after my lunch, and I am absolutely as fit as a fiddle. I know I'm making money and I only hope it goes on. The one thing I don't want in connection with my club is 'incidents.' I can't imagine why they wanted to send that boy to a hospital. These sort of things always get into the papers."

"I shouldn't worry about it for a moment," Martin advised her. "Tell me, does that fellow Leversen come in here often?"

"Fairly often. Generally brings one of his family with him. I've never seen him going gay or anything of that sort. He seems to be on very good terms with all the servants, so I suppose he tips them very well—and that reminds me, he was asking me only the other day whether you weren't a member here."

Mr. Branson, a little heavy-footed and with a grave expression, came across from his office. He leaned down a little towards Lady Diana.

"I've just had a telephone call from the hospital, your Ladyship," he announced. "I am sorry to say that the young man we sent there died a few minutes ago."

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## CHAPTER IX

Pamela turned her head slowly, very slowly indeed. She was seated on a low stool before her canvas, which she had adjusted to its lowest peg. She had been trying to catch the last sweep of sunlight, shining feebly enough through a misty sky. Then the knock had come. She turned around and she was conscious of a queer sensation. She knew that she was afraid. She rose slowly to her feet and she stared for a moment through the shadows. The knock came again, a little quicker, a little more impatient this time. The brush slipped from her fingers; she looked around the large studio with its shadowy corners, its cupboards, its general air of comfort, disorderliness, softened by a touch of artistic recklessness. She very seldom suffered from nerves, but there was no doubt that in those few minutes she knew that she was afraid. An ordinary visitor would have known that there was a bell, a little out of sight but there for the use of her friends and visitors, of whom there were so few. This must be a stranger, and just then Pamela was afraid of strangers. She moved towards the door, very slowly. It was closed with a spring lock; the handle her side was of old Venetian brass, many hundreds of years old but a fragile thing. There was no bolt. As she stood there the knock came again and it seemed to her that it spoke with a living voice. It seemed to her that the most horrible thing in the world which could happen had come to pass. She looked at the telephone. It stood only a few feet away and the sound of her voice could easily be heard out on the landing. She stood still, twining and untwining her fingers. Supposing she remained breathlessly silent? Then perhaps the visitor would go on his way in the belief that she was not there. Then again her heart sank. She remembered that she had pushed the little slat opposite to her name on the oaken board below to indicate that she was in. She heard the creaking of shoes outside, a little cough, the visitor was becoming impatient.

"Open the door," a hoarse voice demanded from outside. "There's someone standing there, I can tell that. I wish to see the lady of the house."

"Who are you?" Pamela asked. "I do not recognize your voice. I do not think I know you."

"Then you're in for a joyful surprise," was the curtly spoken response. "Open the door, Pamela, unless you wish to have me found on your doormat."

For a moment the room whirled round her. This then was the answer to the haunting fear of the last few hours. She should have flown the moment the news was in the papers. She was trapped.

"Is it wise to come here?" she asked breathlessly.

"Open the door, damn you," was the angry reply.

She turned the handle with trembling fingers. The man who stood there first glanced down the wide stairs, but there was no one upon them or on either of the landings—no sound to be heard throughout the whole building. The caller slipped into the room, closed the door behind him, threw his hat on to a sofa and held out his arms.

"No embrace for the wanderer, Pamela?" he asked, with bitter sarcasm.

She drew a little farther away.

"I am very sorry for all you have suffered," she said, "but you cannot expect me to say that I am glad to see you."

"Give me some whisky or brandy," he ordered, "a handful of cigarettes and some matches. Then we will have our little talk."

She pointed to a chiffonier, where he rummaged about and helped himself.

"Haven't you any servants?" he demanded.

"I have two," she answered. "They are out for the day. That is to say," she corrected herself quickly, "one is out for the day, the other might be back at any moment."

He laughed mockingly.

"I think you were right the first time," he scoffed. "Wait until I've had my first drink."

He consumed a whole tumblerful of whisky and soda, then he threw himself on the couch, placed a tin of biscuits by his side and began to eat voraciously. With terrified but fascinated eyes she watched him. Notwithstanding the signs of hardship and poor living in his face, his unkempt hair and his broken fingernails, he was still a handsome man.

"They let me shave, you see," he remarked, "or your husband might have returned to you with a black beard. You wouldn't have cared for that, would you?"

"Your looks are nothing to me," she answered with a shiver. "You have known that for a long time. You have done a cruel thing in coming here, Richard."

"Cruel!" he repeated savagely. "You're my wife, aren't you? You belong to me, and if this is your home, half of it is mine, and don't forget it, Pamela," he wound up, lighting one of the cigarettes. "What there is left of you is mine, too. Mine to take when I want it, and I've led a pretty lonely life for the last six years."

"You cad," she rejoined quietly.

She was becoming calmer every moment. The more brutal he was, the more impossible the situation, the more surely she felt her poise and composure returning. All the time, too, her brain was working. There must be a way of getting rid of him.

"You haven't any of my old clothes here, I suppose?" he asked.

"I have not," she answered. "I gave them all to your servant."

"What, Jones? He didn't deserve them, the skunk. If he'd given his evidence the way my lawyer instructed him he'd have saved me a great deal."

"Perhaps," she answered, "he preferred to tell the truth."

"Listen," he went on, "is old Leversen alive still?"

"So far as I know."

"And his Lordship? The man who tried his best to hang me?"

"I saw his name amongst the guests at a party last week," she replied.

"Stinking hound," the man on the couch muttered.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he went on, "I spent years brooding over these people. Something may come of it some day. Not just yet. If your maids are out, Pamela, who is going to cook me some dinner?"

"There is no one," she told him. "You must go and buy your own food. It is quite impossible for you to stay here. The police are certain to hunt you down."

"Not in the least likely," he assured her. "From the report of the trial they would judge that we were on bad terms and the last place they would come to look for me is in your flat. They would never guess that we're still in love with one another, would they, Pamela?"

He smiled at her, an insinuating, almost a fascinating smile. She shrank away.

"I was never in love with you, Richard Lebur," she declared. "I married you against my better judgment. You have given me bitter cause for repentance."

He shook his head gloomily.

"This is a nice way to greet your husband after he has risked his life to gain his freedom and come back to you," he said bitterly. "Go and get me some wine and come across and drink with me."

"I have very little wine here, for, as you know, I rarely take it," she answered.

"That sounds unsociable," he remarked. "What about Bessie, your good-looking housemaid—I don't believe she is out—why can't you send her in to me? She wouldn't be quite so brutal to her master as you are."

There was something in his eyes which frightened her. She felt her composure slipping away.

"I told you the truth," she said. "They are both out, and Bessie left a long time ago. I don't know why you came here, Richard, but if you want money I can let you have some."

"Give me all you have," he ordered; "but remember, my beautiful Pamela, I didn't come here for money alone."

She turned on the light, opened a desk at the farther part of the room, took out a small coffer and emptied it into her trembling hands.

"It is all I have in the house," she assured him. "Take it and go away, please."

He remained on the sofa.

"Bring it to me," he ordered. "Don't keep so far away, Pamela. Wonderful how you've kept your looks," he went on. "It's not my type of beauty, you know, but it's good of its sort. Spirituelle, I suppose you'd call your face, wouldn't you? Your figure, I think, has improved," he went on, leaning back, regarding her with sardonic cruelty and studying her critically. "A little lean in the flank you used to be, like that filly I had we thought was going to do such big things."

It wasn't so much the words, she thought afterwards, it wasn't so much the tone, although there was something terrible underneath its note of mockery. It was the glitter in his eyes, the strange, lascivious look with which he seemed to be measuring her up. She leaned forward and deliberately threw the money in her hands straight at his face. More than ever before, it seemed to her, she hated him, as he stooped,

laughing to himself, and collected the silver and notes which lay all round and on the couch. He glanced towards the door, to be sure that she was making no attempt to escape, and stuffed it all in his pockets.

"Quite as much as I expected to find in the house," he remarked. "We'll talk about what you have in the bank later on."

"Neither this money," she said, with a wonderful return of her self-control, "or any part of it, or any part of the money I have in the bank, belongs to you—not any part of it."

"You may have been keeping some gigolo for all I know or care. I'll have him out of here."

"You'll have yourself back in Dartmoor, or whatever prison you came from, in ten minutes if you shout like that," she warned him. "Stop and think what you're talking about, for goodness' sake. It seems to me that you've escaped from prison—is that so?"

"And damned sorry you are, aren't you?" he exclaimed.

"What you seem to forget," she told him, "is that most certainly you'll be back there again before many hours have passed if you behave like this. Why can't you be sensible? I'll help you if I can, even if it's against the law," she went on, "but I won't have you here. You've lost your sense of how to talk to anyone. You've said foul things to me. You used, at any rate on the surface, to behave like a gentleman."

"I am not sure that I want to any longer," he replied. "Behaving like a gentleman hasn't brought me very far, has it? Supposing I tell you that I feel like behaving just as I choose for once in my life and taking the consequences, whatever they may be?"

She was trembling violently. She knew what he did not know—that both the maids were staying out by special permission until the next morning. She had planned to have a long, quiet evening, to think out her work, to read some books she had fetched the day before from the library. There they were, just as she had brought them in. She had meant to paint a little, play a little to herself on the baby grand piano at the other end of the room, and dream a little. There were times when the emotions were troublesome, when it was such a joy to be alone. She had looked forward to tonight. And now had come this vision of stark, staring hell. Every moment she was more hatefully aware of the change in the man. Prison life had coarsened him, had let loose the animal which was never far from the surface. She looked wildly round the room. She could have beaten against the walls in her fear. All the time she felt his eyes upon her. It was a slow, cruel torture she was suffering.

"Will you go away?" she begged. "I will send you money. I will help you to escape if I can, but I want you to go away from here."

He looked at her suspiciously.

"Why?"

"Because you frighten me," she explained. "You are not like yourself even when you were at your worst."

Even now he was a fine figure of a man, although a little given to drooping his head and slouching. He walked the whole length of the room with his hand behind his back. He paused, suddenly, in front of her.

"Have you ever tried to divorce me, Pamela?" he asked.

She smiled bitterly.



"They wouldn't grant me a divorce, even if I chose to apply for it, just because you were in prison," she answered.

He chuckled.

"Beastly old-fashioned laws, the English, aren't they? And you mean to tell me," he went on, looking her straight in the eyes, "that all this time you have been faithful to an absentee husband?"

"I have had no one to be faithful to," she replied. "I have not counted on you as being my husband. I have kept myself to myself, if that is what you mean. It is my way of living."

"Six years," he muttered to himself. "Why, you must be twenty-nine, Pamela."

"It is no business of yours, but it is the truth," she answered. "I am twenty-nine."

He resumed his walk of the room. Something seemed to have brought back the old fears. He walked and carried himself like a criminal. Every now and then he stopped and listened. Once or twice he peered out of the window. A taxi-cab stopped below. He listened at the door to the people slowly mounting the steps. When they had passed and mounted higher, he rubbed his forehead with his handkerchief.

He smiled wickedly across at her.

"I'm as safe here as anywhere," he declared. "Tomorrow morning I shall have my chance of escape. If I am taken before then I would rather be taken after I had spent the night, according to the evidence which will be given, in my wife's apartments."

Internally, the turmoil was tremendous, externally she kept her voice and her appearance almost calm.

"If you attempt to stay here, Richard," she threatened him, "I shall hunt the streets until I find a policeman to give you up to. I shall either do that or kill you. It will mean the end of your life, anyway."

That same fiendishly irritating smile was back on his lips. It was satanic because it seemed to bring the elements of humour to mingle with the avowed purpose of a man about to commit a sin.

"We'll play the game out," he declared. "You and I will go into the larder now and see if there is anything you can cook for my dinner."

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## CHAPTER X

Martin, a few minutes later, laid down his pen and took up the telephone receiver which stood upon his desk. A hoarse, unfamiliar voice spoke to him over the telephone.

"Is that Martin Brockenhurst?"

"It is."

"You are asked to come round at once, and without questions, to Number 17 Richmond Mansions, Chelsea. Do you understand?"

"Not in the least," Martin replied. "Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter who I am. If you are a friend of Pamela Lebur, the artist, you will be round at her flat in ten minutes—five, if possible."

"I shall be there," was the curt answer.

Fortunately his car was waiting outside. At the corner of Piccadilly he received the shock of his life. A news vendor was waving a placard. There it was in ominous black characters:

#### MURDERER ESCAPES FROM DARTMOOR REPORTED TO HAVE REACHED LONDON

Martin's foot leaned on the accelerator. He drove with reasonable care but desperate eagerness. He pulled up outside the block of flats in Chelsea within the ten minutes. He ran up the stairs and rang the bell at the studio's outer door. Lebur free and ringing up from Pamela's flat! The whole thing was fantastic—it was worse, it was diabolical. He pressed the door-handle viciously. A rough-looking man in a ready-made suit of blue serge opened the door. Nothing but his voice was in the least familiar.

"Glad you could come, Brockenhurst. You've seen the news, I expect. They may be after me at any moment, but I must have a few words with you first."

"Where's Pamela?" Martin demanded.

She appeared at that moment from the other end of the room. Her little sobbing cry was like music to Martin. She came over to him, swift and eager, the light of an enormous and overwhelming relief in her eyes.

"Martin!" she cried. "Martin, how did you get here?"

"He rang me up," was the breathless reply. "It was you at the telephone, I suppose, Lebur?"

"Yes, I rang you up. I needed help from a man and you seemed to be as likely as anyone. Besides, I wanted to talk to you."

Pamela was sobbing quietly to herself. The relief from the strain of the last hour was too much for her. She had thrown herself back in an easy-chair and Martin was standing by her side. Lebur looked at them both and there was a sneer underlying his tone when he spoke.

"I'm afraid I've been rather a beast to her, Brockenhurst," he said with suave cruelty. "My coming frightened her to death and her welcome wasn't much to offer a man who has been five or six years in hell. I told her I'd come back to stay. If she hadn't been just a little fool she'd have known that the last spot on earth I'm likely to linger in is my ex-wife's apartment. I want to get away as quickly as I can. I want you to help me, but before I leave I've a commission for you, Brockenhurst. You're the only honest man I know. You've got to listen to what I tell you and you've got to do what I ask."

Martin remained silent. The ex-convict threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Forgive my sitting down," he sneered. "I've had a long time of wooden benches and it's a luxury to me to feel a cushion underneath."

"How did you get away?" Martin asked.

"Never mind that," was the curt reply. "I didn't kill anyone, as some of the others have done. I got away on a foggy night and because I'm a strong man and because I had the one thing that's necessary—a change of clothes at hand. They aren't much of clothes, perhaps," he added, looking down at himself, "but such as they are, they've helped me to travel up safely from Devonshire. I've passed without much trouble through the streets of London after a shave and a Turkish bath, the purchase of a clean collar and another tie. Here I am, and so far as I know, I haven't been traced here. The police are bound to come, however, to make enquiries from Pamela. Before they come you've got to listen to me."

"Go ahead," Martin invited. "I'm ready."

Lebur stretched out his hand and helped himself to a generous whisky and soda. He half-closed his eyes with pleasure, but he drank moderately.

"Listen, Martin Brockenhurst," he said, and his voice now became noticeably clearer. "You can prepare for the shock of your life—you, too, may get a little thrill out of it, Pamela. I did not kill David Culpepper."

"What!" Martin exclaimed.

"I was innocent of the charge. A man of guilt in many ways, perhaps, but I repeat that I did not kill David Culpepper."

They were both incredulous.

"But you pleaded guilty!" Pamela exclaimed. "You applied for leave to alter your plea."

"That is true," Lebur acknowledged, "but I repeat again that I did not kill David Culpepper. I want you to get that into your heads for a moment, and then I'll go on."

"Go on," Martin begged.

"Remember," Lebur continued, "I have nothing whatever to gain by telling you a lie, Brockenhurst, or you, Pamela. Therefore you must ask yourselves, Why do I insist upon telling you this? My answer is this—to get me out of that hell down at Dartmoor it is necessary for you to find out who did kill him."

"To find out who did kill him?" Martin repeated, a little dazed.

"It should not be difficult. It was my own lawyers, the great firm of Leversen, or rather a member of it, who induced me to plead guilty. The bait was simple—it was penal servitude instead of hanging. I had a strong disinclination to go out of the world by being hanged by the neck. When the lawyer who had the case in hand, one of Leversen's own men—his son, I think it was—told me that I had not one chance in the world of escaping a death sentence if I persisted in my plea of 'Not Guilty,' what he said sounded damned reasonable. The evidence, I knew, was dead against me. He insisted that I should make an appeal to the Judge and have the plea changed. I did it. The little rat knew that I was not guilty—there was something in his eyes which told me so, but I believed him at the time. All men are fools once in their lives and generally at a moment of crisis—I was a fool then. My plea was 'Not Guilty.' I changed my plea to 'Guilty,' and, as I had been promised, I was sentenced to penal servitude for life."

"So that was why you called out when they were taking you away," Martin muttered.

"Just so," the ex-convict admitted. "I couldn't bear it at the last. The eyes of the whole court seemed to be upon me. I recognized men there whom I had known all my life—and women—and I hated myself for

having listened to that filthy little lawyer. The only thing that carried weight with me was one of his arguments. 'If you can get away with it,' he said, 'which you can by pleading "Guilty," the truth may come out some day, if the truth is that you did not commit the murder. If you're telling the truth to me at this moment, Mr. Lebur, when you swear that you did not kill him, then I say that the truth always comes out some time or other and you'll have a chance of freedom and preserving your honour while you're still alive. If, on the other hand, you stick to a plea of "Not Guilty," you haven't one chance in a hundred of leaving this world in any other way than with a rope round your neck....' That's the story I have to tell you, Martin Brockenhurst, and I've got to ask you a hard thing—I've got to ask you to believe it."

Pamela rose to her feet.

"Richard," she said, "I for one believe it. I believe for the first time that you are telling the truth. I never believed you before—I believe you now. I am sorry."

"Well, that's something to take back with me, at any rate," Lebur said with a smile which was not altogether disagreeable. "I ask your pardon, Pamela, if I've frightened the life out of you today. Prison makes beasts of men; it has made a beast of me except in such moments as this. And don't be afraid, Pamela. You've said words I am glad to have had you say, but if ever the truth comes out and my innocence of that one particular crime is established, I shall never be a worry to you. I was a bad husband and I was unfaithful to you fifty times. I shall never claim any rights over you and I hope that you will be happy in the way that seems to you right and which you choose. You understand?"

"Perfectly," she answered. "We'll forget that side of the past, Richard, willingly."

"You can consider yourself free from me whenever you like," Lebur went on. "I haven't deserved even a hundredth part of the fidelity you gave me when we were living together. Send a lawyer to the prison at any time you like and I will furnish you with a dozen proofs, even up to the day before my trial, which will establish your claim to a divorce."

Martin, who saw the misery in Pamela's face, broke in.

"Look here," he said, "I think it's all clearly understood between you and your wife now. I don't want to butt in, but I can't help thinking that you may have disagreeable visitors here, Lebur, at any time. Don't you think you'd better tell me the true story of David Culpepper's death as quickly as possible if I am to be able to do anything for you?"

"You accept the trust then, Brockenhurst?"

"I accept it willingly," Martin replied. "I am going to force myself to believe you although it seems incredible. You did not kill David Culpepper. Then who did?"

"That is what you have to find out."

"Haven't you any clue?"

"Sarah had plenty of other admirers—more than you would believe possible."

"Even then, the first difficulty that a man of common sense has to face is this—how could such a woman inspire any man with a passion strong enough to make him risk the gallows for her sake?"

Lebur made no immediate answer. He had the air of a man who desires to choose his words carefully.

"You might ask yourself that, Martin Brockenhurst," he said, with a faint sneer in his tone. "I might have when I was a boy. I can only answer you in one way. There are women famous, or, rather, infamous, in history—and more especially in the history of such crimes as this—who have the gift of bringing the madness out of a man as no good woman could. There are women, nothing much to look at, some of them, strange women who can drive men almost crazy with their unusual gifts. This woman is one of them. How she did it I don't know, but I was one of her victims. She was one of those women who can bring dead passions to life again, one of those women who can relight fires that a man might honestly believe had burned out of him. It was in her blood, Brockenhurst. Perhaps a really good man would never have felt it. I can tell you that she brought everything that was evil in me dancing in my blood as no other woman ever has or could."

There was a curious silence in the room. Pamela had turned a little away. She was gazing with a strained expression into the shadows beyond the two men, but Martin always fancied there was a light of real understanding in her beautiful, curiously lit eyes.

"I saw the woman the first day in court," Martin said quietly. "If one could accept what you say, Lebur—and you speak like a man who knows—well, that way may lie the explanation. To the eyes of the ordinary onlooker, she was a coarse, ungainly person, flamboyant in appearance, without any sort of refinement, without any visible allure."

"Ever read the books of a Frenchman called Zola?" Lebur asked.

Martin nodded.

Pamela, who had been listening intently, turned her head.

"I know what Richard is trying to explain," she said calmly. "I heard a very great Frenchman once talk for an hour in a French studio, and talk eloquently, of that 'secret gift,' as he called it."

Lebur nodded. There were new lines which seemed to have crept into his face, the gleam of a strange light of understanding in his hard eyes.

"The secret gift," he repeated. "That's just what she had. I never pretended to be faithful to you, as you know, Pamela," he went on, a sudden return of the coarseness underlying his words and his tone becoming almost flagrantly noticeable. "You were not my sort for that kind of thing. I found it out as soon as I married you. You can't say I worried you very much with amorous proposals afterwards. I never pretended to be faithful to you, but, my God, I was faithful to that woman. I could not get the longing for her out of my blood—that's that! Your question is answered, Martin Brockenhurst. There are madmen in the world. There is madness in the breath some women inhale and exhale as there is poison in the blood of a scorpion. I never killed David Culpepper, but I won't say that some day or other I shouldn't have done it. The other man got in first. He came while I was there. She pushed me away. I was to go into another room. It was agony. I drank a half-bottle of whisky. I must have been half-drunk. Then I heard the door-bell of her flat ring again, I heard the sound of voices—I drank more whisky. I was blind. When at last I opened the door and staggered out, there it was in front of me!" he cried, rising to his feet and pointing with both arms extended to the drama which he alone saw. "There was David Culpepper lying dead with his back against the banister. There was the revolver lying by his side, the sour smell of gunpowder in the air, the telephone behind that closed door being treated furiously, and the sound of Sarah Rose's voice bawling down the instrument. 'Police! Police!! Police!!!' I could hear her yelling. I picked up the revolver. It was one I had given the woman myself when she complained of being frightened at night. It had my initials engraved upon it. I was gripping it, turning it over, wondering how it came there, when they came up the stairs—two policemen and an inspector a few yards behind. They are quite right. I threw the

revolver down just as they described and I kicked the dead man as he lay there—I hated him so. All quite correct. All the same, that is everything I know about the murder."

"The woman's evidence, then, was a tissue of falsehoods?" Martin observed.

"Falsehoods, bloody falsehoods...!"

Lebur was losing control of himself. It was not until Martin held him by the throat that he ceased his torrent of abuse. Pamela sat quite quietly and without movement. She listened to his stream of foul language without flinching. Martin's grip choked him into silence.

"You are a fool to waste your breath like this."

Lebur recovered himself slightly. He scowled across the room at Pamela as though anxious to see how his language had affected her. "Always a coarse brute, wasn't I?" he muttered. "You never heard me talk like that before, though. That's prison—six years of Dartmoor have done that."

"Well, don't do it again," Martin begged him firmly. "If you can't remember that your wife is here, remember at least for your own sake that every unnecessary moment you spend here is a risk. Besides, you might be better employed answering my questions."

"Go on," Lebur invited hoarsely.

"This woman whom you speak of," Martin continued, "this Sarah Rose, as she was called, either committed the murder herself or deliberately sacrificed you for someone else?"

"As if I don't know that," Lebur snarled. "As if I don't brood over it sometimes all night long. God, there have been nights when, if I could get her by the throat, just one twist of the fingers would finish her. But I will tell you something, Martin, before I have finished with her—"

"Hold your tongue," the other ordered firmly. "If you can't behave yourself, Lebur, I am sorry, but out you will go into the streets and take your chance of what turns up. Now answer this question."

"Get on with it then."

"The man for whose sake this woman was prepared to swear your life away must have been someone of importance to her. Try and think. She was the sort of woman to have boasted to her other admirers, I should think, if she had one she was specially fond of. Someone, perhaps, who might have held a different sort of position in life. Did she ever give you any idea as to who he might have been?"

"Never—never mentioned the names of any of her admirers—never to me, at any rate. She knew me too well. She knew that it only took a word or two from her to make me flame up with jealousy."

"Are you going to try and see her while you are free?"

"What business is that of yours?" Lebur demanded.

"It is my business," Martin replied, "only if you really expect me to take an interest in your affairs. I suppose your wife and I are the only two people in the world, except the actual murderer if he is still alive, who don't believe you guilty of murdering Culpepper. I will do what I can for you so long as you behave. On the other hand, you must answer my questions—are you going to try and see this woman?"

"I dare not," Lebur confessed hoarsely. "My temper has not improved in Dartmoor. It is not a soothing place. Those warders are not any too pleasant companions, and daily life there is just hell. If I found myself alone with her—well, I could almost spell the thing out. I could tell you what would happen, but don't be afraid, I won't. I don't know where to find her—I should not go if I did."

There was a curious little tremble in his tone.

"You promise," Martin went on, "that you won't go back to any of the haunts which she used to frequent here in London?"

"I promise."

"What are you going to do when you leave here? You are not going anywhere near your father, I hope?"

"Not if I can get enough money out of my beloved wife," was the sardonic reply. "There would not be any fatted calf business about going back to see the old man."

"He can have all the money he wants from me," Pamela said quietly. "He has some claim on it. His father would have continued his allowance, if I would have accepted it, all the time that he has been in prison."

Lebur groaned.

"A thousand a year it was."

"You can have a thousand pounds if you want it," Pamela told him calmly. "I will go to the Bank tomorrow morning and get it."

"And me on my way to Wapping tomorrow to try and get a boat," Lebur observed with an evil chuckle. "A thousand pounds in my pocket, eh? Well, where shall I come for it?"

"Not here," Pamela begged him. "Mr. Brockenhurst will help us, perhaps?"

"Yes, I will see to it," Martin promised. "Where are you sleeping tonight?"

Lebur drew a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket.

"It's down Wapping way," he said. "I know how to get there."

"You know my telephone number," Martin directed Lebur. "Ring me up any time between ten and eleven tomorrow morning; we can have money for you by then. If your wife is pleased to hand over so large a sum, it is, of course, not my affair, but I believe you would do much better to try and think of some place where you could leave a portion of it."

"The money is useless to me," Pamela said. "I make all that I need to live on by my work. What I am not altogether happy about, Martin, is my father-in-law. Don't you wish to see him, Richard?"

The man shrank back. The hard lines in his face seemed to have momentarily disappeared. He shook himself slightly. He was like a frightened animal.

"My father," he muttered. "He would never want to see me. He would never receive me. If my mother had lived, perhaps—no, I could not go there. Our race do not forgive."

"Besides, it would be very dangerous," Martin pointed out. "My own advice to your husband is that, if he has any plan whatever for getting away, he put it into effect quickly. I do not think that he will succeed. No one ever does get away for long. But the sooner he tries, the better his chance."

"I have a plan," Lebur said sullenly. "With that money I can get away if I have luck."

Martin walked with him to the door. Lebur looked back to where Pamela was standing.

"Do you wish me luck, Pamela?" he asked.

"I hope that you may get away," she assured him. "I can say no more. If you were not guilty, Richard, it is a cruel life you have had to lead. I hope you will not have to go back to it."

Martin watched him go shuffling down the stairs. He never once looked up or back. His shoulders were bent, he carried himself like an old man. Martin's expression was very grave indeed as he re-entered the studio.

"He will never get away, I am afraid, Pamela," he said as he closed the door.

Pamela came across from her desk where she had been writing. She thrust an oblong strip of paper into his hand.

"There is the cheque, Martin," she said. "You are sure that this will not bring trouble upon you?"

He took her arm and led her to the window. She gave a little cry.

"Fog!"

He nodded.

"He is in luck to start with, anyway. If this thickens, he ought to be utterly lost in Wapping."

She sank into an easy-chair.

"Martin, dear, would you please go away?" she begged. "I am going to be very foolish. I am going to cry. I don't know why, but I am miserable. The sight of that man, the sound of his voice, the dread of some harm coming quickly to one when he spoke—Martin, at first he was terrible."

"I shall stay for a time," he insisted. "You can't be left alone here."

"I tell you what I think would make me happy," she confided. "I will lock up here and you shall try and find me a taxi, and go down with me, if you will, to Simon Lebur. He will have seen what has happened in the papers. He will be very unhappy. It will do him good if I talk to him a little. He has a room there he calls my room. Do you mind if I do that, Martin? I will pack a little bag."

"Mind?" he laughed. "You know so well, Pamela, there is no service you could not demand from me."

\* \* \* \* \*



They descended to the street a quarter of an hour later, Martin carrying the bag and steering Pamela across the deserted pavement to where his own car was waiting by the kerb. The chauffeur turned on the lights and started the engine.

"Will you be able to drive?" she asked, peering forward. "I shall keep the window rubbed quite clean for you this side."

"I shall see all right," he assured her. "Besides, David, behind there, has the eyes of a lynx. He stands up behind and keeps an eye on us all the time."

They moved slowly off, just as a shabby figure in a blue serge suit stumbled down the steps of the corner public-house.

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## CHAPTER XI

Martin left his passenger a more than welcome guest at Simon Lebur's flat, went round to his club, and then, through sheer nervousness of missing a telephone call, dined in his own apartments. At about eleven o'clock that night he started out again, drove slowly past Simon Lebur's premises, where everything seemed quite normal, and finally brought his car slowly to a standstill directly opposite the coffee-stall on the Embankment. He stepped lightly out, crossed the broad footway, and established himself on one of the deal stools opposite the spot where old Joe himself was standing, polishing one by one the long line of cups he was preparing for his night's trade. He paused in his task at Martin's approach, and his welcome was without doubt a little strained. Martin chose to disregard the fact.

"Short of customers tonight, Joe," he remarked, lighting a cigarette.

"It is full early for them yet awhile, sir," the man replied. "So long as this fog hangs round, there's never many of them comes out."

"Bad for trade, eh?"

"It is that, sir."

"Well, I will be a customer," Martin observed. "A cup of your best coffee, Joe."

"I will make it specially, sir," Joe promised him. "The urns aren't exactly what you might call going yet. You are rather an early visitor, you see."

"I came early," Martin acquiesced, "because I wanted a word with you, Joe, without that crowd around. The attentions of your lady clients become a little embarrassing at times."

"Oh, them two!" Joe remarked. "They ain't so bad, sir. They don't hang round like some of them. If there is no business about, they sheer off pretty quick. It's natural-like, sir," Joe went on, shaking some coffee into a pot, "that when they see a gent like you about in a slap-up motorcar, they should try for a bit of luck. I don't think they'll be here tonight, though. They generally stick in the pubs this weather."

"The best place for them," Martin agreed. "Joe," he went on, and his voice for a hard man was very gracious and friendly, "Joe, you don't need to be scared of me."

Joe glanced towards his coffee-pot, altered its angle a little on the gas burner, and recommenced his task of polishing cups.

"The Inspector was round the other night, sir," he confided a little irrelevantly, "him who used to be on this beat many years ago before he got promoted. He sits in a swell office now, up at the Yard."

"What about him?" Martin asked.

"He got off for a chat, same as you did, sir."

"A chat about me?"

"Well, your name did crop up, sir."

Martin smiled thoughtfully. It was so like Inspector Charlesworth to yield now and again to his curiosity.

"Did he tell you that I was back in the Force as a detective, Joe?"

"Not exactly that, sir. He did mention the fact that you were still worrying about some old case, the last before you came in for that ton of money and went to foreign parts."

"It was a very interesting case, Joe."

"It ain't one as I cares to talk about."

"Naturally," Martin agreed. "I can understand that, Joe; but you ought to know me well enough to realize that I shouldn't be likely to ask any questions that might bring harm upon you or yours."

Joe paused in his rubbing. He hit the deal counter in front of him with his clenched fist and leaned a little towards his patron. There was a flush in his cheeks which might have been anger.

"Then why in hell's name do you come here trying to find out what's become of my Sarah?" he asked.

Martin threw away the stump of his cigarette and lit another.

"Well, you see, Sarah was in a way interested in that case, wasn't she, Joe?"

"And if she was, why can't you leave the bloody case alone?" Joe demanded. "You're like all these blasted dicks, even if you have turned gentleman. You can't bear to leave a trail that you haven't finished right up to the end."

"But this case is finished and done with, isn't it, Joe?" Martin asked quietly.

There was positive evil in Joe's bleary eyes as he gazed at his persecutor. His voice shook, but he kept his self-control.

"Of course it's finished with. Lebur went to penal servitude, and lucky he was to save his neck. He's in Dartmoor at this present moment."

Martin shook his head.

"Oh no, Joe," he contradicted. "You don't keep up with the news these days, I see. You don't even read the placards. I am sure your clients, some of them, must have been talking about this affair this evening."

"What affair?" Joe demanded hoarsely.

"Lebur is no longer in Dartmoor," Martin confided. "He escaped two days ago. It was in tonight's paper, with his name and everything. Up till ten o'clock this evening, at any rate, he was still at liberty."

The cup that Joe was polishing slipped from his fingers and crashed into pieces on the hard ground. Joe leaned forward and his long, yellow-stained fingers gripped the rough counter for support.

"Gawd, is that the truth?" he gasped.

"Certainly it is the truth," Martin assured him. "Richard Lebur's free at the present moment and no one knows where he may be."

Joe was gazing in terrified fashion into the blanket of the disappearing fog. There was fear in his eyes.

"He might come here, of course," Martin went on. "He might come to ask the same question that I asked you once, Joe. You weren't very polite to me. I don't think that I should answer Richard Lebur's questions if he should come. I think you had better tell him what you told me—to mind my own business."

Behind the counter Joe kept a cut-down stool into which he relapsed sometimes when fatigue overcame him. He pulled it out and sank unsteadily down upon it.

"What makes you think that he would come to me?" he faltered.

"You must have thought me a very clumsy detective, Joe, when I came here to ask you for Sarah Rose's address and went away disappointed because you would not give it to me."

"Of course I would not give it to you," Joe growled. "If he came here for it, I'd sooner cut his throat than let him have it. For years after the trial I used to hear them talking down here as to what could have become of her. They none of them thought of asking me. Not that they would have learned anything if they had."

"They never thought of asking you, Joe," Martin repeated quietly, "because—"

"Aye, because—"

"Because they didn't know that she was your daughter," Martin concluded, dropping his voice almost to a whisper.

This time the old man preserved his self-possession. He set down the cup and laid the duster by its side. He folded his arms and from his crouching seat upon the stool he looked upwards over the counter.

"So you've got it off your chest at last," he snarled. "That's why you came to me for her address. You knew. You knew that she was my daughter all the time."

"Of course I knew," Martin assented. "I was never much of a detective—in fact, I never even qualified properly—but—"

"You never had anything to do with Sarah?"

"Never in my life," Martin assured his questioner. "The first time I saw her was when I was called off my beat as a constable to climb the stairs of the building where she had a flat and found her screaming over the dead body of a man named Culpepper. Now you know all about it, Joe. As I think you reminded me just now, this was about the time I came into my fortune. Still, I stayed in the Force long enough to do a little work on what they called 'the Lebur Case,' and I have always been interested in it since as a case."

Joe was nervously locking and unlocking his fingers.

"You ain't one of them bloody fools who went about after the trial declaring that Sarah had done the job and that Lebur was shielding her?" he asked fiercely.

"The idea occurred to me," Martin confessed. "I won't say that I really adopted it, but it had occurred to me for a time, as it did to a great many other people. You see, that call back when he was led out of the dock, that sudden, passionate desire to revert to his plea of 'Not Guilty,' struck a great many people as being strange. However, I never seriously believed that Sarah had much to do with it. It was just one of the possibilities—then, as it is now. What's the matter with you, Joe? You aren't thinking of going, are you?"

Joe had pulled down his old cap from the peg where it was hanging and was struggling into a warm overcoat.

"I am going to get Tim Bradley to come and look after the stall tonight," he confided. "You will excuse me, sir; I am fair upset with what you have been telling me, and I am afraid."

"Afraid of what, Joe?"

Joe looked around, stared into the fog as though to penetrate it, and dropped his voice.

"Lebur," he muttered. "If it is true that he is in London, he will want to find Sarah. I will say this much for him. He was cruel fond of my girl, was Richard Lebur. He won't be able to find her, but he might come to me."

"You could do as you have done to me—refuse to tell him," Martin observed.

"Aye, but he is not like you. You have taken it gentlemanlike—he would not. He would do me a harm, Richard Lebur would."

Martin studied the old man curiously for a few moments.

"I wonder," he said, half to himself, "how much you know about your own daughter?"

"I will tell you this much," was the prompt reply. "If you or anyone else was to say a word against her—I am an old man—but I'd do for you."

His voice bristled with anger. Martin looked at him in wonderment.

"Keep quiet, Joe," he begged. "I have said nothing against Sarah."

"Who ever gave you the right to call her 'Sarah'?" Joe demanded.

"I apologize," Martin ventured. "Look here, Joe, if you are really off—and I think you are wise to go—I will take care of the stall for you till Tim comes."

"You don't need, master. He is selling matches at the corner of the bridge there and he will be only too glad to come and rest a bit. He will do the job all right. There will be no crowd round here tonight, anyway. Nothing like a fog for keeping people off the streets. If you take my advice, you will be getting home yourself with that fine car of yours."

"Perhaps you are right," Martin agreed, as he slipped down from his stool.

The two men lingered together for a few moments on the broad footway.

"Jump in, Joe," Martin invited. "I will drive you home."

Joe shook his head. Away from the stall he seemed somehow to look older and more feeble. He leaned heavily, too, upon a stick he was carrying.

"There isn't a soul in this world, except old Tim," Joe declared, "who knows where I live, and you ain't going to be the second, Mr. Martin Brockenhurst, P.C.—or whatever you calls yourself nowadays."

"Don't be such an old fool, Joe," the other replied good-naturedly. "If I wanted to know where you live, I could find out in twenty-four hours—but I don't. Garret or palace—it's all the same to me."

Old Joe's attention had suddenly wandered. He was leaning heavily on his stick and the long bony fingers of his other hand gripped Martin's shoulder. He was bending forward, watching someone across the road. The man was making his way towards the stall at which the match-vendor had already taken up his position. Martin felt his companion's fingers gripping into his shoulder-blade. He was breathing quickly.

"You seed him, Guvnor?" he muttered, scarcely above his breath. "There he is. He's talking to Tim now. You know who that was?"

"I can guess," Martin assented. "It was because I thought he'd make his way down here some time that I came. Better get in my car, Joe."

"Drive me to London Bridge Station," the old man implored. "I'll get out there. Promise me you won't follow me any farther."

"Willingly," Martin acquiesced. "You'll agree with me now as to what he has come for, I suppose."

"I shouldn't have told him," Joe answered, as he sprawled into the car. "I shouldn't have told him. No one will ever get to know from me."

Martin was bending over his wheel for a minute or two. As soon as they had swung round, however, and he was well on his way over the bridge, he turned to his companion.

"Joe," he said, "it's no good being too obstinate about this matter. That was Richard Lebur. You know that without the slightest doubt—so do I. You can guess what he wants—so can I. He wants Sarah's address."

The old man moistened his dry lips with a scrap of coloured silk handkerchief.

"He will never get it from me, never in this world."

"Why not?" Martin asked, slackening pace a little as they approached the entrance to the station.

"I don't want my girl to have naught to do with a criminal," the other replied sullenly.

Martin brought the car to a standstill by the kerb in the front yard of the station.

"They were friends, you know, in the old days, Joe," he reminded him. "You know that from what came out at the inquest. She herself admitted that he was a frequent visitor."

"Curse you! Why do you want to remind me of that?" the old man muttered. "Listen you here, Mr. Martin," he said, clutching at his sleeve, "just you open the door and let me get out."

"Wait a moment," Martin insisted. "Don't you think you ought to remember that Lebur must have been very kind to Sarah, although it was her evidence that nearly sent him to the gallows?"

"She had to tell the truth," Joe groaned. "What do you mean by being kind?"

"Sarah has never wanted for money," Martin observed. "Since the day Richard Lebur was driven off in the prison van on the first stage of his journey to Dartmoor, Sarah's been well looked after, Joe. Don't you think she ought to show a little gratitude to the man who forgave her for pretty well swearing his life away?"

"Who knows that the money comes from him?" the old man asked breathlessly.

"Well, it doesn't come from you, does it, Joe?" Martin observed, as he leaned over his companion and opened the door of the car. "There you are. I shall keep my word. I shan't attempt to follow you. Find your way home and, if I were you, I'd let Tim run the coffee-stall for a night or two. And there's one thing more, Joe! Keep your daughter away from Richard Lebur, if you can, but if he finds her out, don't interfere."

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## CHAPTER XII

Martin drew a little sigh of relief as his front door was swung open before he had time to turn his latch-key. Janien, the perfect factotum in his quiet indoor livery, was back again at his duties with the air, easily recognizable to his master, of one who had successfully accomplished a somewhat complicated mission. He preceded Martin into the library, turned on the lights, stirred the fire, drew up a small round table by the side of his master's favourite easy-chair, and produced whisky and soda from the sideboard.

"Any luck?" the latter asked him.

"I have discovered the lady's whereabouts, sir," the man announced. "It was, after all, a very easy affair. The name under which she is living is on the back of this card with the name of the hotel and the number of her suite. She has a maid with her, a Miss Hélène Mason. She calls herself French, but I should gather, from her accent, that she is Belgian."

Martin studied the card for several moments carefully, then he tore it in pieces and threw it into the fire.

"Quick work yours, Janien," he remarked, shaking out an evening newspaper. "Did you do it all on your own?"

"I received some assistance, sir, from the old Headquarters," the man admitted. "I may add that they told me, there, that they had never altogether lost sight of the lady in question. For some reason or other there have been recent enquiries in other directions."

Martin nodded.

"What's in the other envelope you are holding?"

"It's a letter left here by the person who called punctually at the time you said, twelve o'clock mid-day," the man explained. "He wrote a note which he said was to acknowledge receipt of the packet, and slipped it into the envelope containing the other communication which he apparently brought with him. He sealed them all up and I kept them here to await your arrival."

Martin mixed himself a whisky and soda, selected a pipe from a rack over the mantelpiece and filled it from a jar of honeydew tobacco.

"Your enquiries at the Shop were cautiously made, I hope, Janien?"

"You were not associated with them in any way, sir," the man assured him. "I got talking to one of my old companions there and, of course, the case came up of this escaped convict from Dartmoor—Lebur. That led to mention of the lady. I just made a remark that I wondered what had become of her and I gained the information which I've passed on. I've since had it corroborated from another direction."

"Rather an expensive hotel the young woman seems to have discovered," Martin remarked thoughtfully.

"It has the name of being so, sir," Janien assented. "It possesses, also, certain notoriety in other directions."

"To that," Martin said, "I don't imagine that the young lady would greatly object. At the same time, though, under present circumstances, I should have thought a quieter part of the world might have been better. Any news of the Dartmoor convict, by the bye, Janien?"

"I have not yet seen the evening papers, sir," the man replied.

Martin glanced through the stop-press news of the paper which had slipped from his knee. The paragraph for which he was looking was nowhere present.

"You won't forget the other envelope that I gave you, sir?" Janien reminded him. "The person who left it seemed to think it of some importance."

Martin dropped his papers and picked up the packet. It was addressed to himself in block letters. He tore it open, glanced at the receipt, which he placed in his pocket, and withdrew the rubber band from five or six hotel bills. He looked them through and then turned to the last enclosure, a letter written in Lebur's handwriting. He opened it slowly and read. The letter was curious from the fact that it had no commencement and no ending.

I have the thousand pounds. I don't know where it came from and I'm not asking. I can only say it is not like my old Dad to part unless he had to. You can guess what I am going to do with it—if you can't, it doesn't matter. If I keep going for a single week, it will have been worth my while. I shall not regret anything that may happen afterwards.

I was never one to accept benefits without doing my best to repay them. Enclosed are six hotel bills, any one of which will give you and my saintly wife what you desire.

"Any special orders for tomorrow, sir?" Janien asked, after a final glance round his master's bed-chamber an hour or so later.

"Usual time in the morning," Martin declared. "And I shall be going down to Brighton in the afternoon. You can telephone through to the Gigantic for a bedroom, with bath and sitting-room."

"Your own name, sir?"

Martin looked at him reprovingly.

"I am out of the profession, Janien, and my new name is not one to play tricks with."

"I beg your pardon, I am sure, sir. Shall you be requiring my services?"

"Probably. You can prepare to come, at any rate. We will go late in the afternoon. Get there just in time to have a swim, a cocktail, and change. Look up the trains and let me know at luncheon time."

"Will you be requiring your golf clothes, sir?"

"Nothing but the tweeds I travel in and my dinner clothes. And, Janien—"

"Yes, sir."

"My journey is not one to be spoken of—any telephone enquiries before we start—you know nothing of my movements. The few hours I shall spend in Brighton are to be forgotten."

"I quite understand, sir," the man answered respectfully.

He closed the door noiselessly and Martin watched his disappearance.

"Quite understands, does he?" he repeated to himself as he heard the man's retreating footsteps mounting the stairs to his own quarters. "I wonder whether he does? If so, he is cleverer than I am. I don't understand myself...."

But though Martin closed his eyes, practised deep breathing exercises, and counted the sheep passing through the farmer's gate, very little sleep came to him that night. He still felt undecided in the morning. At twelve o'clock he drove down to Chelsea. He telephoned from the downstairs entrance to say that he was on his way up and found Pamela standing on the threshold with the door wide open. In the background Leida, her maid, was sewing.

"It was very considerate of you to telephone, Martin dear," she said. "But, you see, I am prepared now for all emergencies. Any fresh news? Tell me all about it, please. I have been painting for two hours. Make me a White Lady, please—everything is on the table over there—and come and sit by my side. Leida," she added with a wave of her hand, "you can go."

The girl took her leave, carrying away her sewing-basket. Martin mixed the cocktails and brought them over to the little table by Pamela's side. She was seated by her canvas with folded arms.



"You see," she pointed out, "that little streak of sunshine came and it has spoilt my first idea. Never mind, I am tired of painting. Tell me about everything. Sit close to me, please. I don't know why, but I am lonely this morning."

She came close to him on the settee, passed her arm through his and leaned back for a moment with her head upon his shoulder.

"Martin," she whispered, "is it all a bad dream? Is he really wandering about through the streets here—free, breathing the air just like you and me, tasting the wonders of freedom? No; there would be a difference," she added a few seconds later. "His thoughts are chained. They can never escape far enough."

"Where he is just now I do not know," Martin replied. "I was out when he came. I had left the money for him and he has taken it away with him, every penny. There is his letter."

She held out her hand in horror.

"Don't let me see it," she begged. "Please don't."

"He left also," Martin went on, "this little packet. Perhaps you will not understand them so easily as I do. Don't be frightened of touching them, dear. They are poor, vulgar documents, but in a way they are the path for us to freedom."

She took them into her hands. She read steadily through three of them. Three times it appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Lebur had occupied a double room with bath at the Gigantic Hotel at a well-known watering-place, and while there had dined expensively and consumed immoderate quantities of liquor. They fluttered through her fingers. He shook them from the edge of her gown.

"Why do you show me these loathsome things, Martin?" she protested.

"He says in that curious letter of his," he replied, "that they are what he calls his atonement. I don't know much about the law, Pamela, but I believe they would give you what we want—your freedom."

She pointed down to them—a momentary gesture of disgust—then she covered her eyes with her hands and leaned back in his arms. He did little to check her quiet sobbing. It was some time before he spoke.

"Pamela," he said at last, "I think I know what you are feeling, but you and I—we are free from the sort of life where those things count. We may stoop to use them for certain reasons—not for our own sakes, but for the sake of others after us."

She drew a little away from him.

"Martin," she complained, "I don't understand."

"For the sake of our children," he answered boldly. "You don't mind my reminding you," he added, his arm stealing around her, "that children are a possibility of our future life together?"

Her reaction puzzled him. There was a wild, strange light in her eyes for a moment. She drew nearer to him and then farther away.

"Martin, don't you really know?"

"Know what?"

"I ought to have told you," she continued, speaking quietly, almost as though to herself. "Do you remember one evening, Martin, in Switzerland, during those marvellous days—it was not long after I'd met you really? It was when we were both beginning to be conscious of feeling a curious sort of happiness, I think, in being together in all those glorious places, amongst the wild flowers and heights where those winds came so wonderfully up the valleys and across the mountains! It was an early sunset. We could see Grenoble in the far distance and Mont Blanc quite clearly. It was the first evening, I think, that I really felt something new and strange stealing into life. It came with the smell of those flowers, Martin, and there was something fresh and stinging in that evening wind that touched the snows and then burned our cheeks."

"I remember it quite well," he acknowledged. "You were more than ever your mystical self that night. We were on our way to Chamonix."

"I ought to have told you then, Martin," she continued. "Of course, it did not seem to matter when I thought of it. It just made things, if possible, a little more beautiful. And then"—she drew her skirt a little farther away from one of the papers that had fallen near her foot—"you asked me, if you remember," she went on, "why it gave me so much pleasure to get up so early and sit in that strange little church that I loved so much. I nearly told you and I didn't. I am a Catholic, Martin."

He looked down at the papers and a sudden dread seized him.

"You mean that you wouldn't marry me?" he gasped.

"I couldn't," she answered. "You know that, Martin. Take those horrible things away. Tear them up, tear them up quickly or I shall scream."

He hesitated for a moment, then slowly he obeyed her. She carried the wastepaper basket to the fire and emptied it there. When she came back to him she was shivering as though she had done some dreadful thing. She crept into his arms. Her slim, beautiful body was strained against his. He felt the rise and fall of her breasts against him, felt the passionate grasp of her clinging arms.

"You are not angry, Martin? You are not going to leave me all alone because of this? Life has been so hard. I have prayed so long for those Swiss days to come back, the days when you began to love me a little. You are not going to take it all away? You are not going to leave me all alone with nothing but grey thoughts and nothing to feel in my heart and brain but grey hopes and queer half-lights? I shall go mad, Martin. Promise me. I shall give up my painting. I couldn't do it unless God sent me some colour or dreams or hopes of it.... Oh, I am crazy, Martin, I know I am. Don't listen to me; it isn't sense. These last few days—it's all been so terrible."

Then she felt the sudden tightening of his arms. She saw what she had wanted to see in his face; that sudden ghastly burst of selfishness, which seems to be man's heritage, left him.

"My sweetheart," he cried. "You are here and I am with you. What does anything else matter? Get your hat on quickly. We are going to have a wonderful lunch in my little French place. Then we are going to be reasonable and happy."

"The tears will fall into that beautiful wine of Henri's," she warned him.

"Then we will drink *Lacrima Christi*," he smiled. "He has three bottles left. Absurd!" He laughed as at some small joke of which he was a little ashamed.

## CHAPTER XIII

Martin Brockenhurst was a man born with that peculiar, but sometimes troublesome, instinct which entails real and absolute discomfort to its owner when circumstances demand a brief sojourn amongst vulgar surroundings. From the moment when he set foot in the huge, over-decorated and yet dingy dining-room of the Gigantic Hotel, he was uncomfortable and ill at ease. Not even the fact that the maître d'hôtel, who possessed at any rate the genius of discrimination in regard to his patrons, had given him the most desirable table for one in the room—small, in a retired corner, but still commanding a view of everything that went on—could raise his spirits. He ordered his dinner without enthusiasm. He chose his wines with almost a lackadaisical air. Nothing about him promised the slightest relief from his depression. The guests of the hotel, who were soon streaming in, were just the class of people whom he was accustomed to spend half his time avoiding. The women were over-jewelled, over-peroxidized, and concealed too little the superfluity of flesh with which they were encumbered. The men even went to the length of wearing white ties with their dinner-coats, smoking cigars before they had even ordered their dinner, and talking with an accent reminiscent of Leadenhall Street or Smithfield.

Occasionally, an ill-matched couple—a demi-mondaine who had learned how to wear her clothes, accompanied by a business man whose prosperity demanded a certain selective gift in the choice of mannequins—brightened the scene up a little, but a moment later it was further depressed by the sight of an entire family from the realms of Hampstead—father, mother, grown-up daughter, and two boys with Eton collars—who depressed once more the average.

Martin, who was in an almost hypercritical frame of mind, felt the spirit of revolt interfering with the fixed purpose with which he had started his evening. He even allowed the one person in whom he was chiefly interested to enter the room and take a position only a few yards away from his own table, with scarcely a glance. It was not until his attention was momentarily attracted by the officious politeness of the head waiter to the elder of the two ladies, who were now his neighbours, that he realized what had happened.

Janien had made no mistake. There she sat, only a few yards away—more expensively dressed, perhaps, than anyone else in the room, and certainly a shade less abominable, notwithstanding the diamonds that flashed upon her white neck and her wrists—old Joe's daughter, the mistress of Richard Lebur and many others, the woman who had sent her paramour to penal servitude.

For the first time Martin raised his glass to his lips, found the wine excellent and drank half the glassful slowly, with the air of a connoisseur and with genuine appreciation. Old Joe's daughter, Sarah, and she hadn't recognized him! Her bold eyes had flashed their approval already across the empty space which separated them, but it was the approval of a questing woman. The light of a continual invitation was there, and the smile which slightly parted her lips was the smile which had been the downfall of so many of her victims. But she had not recognized him.

To say that Martin was embarrassed by her unspoken advances would have been an exaggeration, but he certainly found some relief in transferring his regard for a moment to her companion. The latter was a girl of probably between twenty and twenty-five. She was plainly dressed, she wore no jewellery, she had good looks of a certain type despite a bad complexion, but she showed no signs of wishing to impose them upon anybody. She contented herself with eating her dinner calmly and answering her neighbour when she was addressed. She was obviously of the companion type, but without any affinity in appearance or manners to the woman whose table she shared.

Martin took the opportunity a few minutes later, whilst his vis-à-vis was indulging in a discussion with the maître d'hôtel and both their heads had disappeared behind the huge menu, of edging his chair into a slightly different angle. He asked his own waiter a question a moment or two later.

"Do you know the name of the lady opposite?" he asked. "The one in black with the diamonds."

The waiter smiled, a little impudently, Martin fancied.

"There's many of the gentlemen who visit down here who have asked me that, sir," he replied. "Her name is Culpepper."

Martin was a little startled.

"No connection, I hope, with the David Culpepper who was murdered by the escaped convict from Dartmoor for whom the police are searching the whole of this part of England?" he remarked.

"I don't know anything about that, sir," the man replied. "She registered as Mrs. Culpepper and the young lady with her, who seems to be a sort of companion, as Miss Hélène Mason. The elder lady," he continued, leaning a little forward and dropping his voice, "is not on very good terms with the management just now. She's too fond, they think, of recognizing old acquaintances amongst the gentlemen who come here."

Martin dismissed the man with a little nod and returned to his study of the evening paper, which he propped up in front of him. A minute or two later the man with whom Sarah had been in consultation regarding the menu presented himself respectfully.

"You will excuse me, sir," he begged, "but the lady opposite has asked me to give you this card. She assures me that you are an old acquaintance and she would be glad if you would take your coffee with her in the Winter Garden in half an hour's time."

Martin turned the card over speculatively, glanced across the room, and ventured upon a slight bow.

"Will you tell the lady that I shall be delighted," he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, half an hour later, Martin found himself bowing over Sarah's pudgy fingers in the retired corner of the palm court which he had chosen. Sarah looked about her with some disappointment.

"Didn't mean to advertise yourself tonight, did you?" she remarked.

"I prefer the quiet corners in a lounge of this description," he confessed. "Don't you?"

"Of course I don't," she answered. "What's the use of wearing twenty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds if you hide away in a corner with no one to see them or to know that you are wearing a French gown?"

"That's all very well for you ladies," Martin observed. "But I don't think anyone would recognize where my trousers came from or who built my coat, and, as you see, my signet-ring is the only jewellery I can display."

"You men are so selfish," she remarked, settling herself upon the settee, her full skirt flowing about her with certainly the right amount of fashionable negligence.

"What did you think when you got my card, and who are you, please?"

"You said you remembered me."

"I do, but I have forgotten where we met."

"Perhaps if you remembered," he said, "you would not have invited me."

She leaned a little forward.

"I know whom you remind me of, anyway," she acknowledged, staring hard at him. "You have grown better-looking and you carry yourself better. But you remind me tremendously of a policeman who once nearly took me into custody."

"Quite right," he assured her. "I have changed my name since then, though. I was P. C. Campbell and I was called in after a man had been shot in your flat."

"What a memory!" she murmured.

"It was almost my last case before I left the Force," he went on. "A very interesting one, too."

"It was perfectly awful," she declared. "Please don't let's talk of it. I can never think of that night without a shiver. Do you know that it was the murdered man who left me all these diamonds I am wearing?"

"How should I?" he asked.

"He was rich and he was generous, was David Culpepper," she went on with an affected sigh. "We were to have been married. However, I don't want to talk about him now, no more than you do. There are plenty of other things of interest in the world."

"Was Culpepper as much in love with you as Lebur?" he asked.

"They were all in love with me, or said they were, in those days," she giggled. "I can't say that I found you very sympathetic, though."

"A policeman has to keep his feelings under control," Martin reminded her. "There was a dead man lying almost across your mat and I wasn't at all sure that you weren't the person who had shot him."

"Ugh! I never let off a gun in my life. Besides, why should I shoot a man who was madly in love with me?"

"No reason that I know of," he admitted. "But I didn't see what you were doing with a man's revolver in your rooms if you didn't know how to use it."

"It was Richard Lebur himself made me take it," she confided. "He knew how crazy some of those men used to get. The worst of having friends who are too affectionate!"

"I've had no experience in that direction," Martin observed.

"Well, Richard Lebur knew that I didn't shoot David Culpepper, at any rate," she observed. "I don't suppose anyone could ever have thought that I would do such a thing. If so, it was just as well that Richard pleaded guilty."

"I often wondered what made him change his plea," Martin reflected.

"Changed it to save his neck," she declared. "There was never any doubt about that. He had a way with him, Richard Lebur, but he was a white-livered creature—he had no courage."

"He had the courage to break out of Dartmoor, anyhow," Martin reminded her.

"He—he what?" she gasped.

Martin suddenly remembered that it was quite likely that she had not noticed the name of the escaped convict which had appeared in the papers. He held out the brandy he had ordered. She took a long sip from the glass he pressed to her lips.

"When did he break out?" she faltered.

Her face was ghastly under its coating of rouge. Despite himself he was sorry for her.

"Several days ago," he confided. "He is still at liberty."

"Why haven't they caught him?" she demanded.

"I suppose they have done their best," he answered. "Lebur must have had friends who have been helping him. His father is a rich man, you know, and he would have plenty of opportunity of getting money."

"It isn't money he would be looking for when he got out," she said breathlessly. "It's me."

"I had the same thought when I saw you sitting there tonight," he replied. "I don't suppose he would be too happy to walk in just now, would he, and see you wearing all David Culpepper's diamonds and staying at a hotel like this?"

"Let's go up to my sitting-room," she proposed, rising to her feet. "I am frightened."

"Forgive me, but I think that would be a little worse," he objected, shaking his head. "If he succeeded in tracing you down here, he would also succeed in finding out what name you were living under. I should advise you in a few minutes to make your way to your own room and stay there for a time. You have a companion who looks an intelligent girl. She had better warn the management against letting strange visitors know that you are here."

"You will stand by me, anyhow, if he forces his way in?" she demanded. "You know that the murder was nothing to do with me. You were there."

"I was not there when the murder was committed," he reminded her. "To this day I have not the faintest idea who killed David Culpepper."

"It was Richard Lebur," she almost shrieked. "Why, everyone knew that he was guilty. If he hadn't changed his plea and had a soft-hearted judge, he would have been hanged."

"Do please listen to me for a moment, Mrs. Culpepper, if that is your present name," he begged.

"I have to call myself something," she declared truculently. "He was more my husband than anyone. He left me some of his money and all his jewels. Why shouldn't I take his name? I should think it would please him."

"It's of no consequence to me," he assured her, "whose name you take."

"Well, the case is over and done with, isn't it?" she asked. "He was found guilty. It can't be opened again and they can't take these jewels away from me."

"They certainly can't do that," he admitted. "The man left them to you in his will and they were certainly his to leave. Now, please calm yourself. I have seen one or two people glance over in our direction and, the name of the escaped convict having been on the placards, people might naturally associate you with him. You have not sold any of the jewels I see, then?"

"Why should I?" she demanded angrily. "I have plenty of money of my own."

"David Culpepper didn't leave much," Martin remarked.

"How do you know he didn't give me some before he died?" she asked.

"That's quite true," Martin acknowledged, "and it isn't my business, anyway. But, listen, if you will, to me for a moment. I have known old Simon Lebur ever since I was a boy, and I like him. I can't help thinking that, if his son gets in touch with him, they will do their best to get this case reopened."

"How can they?" she demanded. "It was properly tried in court and Richard Lebur pleaded 'Guilty.' He can't take that back."

"I don't suppose he can," Martin admitted. "But there's just one thing I would like to ask you, since the subject has come up—do you yourself believe that Richard Lebur killed Culpepper?"

"Who else could it have been?" she demanded. "You aren't going to suggest that it was I?"

"Not likely," he answered. "But can you think of anyone else who might possibly have been guilty?"

"Not a soul," was the firm rejoinder. "There was no one else in the flat."

"The hall-porter, who was absent from his office when he should have been there, was a very unconvincing witness," Martin observed. "He admitted having been across at the public-house when he ought to have been on duty and at the inquest he got completely confused."

"Nothing to do with me," the woman replied. "So long as I lived at Byron Court there were bound to be men on the stairs. Someone might have been waiting for me and never come up. I can't be responsible for them. There was no one else came to my rooms. That I have sworn to in court, though I was afraid it would mean Richard Lebur being hung. I was too frightened that someone might try to put it on me to tell anything but the truth that time."

"Well, anyhow, I won't bother you with any more questions," Martin promised. "So far as you are concerned, I don't suppose anyone else ever will. But I must warn you that Richard Lebur is at liberty. You admitted in your evidence that he was furiously jealous and madly in love with you. If he tries to find you, he might very easily succeed. This is a well-known place. If I were you, I should lock myself up and then get across to the Continent for a few days. Go to Paris or Monte Carlo. It's good advice. Remember, if he found you out down here, he would not be able to get a passport to follow you abroad."

"What's that? Tell me that again," she begged.

"It's just as I said it," Martin told her. "Lebur has no passport, naturally, and he couldn't possibly apply for one. You hire a car to take you to Dover and catch the midnight boat to Calais and you will be safe."

"Come with me," she begged. "I will give you anything in the world you want. My diamond necklace—anything. I am afraid to go alone to a strange country. I have always been like that, and I need a man with me. You don't look married—are you?"

"No, I'm not married," Martin assured her. "But I'm next door to it and I could not possibly do as you ask. I have given you good advice. Everyone speaks a little English in France nowadays. You will have to go back to your own name to get your own passport, but that will be all the better. Your companion looks a sensible girl. She will be able to help you."

"She speaks French!" the woman almost screamed. "My God, I had forgotten all about her."

"You go and talk it over with her at once," Martin begged.

She caught at his hands. They were almost alone in the Winter Garden. The old glint was back again in her eyes.

"I would rather have a man," she said wistfully. "You look so strong and capable. I have plenty of money. It won't cost you anything. Come with me."

"What you are asking is quite impossible," he answered. "I am on my way to London now."

"You have a suite here; the maître d'hôtel told me so."

"But I have changed my mind. Do just as I have suggested and you will be safe from any trouble with Lebur. If he comes here and finds you alone with me, you will be asking for it. You see, I am being brutal."

A quick turn on his heel and he was free from her partly attempted embrace. He looked back at her from the entrance and waved his hand. Three minutes later he was in his room with the door locked.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the placid dignity which he had chosen as his middle-age poise, Inspector Charlesworth rose from his comfortable seat at a corner table in the Restaurant St. Germain to greet his host.

"Began to think you weren't coming, Martin," he observed. "Distinctly against discipline for you even to telephone me. I told you I was not having any more of that damned Lebur case."

"You were not serious?" Martin suggested. "You are really as much interested in the case as I am, and directly I read of Lebur's escape, I knew that we should be coming together again before long."

"I have not reopened it," the Inspector reminded his host. "You wrote and asked me to dine here in a friendly way."



"Well, here I am. It's a good place to dine and we have other things to talk about if necessary," Martin reminded him. "As to my being ten minutes late, I apologize. You will understand why when you have heard my little narrative."

"It's the Lebur case, then," the Inspector exclaimed. "By Jove, you are persistent, at any rate!"

"So were you in your younger days," Martin reminded him. "Now then, Inspector, out with it! Shall it be another of the same or will you try one of my own?"

"Anything sooner than another of the same," the Inspector declared with emphasis. "I'd rather be poisoned more pleasantly."

Martin tore a page from his pocket-book and scribbled a few lines upon it. He then sent for the barman.

"Two of these, James," he told him. "Well shaken and, if lemons are out of fashion, two teaspoonfuls of lime juice."

"Right away, sir," the man promised.

"To give you an appetite for your drink," Martin proposed, "I will ask you a conundrum. Who shot David Culpepper?"

"Why, the woman, of course," the Inspector declared. "I have gone into it thoroughly since you disappeared. Culpepper had left her quite a good deal of money and all his first wife's jewels, which everyone knows were well worth having. Of course, she shot him—who would not for jewels worth one hundred thousand pounds?"

"How did she get a pair of gloves on and off in the time?" Martin asked. "You did the searching yourself. You admitted that there were no gloves she could have worn anywhere about the place. Lebur's fingerprints were as clear as possible."

"I am disappointed in you, Martin," the Inspector sighed.

"Well, tell me what you think of this drink that is coming. It's supposed to have a stimulating effect on the brain."

The Inspector drank his cocktail at a gulp.

"It's given mine a jog," he admitted. "I am perfectly convinced that you know who did it, but it was not Sarah Culpepper, as they tell me she calls herself now. But if I dine with you every night for a month, you won't tell me who did it."

Martin held out his hand.

"I shake hands with you, Inspector," he declared, "because you are the nearest man I can find to the man who gave me the recipe for that cocktail. You may have missed a point or two, but I believe if I left you alone you would arrive at precisely where I have arrived."

"Your appreciation overwhelms me," the other acknowledged. "Get to work and order dinner. I have four men out tonight and I want their reports before I get home."

Martin called the maître d'hôtel—suave, dark, with shiny black hair and a knowing twinkle in his eyes. They conferred together for a minute or two, after which the waiter retired. The flames stole higher round the bars of the grill and the first stages of a very pleasant little meal were set in being. A repetition of the secret *apéritif* was followed by an order for a bottle of Beaujolais, slightly warmed, to be ready with the *poussin*.

"I wonder if by chance you saw anything of Lebur on his leave of absence?" Charlesworth enquired with an almost lamblike meekness.

"If I did, Inspector, I should not burden you with the knowledge," was the quiet reply.

The Inspector crossed two fingers. Martin nodded in understanding.

"I did, and I was sorry for the poor devil," Martin confessed. "He looked ill and tired and weary of life. I only hope he gets what he broke loose for."

"The heroine of the tragedy?" Charlesworth queried.

"Two yeses," Martin assented. "He had his chance, at any rate—whether he found it worth while, I don't know. One is generally disappointed in these big efforts, and Sarah Culpepper, as you may have heard, Inspector, was very much playing the grande dame."

"Seen her yourself?" the Inspector asked once more.

"Inquisitive old devil, aren't you? Yes, I have seen her. She didn't send her love to you, if that is what you are worrying about."

"Were you present at the happy reunion?"

"There or thereabouts," Martin admitted. "Upon my word, there is no man I have hated worse, but I was almost sorry for Richard Lebur. If he's been sitting chopping sticks on Dartmoor all these years with only one desire in his body and that to pass the rest of his days with this woman, I am sorry for him. I forget who it was who said so—one of our filthy decadents, of course—but it very nearly got into the *Select Book of Verse* for the year. 'The Harlot of Hampstead Hill,' it was called—"

"Don't tell me any more," Charlesworth begged. "I hate that sort of muck. The only prison poem I have ever been able to read was 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol.'"

"That was an epic," Martin observed. "A really great piece of work. An extract from that has appeared just lately in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Let's forget this stuff. Charlesworth, tell me—you can afford to—I am not asking who is on the job—I have a pretty good idea—but are you going to lay your hands on Lebur?"

"Not if I can help it," the Inspector confided. "But, remember, we have the prison authorities to bear in mind, and it's a crushing blow to them if they let a prisoner get away and he is not trapped and brought back again. Otherwise, so far as I am personally concerned, I'd be glad to know that he was clean out of it."

"And why?"

"Because I don't believe he was guilty. He wasn't a pleasant character. I have always understood that his domestic relations were unhappy. I have heard neither man nor woman say a good thing about him, but I

don't think he killed David Culpepper. He had the pluck to break out of prison and without bloodshed, without mauling a warder about, or anything of that sort. He can never re-establish his life here in England, and I hope he finds his way somewhere where he can start again, and takes the woman with him."

"The object of our little dinner is achieved so far as I am concerned. I don't mind confessing," Martin went on, "that there was a time, not long ago, when I should have liked him out of the way for other reasons. But it's too late to hope for that. Let your men go easy on him, Charlesworth, and I will stand you one of those Lord-Mayor-looking Larranagas."

"I will smoke it for you," Charlesworth promised.

Just at that moment a woman, expensively dressed in the prevailing mode, that of half evening dress, with a few too many diamonds and a little too much swagger, sailed into the place, followed a yard or two behind by the subject of their conversation and the cause of their tête-à-tête dinner.

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"Did you pay the bill?" Inspector Charlesworth asked, choking in the back seat of the taxi-cab a few seconds later.

"I didn't. Nor did I dispense a single tip," Martin confessed. "Notwithstanding those slight drawbacks, it was a brilliant getaway, Inspector. I think the chef was the only one who really saw us go down his passage and I am perfectly certain that the beautiful Sarah hadn't an idea who we were. She was far too occupied in ogling the gigolo with the violin. Lebur, fortunately, has almost lost his sight, working out of doors in the clear, hard light of Dartmoor. Monsieur Degroutte, the manager, will have one on us for the rest of his life—one high official of Scotland Yard and another retired detective bolting from his place like rabbits to avoid a famous criminal!"

"Degroutte must keep his mouth shut about it," Charlesworth muttered.

"Hope you will close his place for him if he doesn't," was Martin's grim response.

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## CHAPTER XIV

Martin looked across the table at his companion with an air of astonishment. He had been sharing a simple meal with Pamela in the dining-room of her flat. The window which looked over the gardens and down to the River was open and a gentle, very softly blowing breeze was stealing in.

"Martin," she said suddenly, "I am going to ask you something ridiculous."

"What a joy!" he answered. "You are so far away from things ridiculous most days."

"I should like to be taken out—where do you think?"

He reflected.

"There's a new Russian Ballet."

She shook her head.

"Somewhere to dance."

"What! Just ordinary dancing?"

She nodded.

"Aren't I crazy? I haven't wanted to dance for years—tonight I do. I should like some swing music, a good floor, and an occasional waltz. Please let's go somewhere."

"My dear, you don't need to ask me." He smiled. "Nothing would give me more pleasure. I have not played golf for a week. I have been sitting in easy-chairs, being lectured by our friend the Inspector, until I am sure I have put on pounds. Is it exercise or sentiment, Pamela, which has produced this sudden desire?"

"Both," she sighed. "But I want that strange semi-Oriental, semi-Negro music. I want to move my feet differently."

He reflected.

"Any special place?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"You know I never go out at night, Martin," she said. "If I go out at all it is to play the piano to Simon Lebur or to one of Morenstein's recitals. But I should like to dance, and especially I should like to dance with you. Help yourself to cigarettes, please. Take some more coffee if you like—it is still hot. I must change my shoes and stockings. I need not change my frock, need I? I shall be all right like this at any of the restaurants or little clubs?"

He smiled quietly. She was wearing a soft grey dress with a little touch of lace at the throat, closely fitting and beautifully modelled.

"I belong to a night-club," he said. "I don't suppose you have ever been to one, Pamela?"

"I don't think that I have," she admitted. "But I may come, mayn't I?"

"Rather," he answered. "It's run by an old friend of mine. She will be very flattered."

"I go to change," Pamela announced.

Martin lit another cigarette. Pamela had been in one of her strange moods that evening. She had eaten very little and, as usual, drunk even less, but there was all the time a restlessness in her manner which seemed suddenly to have found expression in this queer desire of hers for movement. She was away for only a few minutes, and when she returned she was followed by Leida, carrying her light fur wrap. The girl greeted Martin respectfully.

"It is not for long that I have kept Madame," she said.

"It has seemed long, naturally, Leida," Martin answered. "But that was not your fault. She makes the seconds seem long when she is absent."

"Racine," Pamela murmured.

"What a memory, dear friend!"

"And what a courteous speech! You have your car?"

"Really, I think I am most devoted these days. I remember even your hatred of taxis. The young moon can find gold spots in your hair."

"If you talk like that as we dance, Martin," she smiled, as they descended the stairs, "I shall think that we are in Switzerland again. Of course, you remember that it was in Switzerland with all that wonderful, flowery setting that you began to say those delightful things to me?"

"I have never left off thinking them," he assured her.

"I wonder how it is," she said, as she took her place in the car and Leida spread the cover around them, "that, though one may think those things so often, it is not always that one feels inclined to say them? What a pity it is too late, Martin, or we could drive in the gardens at Kew!"

"Another time," he answered. "You have inspired me with the desire for movement. See how restfully my little Rolls is slipping in and out of these back streets. We shall dance like that tonight, Pamela."

She moved her arms gently, swaying a little in her place. Her right arm rested upon his shoulder.

"It distracts you, that?" she asked.

"Immeasurably," he replied. "While it stays there I could time my angle to a quarter of an inch."

"Isn't your dancing-club in rather a queer locality?" she asked, as they turned away from Regent Street.

"It's a queer place," he told her. "They do strange things there. They even tried to poison me."

"Don't let's go near the place," Pamela begged. "How can you even tell me of anything so dreadful?"

"It was not really dreadful at all," he assured her. "It was a stupid boy's blunder."

They drew up in a little square space left for parking cars, crossed the road, and entered the "Evening Star." At first it seemed to them that the place was empty; then they heard the low moaning of the violin and the sound of welcoming voices. Diana left the party of young people she was with at the bar and came forward to greet them.

"But, my dear Martin, what a stranger!" she exclaimed. "How nice of you to come at last, though, and to bring anyone so attractive!" she added, with a smile.

"This is Mrs. Lebur, Diana, whose pastels you loved so much and whose strange picture you were asking me about only last time I was here—the picture of the old man seated at the window."

"My dear," Diana exclaimed, "I am delighted! How good of you to come! I hope you have not had supper?"

"We dined a little late," Pamela admitted. "But I have a little flat that looks over the River and I live with the windows open, and I think that is why I am always hungry."

"Your usual table, when you do honour us, Martin," Diana pointed out, "is free. I always keep it empty as long as I can in case you turn up. Here comes Antoine. I believe our chef," she went on to Pamela, "would forgive me if I went down to his kitchen and insisted upon cooking one of the dishes, but Antoine, my chief maître d'hôtel, would never permit me to show a distinguished client to his table. May I come and talk to you presently, please?"

"Do," Pamela begged. "We shall be delighted. I am not very good at the new steps," she added, "and I expect Martin will want to find someone else to dance with him before long."

"Plenty of girls here tonight," Diana observed. "A good many of your favourites, too, Martin—if you have any. They call Mr. Brockenhurst 'St. Anthony' here, you know, Mrs. Lebur. He resists temptation wherever he finds it."

"If he resists it here," she replied, as they stepped on to the dancing-floor, "I think that he must be immune."

"I like your young lady friend," Pamela murmured, as they glided away. "Oh, Martin, why did I ever leave off dancing? This is wonderful!"

"One more joy come back to life," he acquiesced. "I don't care if this man calls himself the leader of a jazz band or a swing band, or anything—he has the soul of a musician. Pamela, I am loving it."

"And I," she murmured.

"You are so light," he whispered. "I could lift you from the floor and throw you up to the ceiling."

"And you feel so strong—such perfection," she said half to herself, "that I can't think honestly. Martin, I can't believe—" She stopped.

"I was not at all impatient," he reminded her, "but you didn't finish your sentence."

"I couldn't," she answered. "What fools we women are, Martin, dear. I ought to have known that this was the one thing I should have avoided."

There was a soft note of pleasant mockery in his laugh. It came back long afterwards when he led her from the floor to their table. She walked almost as though she were in a stupor. Her hand clutched at his wrist.

"It is necessary," he told her, as they gained their places, "that we order some supper."

"Anything," she begged.

"Not at all," he objected. "I have a reputation to keep up here, Pamela. They call me *a bon viveur*. By the bye, the last time I tried to eat simply here it nearly cost me my life. I ordered a ham sandwich. It turned out afterwards—although I never got the whole truth of it—that it was flavoured with strychnine."

"What a horrible story!"

"It isn't pleasant, is it?" he agreed. "Tonight I think we will have—if that suits you—a *petite demoiselle* lobster with mayonnaise, and a bottle of Piesporter."

"Delicious," she murmured.

They gave their order and she accepted a cigarette from his case.

"No wonder you leave my shabby window-seat and my dull little River so early at night, Martin!"

"It would take more than this, Pamela, to drag me away if I thought it made a great deal—a very great deal—of difference to you," he whispered.

Her hand crept out to his across the table. She looked fearlessly into his eyes and the light that shone in hers was rather like the light that blazes from the star in a star opal.

"You should know, Martin," she said quietly.

The secretary, a ponderous, slow-moving person, came out from his office, crossed the floor—deserted for a few minutes by the dancing crowd—and bowed a greeting to Martin at his table.

"You read the report of our case, Mr. Brockenhurst?" he enquired.

Martin nodded.

"An extraordinary affair," he remarked. "It does not seem to me that the police are particularly intelligent. They have not even found out where the strychnine came from, who was the purchaser, or who put it on the sandwich. No wonder they had to adjourn the inquest!"

"There's still no evidence on either of these points, sir," the secretary regretted. "There's not even any evidence as to whether it was known in the kitchens that the sandwiches were for you."

"Shouldn't think so," Martin observed. "I don't believe I have an enemy in the world."

"I shouldn't think so, either," the secretary agreed. "I thought you would like to know that the adjourned inquest takes place tomorrow."

Martin nodded.

"Well, I have wasted one hour on the affair already," he said. "I certainly shan't go again. I'm not even subpoenaed."

The secretary lingered for a moment.

"I suppose it is useless to ask you, sir, whether you have any ideas on the subject?" he enquired wistfully. "You have never had occasion to speak severely to any of the waiters here or anything of that sort? We have one or two Italians who are apt to be a little troublesome sometimes, and if there is any bad feeling about the place, what we want to do is to get rid of it."

Martin shook his head decisively.

"I don't remember," he remarked, "ever having had to find the slightest fault with anyone even remotely connected with the service."

The secretary bowed and took his leave. Pamela watched him with wondering eyes.

"How strange that he should come and ask you questions like that!" she observed.

"The fellow's a fool," Martin remarked. "Only one of the sandwiches was poisoned at all, and the chef who cut them didn't know for whom they were ordered."

"But they were for you?" she persisted.

He nodded.

"Well, as a matter of fact, they were," he admitted. "I didn't feel hungry but I wanted something, so I ordered ham sandwiches. Don't let's think anything more about it, Pamela, or you won't have any appetite for your lobster."

She laughed gaily. The waiter had already wheeled up a service table and was dissecting a small lobster. Whilst they were being served with the mayonnaise the chef himself crossed the floor and bowed to Martin.

"I appreciate very much your confidence, Mr. Brockenhurst, in paying us another visit," he said. "We have sent away half of our staff because of that last unfortunate affair and we have a new overseer of the kitchen specially appointed. Your present order—I took the young lobster myself from the pan, where he was still alive. I prepared him and I mixed the mayonnaise myself. Having done that, I placed him on the dish and I stood at the door till he was wheeled to your table. Madame and Monsieur need not have the slightest anxiety."

They both assured him that they had none at all and he took his leave with another series of profound bows. The lobster was excellent, the wine was marvellous.

"Why don't we do this every night?" Martin asked.

"I love the place, Martin. Do you think they would make me a member?"

"You are one from this moment," he answered. "It shall be my Whitsuntide present to you."

They danced until the small hours, then Diana came back to their table and they talked for some time. The moon shone down upon them and they drove slowly home at two o'clock in the morning.

"Stop at the studio, please," Pamela begged, as they turned into her street.

"My dear—" he began.

He stopped suddenly because he knew that the doors to the flat itself would be locked. He felt her arm, which had been resting on his sleeve, very slowly withdrawn. She lifted her eyes to his as he drew up outside the green door.

"I—I left something here," she said. "You don't mind coming up with me while I look for it? To tell you the truth, I am rather afraid to go in alone."



"Of course I don't mind," he answered, wondering why his hand which was clutching the brake was shaking. "I shouldn't dream of letting you mount the stairs alone, Pamela."

She passed him the key. He opened the door and closed it behind them. They were in pitch darkness. Then she turned on a single light and they stumbled up the stairs into the studio—grey and ghostly it seemed with the single light which was the only illumination in the place. Suddenly he felt her arms around his neck. Her warm lips were close to his cheek, whispering into his ear.

"Martin, I have been thinking—I have been thinking. I believe I am a deadly selfish woman."

"Why?" he asked, struggling to control his voice and striving to look away into the dark, lonely stretches of the room.

"Those papers," she whispered. "They meant so much to you."

"Perhaps they did. I forgot!"

"I want to know how much. To me they meant nothing. You know what our Creed says. You will understand when I say that to me they meant nothing—but you, Martin, to you they meant everything."

He was suddenly conscious of the straining of her arms. The vibration in her voice held something new. His pulses were beating fast. They seemed full of the strangest and most wonderful music. For a single moment he hesitated. Then the fury of indecision passed.

"Pamela," he begged, "will you please wait for forty-eight hours before you judge me?"

He felt the change as she lowered her eyes.

"I am your slave, Martin," she said. "What is it you desire?"

"You first, you more than anything in life."

"But in your own way only?" she interrupted.

He shook his head.

"Your promise is to be that you suspend your judgment," he reminded her. "Will you give me tomorrow and the next day?"

"I have offered you my life," she reminded him.

"I shall be here," he told her, "at nine o'clock in the morning. You will need a suit-case. We shall be away for the two days."

She raised her eyes once more. He felt the fire of them. It was as though she was striving to grope into the back of his brain.

"At half-past nine," she said quietly, "I shall be here with a suit-case, ready to obey your orders."

## CHAPTER XV

Pamela that next morning might have been the heroine of that almost forgotten "Spenserian" poem of Springtime—"The Gay Lady of Surprise." She opened the door to Martin herself, followed by Leida, carrying her modern suit-case. She walked down the stairs, her hands extended, her eyes dancing, colour on her cheeks—the very spirit of happiness in her walk.

"Confess now that I am an amazement, Martin," she cried, as she took his hands and, leaning over, kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Here I am, with no lines under my eyes, no signs of a sleepless night. You should tell me, indeed, that I am the very holiday lady of your dreams."

"Of course," he grumbled lightly, "if you are going to steal all my favourite phrases and snatch the words from the lips of my favourite poets, you will have to be content with a dumb lover."

"I should be content with you for my lover, dear Martin," she assured him, "however dumb you might be. The vital question is this. Is this forth-coming adventure to be a pilgrimage, a picnic, or an expedition?"

"A pilgrimage," he answered.

"Well, then, for this pilgrimage, shall I bring Leida? I have one evening frock, no jewellery, and nothing that I possess is beyond my own manipulation. My hair is a little troublesome sometimes after a long motor journey, but, with a very little amateur help, no doubt I can deal with it."

"Rely, then," he begged, smiling, "upon the amateur help. I don't think that, unless you would be more comfortable with her, we need Leida."

Pamela waved her hand in joyous dismissal. Leida was obviously disappointed.

"If your maid will put your dressing-case in the dicky behind," he suggested, "you might perhaps like to sit with me. You see, I am not bringing a chauffeur myself."

"I could tolerate the idea with great pleasure," she assented. "You are very pleasant to sit next to, Martin."

"I don't talk much when I am driving," he reminded her.

"The silence of the one man," she rejoined, "is much better than the conversation of all others. I shall sit here and watch those fine fingers of yours on the wheel and be happy. Why don't you wear gloves, Martin?"

He thrust his hands into his pocket, drew out a pair of dark leather gloves and put them on.

"I have a fancy that my touch on the wheel is surer with only the fingers there," he told her. "But I have no strong feelings about it."

She laughed up at him.

"A stray hand might perhaps be a little mischievous," she said. "Never mind. I promise to behave."

They drove off, leaving Leida disconsolate on the pavement.

"My dear, you are positively disgraceful in your innuendoes this morning," Martin told her. "You have brought trouble upon your own head. As soon as we have reached the country lanes, I shall remove my left-hand glove—I shall not even apologize. But to tell you the truth, I drive much better with one hand."

"We are going into the country, then?" she asked cheerfully.

"Indeed we are," he assured her. "Shall I tell you where?"

"No!" she cried. "You must not think of such a thing. I don't wish to know. I want to sit here and see the bricks and mortar fly past, and close my eyes and open them again presently and see hedges and trees all hurrying by me, and presently, perhaps, open fields—perhaps woods, it might even in time be the sea. I don't like slow transitions. I like to pass from one stage to another. That is why I think a soldier's death is such a fine thing. London is beautiful," she went on, leaning a little farther back in her seat, "but its curse are its suburbs. It's so long before you get anywhere. You have to watch the slow decline in the quality of the streets, and the shops, and the passers-by, and the architecture of the houses and everything else. Martin, I am so happy."

They were in a broad road and he turned to smile at her. "Pamela," he told her, "you are splendid."

"I would rather you called me that than anything," she confessed. "My father used to tell me that I had courage. I think I have internal courage, at any rate."

"The greatest revolutions that tear the world to pieces are nothing, sometimes, but the tempests inside them," he reminded her.

"With you I am always happy." She leaned her head against his shoulder and took his hand in hers. "As a harbinger of happiness you never lose your way, do you? Even on those Swiss mountain roads you always took me where the views were the most wonderful and the flowers the most perfect.... Am I chattering too much, Martin? I can't tell you why—there is quiet joy in my heart today. To be with you is such—it isn't really rest, because you are such a disturbing person, but you bring joy with you. I feel—I can't tell you why—the most flattering, the most amazing confidence of happiness when we are together. We are travelling on the road which has few sign-posts but one amazing goal. We are travelling towards happiness."

They passed into the richer soil and colouring of the Western Counties. There had to be a pause to pick cowslips, another to strip a tiny spinney of its belated growth of bluebells, and yet another to cut a handful of deep yellow marigolds growing by a stream. This time she stepped once more lightly up into the road, passed through a gate and leaned once more over the stream for a moment, drew off her gloves, and cooled her fingers in the clear waters. Exactly overhead a lark was singing. She came back to the car, humming lightly a fragment of classical opera.

"Martin," she invited, moving quite close to him, "please kiss me at once. This morning you are a neglectful lover and I am more than usually feeling the need for affection. How much farther do we go before lunch?"

He glanced at his watch and leaned back a little. The breeze was shaking the quaker grasses in the meadow by their side. He drew a long breath as he threw his hat down and drank in the flower-scented air.

"There are wild roses somewhere quite near," she told him. "I wish that I could find them. There's no perfume in the world so sweet."

They moved slowly on.

"About luncheon," she persisted. "I am greedy."

"The question of lunch presents serious problems," he confided, as they turned to face a most appalling hill. "There's an old-fashioned hotel about twenty miles farther on, but my housekeeper, who is always inclined to think you are about to starve if you take an excursion into the country, has packed a very simple basket."

"How divine!" Pamela cried. "Where is the basket, Martin? Please let me look at it!"

"You can just reach it, I think," he said. "It's in the hood there. Don't try to lift it out, though. When we get to the top of this hill we will pause and consider the situation."

"I love old-fashioned hotels," Pamela confided, "but I love picnic baskets more."

They glided easily to the top of the hill. Martin brought the car to a standstill in the shade of a grove of trees, and reached for the luncheon basket, which he placed on the seat between them for examination. Pamela didn't hesitate. She threw her hands up with joy.

"The luncheon basket, if you please," she begged. "Why, chicken and ham, salad, hard-boiled eggs—beautiful brown ones, too—cheese and some fruit! What a spoilt man you must be, Martin!"

"There is also this," he announced, drawing a familiar-looking thermos from its particular resting-place.

"Terrible," she sighed. "I shall never want to go back to the simple life again."

They drank cocktails, afterwards ate chicken and ham, and Pamela mixed the salad. There was a bottle of Pouilly '34, for which Martin borrowed a block or two of the ice from the cocktail shaker. They talked of past picnics; of Italy and Switzerland, where to eat out of doors was almost a religion; and they decided that wherever they took up their permanent abode—single or apart, as Pamela stipulated, with a spice of mischief in her eyes—they would lunch under no other roof than the ceiling of the sky. Then the basket was slowly repacked, they lit cigarettes and leaned back in their places.

"In an hour's time," Martin confided, "we shall see the sea. Long before that, we shall smell it."

"Wonderful," she murmured. "Will that be the end of our pilgrimage, Martin? Is this a little visit to the sea-side?"

"No," he answered. "Very soon we shall come upon an old-fashioned house, we shall turn up the avenue, drive to the front door, and find that we are expected."

"Your house?" she asked eagerly.

"Not altogether," he replied. "A Brockenhurst has lived there for many generations. A Brockenhurst is living there now—my father. We are going to pay him a visit."

"Martin, whatever will he think of my Viennese frock?" she exclaimed. "It's perfectly all right—it came from the right people and all that—but I am afraid it isn't the English idea of a picnic outfit altogether."

"You need not bother about that, dear," he told her. "My father has been a great traveller and he is a person who understands most people and their ways of life. He is old-fashioned in a sense, but I am sure there is nothing you could do or say or wear of which he would not approve, because he is a person of great taste and he and I, we have this much affinity, we like the same people."

"You dear," she smiled. "Tell me why we are going down to see him."

"There is a very special reason, Pamela," he replied. "I think you will have guessed it before I have need to tell you—but you will see. If you have not guessed, I will tell you on the way back. You will understand."

She clutched at his hand.

"Martin," she begged, "am I being introduced as your fiancée?"

"You certainly are," he told her. "Please let the rest of the situation develop itself."

She leaned back, her eyes half closed.

"I feel so ridiculously happy," she murmured. "There's one thing, Martin. You told me, almost the only time you mentioned your father, that he was a little old-fashioned. What will he think of our coming down like this?"

"My dear," Martin told her, "he is one of those misguided individuals who, besides having a great affection for me, believes that I can do no wrong."

"I see," she reflected quietly.

"You will like him, I am sure," he went on, "and my father will most certainly like you. He has always had a great penchant, I must tell you, for Italian and French women. You can practise your gift for languages on him if you like. He speaks both perfectly."

"Oh, let's start away," she begged. "I want to see him. What time are we expected?"

"About four. My father has a very short siesta which will be over long before we get there, and, if I know anything of him, he will be strolling about in the grounds or the park, where he can get a view of the road, waiting for us."

"We ought to start at once," she declared.

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The moorlands, suggestive of flaming gorse and sweet-scented heather; more beautiful country; a field of hay-makers; the aromatic perfume everywhere of sun-baked grass; then a wood intersected with many well-kept drives cut through it; finally, a village with white stone and plaster and deep, cool, thatched roofs—a village with a quaint old manor-house standing back from the road; a church; cottages—then, two beautiful lodges where Martin slowed up.

A woman held the gates open—a man, in game-keeper's clothes, stood by her side. Martin, having brought the car to a standstill, leaned out and shook hands with them both.

"Good afternoon, Crockham," he said. "Mrs. Crockham, you are looking younger than ever! How's his Lordship?"

The man touched his hat respectfully.

"Wonderful, sir," the man answered. "He insisted on walking round with me a few days ago to see how the young birds were coming on, and, I give you my word, sir, he walked like a young man."

"Capital!" Martin announced. "This young lady, Mrs. Crockham, is a very great friend of mine. She has not seen much of English country life, so we shall be coming round to see you before so very long. We will come and have a look at the young birds ourselves at feeding-time. Meanwhile, I'm afraid we must be getting on."

Mrs. Crockham's curtsy belonged to times gone by. Crockham removed his hat and stood a dumb, fine survival of feudal times. Martin restarted the car and they passed into a typical, undulating park, studded everywhere with oak and beech trees and ending in a stately avenue of elms. There were deer everywhere, lying under the trees and in the park's farthest corner. Pamela became very silent. When they passed through the final gates and entered the narrower avenue she leaned a little nearer to her companion.

"Is this really your home, Martin?" she asked in almost an awed whisper.

"This is Brockenhurst Park," he told her. "I hope that you will like it, Pamela. That is my father upon the steps."

The mansion had come almost suddenly into view—a large, majestic-looking edifice only mellowed with time, with wonderful chimneys and windows, and half a dozen lawns with deep, velvety green turf dropping away down to the home woods. A little group of people was standing in the shadow of the great entrance. Martin slackened his speed as they turned into the last curve of the avenue.

"You will recognize my father, I think, Pamela," Martin said. "He is in front, in the grey tweeds, leaning a little on his stick. That is Henderson, the butler, standing just behind, and Mrs. Henderson, the housekeeper, in the background there. I think you will like them all, Pamela. They are rather dear people. I never come to see them without wondering how I have the heart to stay away from them for so long."

He waved his hand once more as they drew up before the steps. Martin's father—tall, dignified, white-haired, and with Martin's smile upon his lips—himself stretched out his hand and helped Pamela to alight.

"Welcome to Brockenhurst, my dear!" he said pleasantly. "Pamela, isn't it? Well, you are very welcome. And Martin! It is good to see you here. My dear boy, how well you are looking! I shall begin to hope that this 'wanderlust' of yours is dwindling, and, if so, I shall be more than ever grateful to Pamela—I am right, my dear, am I not? It is 'Pamela'?"

"It is indeed," she answered. "It makes me very proud that you should remember and call me by it. I think your house is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

"That is good to hear," he declared, "because my son tells me that you, too, have been a great traveller. This is my dear friend and butler, Henderson, who has been with the family sixty years, and his wife who, although she looks quite a young woman still, has been with us very nearly as long. She would like to take you and show you your rooms, I am sure. Afterwards there will be tea in the Great Hall which we are opening in your honour."

"You are very kind, Lord Brockenhurst," she murmured.

Martin took his father's arm and they moved off across the hall. Even with Lord Brockenhurst's slight stoop, they were almost of the same height and the likeness between them was striking. There was a delighted smile upon the old man's lips.

"My dear Martin," he said, "you have indeed given me a delightful surprise! I had no idea—you were over-modest in your description—that Pamela was so charming. Of Italian birth you told me? I could have sworn it."

"An Orsini," Martin replied. "She is devoted to her art, though, and, unless there is some necessity for it, she never uses her title. She has not had a happy life, Father—I shall tell you all about it some day—but she is good, and I know that you will be fond of her."

"Have no fear, Martin," his father begged. "For a simple gentleman who has lived so much on his own, I claim always that I have the one great gift of character divining. Besides, I trust you, too, Martin. You bring her to me, and I find her from the first moment a daughter whom I shall love."

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## CHAPTER XVI

It was after tea had been served that the hour of Pamela's ordeal arrived. Lord Brockenhurst, at whose right hand Pamela had sat, and who had succeeded without the slightest difficulty in keeping her entirely at her ease, opened the proceedings quite graciously.

"I think, my dear," he suggested, "it might be of special interest to you to become personally acquainted with the lives and doings of some of the more illustrious members of the family which is hoping some day, and before very long, to welcome you into their midst."

It was rather a formal speech, but it was spoken with so much gentle restraint and without the slightest touch of more than honourable pride, that Pamela answered almost eagerly.

"The picture gallery, Lord Brockenhurst! I should love to see it!"

Lord Brockenhurst touched the bell at his side and gave a few brief orders. First Henderson arrived with a long white wand, shaped like a fishing rod, which could be lengthened or shortened at will. The secretary of the household followed, a studious-looking youth, Maurice Brockenhurst, not long down from Oxford. Martin, his father, and Pamela completed the little party, and as they stepped on to the shining floor, Lord Brockenhurst presented Pamela with an exquisitely carved white ivory stick, rubber-shod, and with a beautifully fashioned head.

"You may find our expedition a little tiring," he said. "My dear wife and my grandmother used both in their turn to carry it when they went round to call upon their ancestors. We don't often," he added, with his quiet smile, "make a formal occasion of this. We have many sightseers who come to see the pictures—our few Romneys, for instance, are famous, and our Reynolds you have, of course, heard about—but we have certain days set apart for showing those. This is a more intimate and, to us, a more pleasant occasion."

"I feel very honoured," Pamela assured him sweetly. "It will give me very much pleasure."

"You, with your knowledge of Art and the great painters of the Renaissance, will, I think, find a special interest in our family collection, Pamela," he said kindly. "I am getting an old man and it is a tour which I do not often make, but I am coming myself, as you see, and I shall introduce you myself to one or two of the Brockenhursts of the past. For instance, over that farther door which leads into the banqueting-hall is Geoffrey Brockenhurst, who departed to the Holy War with a troop of over one hundred of the men of Brockenhurst, was killed there, and had his remains blessed by the Pope before they were brought home. The painter was an Italian—Ferrari—of whom very little is known. But Maurice, my nephew there, will

tell you all there is to be told about him whenever you have a little time to spare. A modern Italian has written of his career and other work."

"Am I dreaming?" Pamela exclaimed. "Of course I am not—the likeness is there. Why, Lord Brockenhurst, both you and Martin have it!"

Her host patted her on the shoulder.

"It is wonderful that you, a stranger," he said, "should have recognized this. But it has been written about a great deal. For years after Geoffrey Brockenhurst's time our family seems to have turned out nothing but soldiers. During the Wars of the Roses they won great honours fighting on the side of the Lancastrians, and you see a representative of them there just in front of us. He is curiously chronicled as Robert Stephen Knight of Brockenhurst and Duke of Merioneth. If you are sufficiently interested, my dear child—and I have a fancy that you will be—Maurice will read to you from our Great Book, which we look upon as being second only to the Domesday Book, accounts of some of these lesser Brockenhursts who have still played their part in the great happenings which have befallen our country. The Clarence Brockenhurst in the scarlet robes was Lord Chief Justice at the time of King John, and the Brockenhurst, whom you see on horse-back to his right, commanded an army which fought desperately on the Royalist side in the Battle of Naseby. There are very few of our women, as you may notice, whose pictures have survived, but there is one amazing one there of Helena, Duchess of Brittany, painted by Andrea del Sarto on that ill-fated visit of his to the Court of the great French king."

"Tell me," Pamela begged, "who is the man with Martin's lips and your high forehead? He looks almost as though he could step out of his frame and greet you both, his kinsmen. In the old days they seemed to ignore in important paintings any eccentricities or distinction in feature, but this one—he must have been painted from the heart. It is life itself."

"Pamela, dear child," her host assured her, "you make me very happy when you speak with such understanding of my treasures. That was Philippe Martin, Count of St. Aumade, Earl of Brockenhurst and, as has been lately proved, fourteenth Baronet. He was the bosom friend of the first Napoleon. That portrait was finished on the eve of the Battle of Trafalgar."

Lord Brockenhurst was leaning a little heavily on his stick. He had taken Martin's right arm.

"I am being warned," the former said with a smile. "It is always one of my great days when I wander into this gallery, Pamela, and great days are fatiguing when one approaches my age. The remaining pictures you see there—one is a Romney—then there's a de Laszlo and a Sargent, of more modern days, and finally three Lawrences, which you must see. Meanwhile, bear with an old man's humours and come and sit with me at the window in my room."

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The little party broke up. Martin remained with the secretary and presently started off for the steward's offices. Pamela walked by Lord Brockenhurst's side into a smaller apartment which he called his den. It was a stately-looking, octagonally-shaped annex of the library. The walls were lined with books and the long windows opened out on a terrace. Brockenhurst subsided into his favourite easy-chair, drawn up to the window, and then busied himself seeing that Pamela was comfortably ensconced by his side. Stretching away before her was a marvellous vale of fruitful country—pastures and woodland, stretching to the blue horizon, with nothing more disturbing to break their outline than the quiet hamlets on the estate and a few larger villages.



"And now, my dear child," he said, "when Mrs. Henderson has shown you over the house—we have some beautiful tapestries which I know you will like—you will have a fair idea then of what Brockenhurst is like."

"It is far more beautiful than I had imagined," Pamela said with gentle enthusiasm. "Nothing that Martin has ever said to me about it seems adequate."

"I am glad you find it beautiful," was the quietly tremulous reply. "To me it has become, during my later years, a sort of heaven upon earth. I am hoping that someday you and Martin may look upon it like that and—if I may suggest such a thing—also your children."

"Will you be glad for me to marry Martin?" she asked, moved. "I love him so much."

"My dear," he assured her, with a deep earnestness in his haunting voice, "you are just the sort of woman I have always felt that I would love to have him marry. Every Brockenhurst has had in his blood a spirit of adventure. That is why the men of our race have travelled so far and have fought in so many different countries. What I am proud of—more proud than I can tell you, perhaps—is that no Brockenhurst has ever brought dishonour upon his name. Soldiers and sailors, lawyers, law-makers and renowned politicians, have taken their place as great landowners of a splendid country. There has never been a tarnished shield. No Brockenhurst has ever been guilty of a dishonourable action. They have lived their lives in the sight of God and of man as honourable human beings should. They have fought for their country, toiled for their country, and, when their time has come, they have gone honourably to their place amongst the immortals. They have enjoyed the possession of a great estate and the bearing of a famous name, and they have proved themselves worthy of it. My dear child, I don't suppose you can quite realize what it means to a man of my age, but this is the crucial point. I am the last of the Brockenhursts in the direct line—and Martin is my only son. If anything should happen to me or if he should make the great mistake which has brought so many of our great families down to the dust, a famous family would pass into oblivion. I love my people as I love my God, and I want to die as happily and as confidently as I have lived. Martin has lived a strange life. He tried the Army and he wearied of it. He then had the peculiar idea of becoming one of the civil protectors of his country—he actually joined the Police Force! He wearied of that. Since then he seems to me to have become a little restless. He has gifts, you know, Pamela—great gifts. He is an artist, he has travelled, and travelled intelligently. If by chance he had taken up diplomacy, he might have won a fine position. There would have been nothing to have prevented his becoming one of our leading diplomats. Well, his tastes did not lead him that way. I have been something of a philosopher all my life. I have never worried—I have preferred to see events flow on their natural course—but the one fear I have always had at the back of my mind was, not that Martin would ever commit a dishonourable action, that he would ever do anything to bring disgrace upon our name, but that he would not fully understand how, for the sake of the next generation, he must take his place amongst those great men who have gone before us. His choice of a wife has been my great anxiety. He has chosen you. Pamela, I am very pleased. I am very happy—he has chosen you and I am pleased with his choice."

She put her hand in his—if only she could have stopped the fluttering of her heart!

"Lord Brockenhurst," she said, "you—you flatter me. I love Martin. I would do all I could and, if this great thing comes to pass, I will do all I can to point out to him what I think your will would have been."

Lord Brockenhurst smiled.

"I do not think now," he said happily, "that he will need it. The only fear I have ever had is that he might not have thought sufficiently of the next generation. Somehow, with you, I have no fear. You, yourself, come of a great family historically, Pamela. Don't think that I am flattering you, but the very sight of you pleases me. There is a clearness in your eyes which gives me joy. You have the sweet, loving mouth of a

woman, but also of a just woman. You have the forehead which means wisdom. And I—far out from the world though I may seem—I know something of your art, Pamela. I was trundled out one morning from Brown's Hotel to a little show given at a small gallery by Simon Lebur, and I saw your pictures. When I knew who it was my son was bringing to see me, I was glad. Let me tell you why, Pamela. No one could have conceived and painted those pictures who had not a soul. No one can live finely and honourably without a sense of beauty. These things I thought in my mind when I looked at your work, and, as I said just now, when Martin told me that he was bringing you down to see me—for a purpose which I could not help divining—and I thought of the things I already knew about you, I was glad."

She rested her hand upon his. Her fingers caressed his.

"What I can do to make you happy, dear Father," she said, with a little break in her voice, "I will do always. Don't be afraid—I shall not fail you."

"I know that you will not," he said smiling. "I have no fear—I am quite happy. It's a great thing to be able to say, but I can say it honestly and truthfully. I am happy, Pamela, in having found you for my daughter."

There was something indescribably sweet to her in the smile, the little pressure of his fingers, and the half-closing of his fine, clear eyes.

"An old man likes to keep his weaknesses to himself," he murmured. "You will forgive me if I do what I have done for many years at this hour of the day—if I sleep lightly for a little time?"

She smiled.

"Can I do anything to make you more comfortable?" she asked, bending over him.

He shook his head. Already it seemed to her that he was asleep. She kissed him lightly upon the temples and sped away. It was not until Martin arrived a few moments later that either of them divined the truth. It was not for his afternoon's sleep alone that Lord Brockenhurst had closed his eyes—it was his happy passing into Eternity.

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## CHAPTER XVII

Once more—only this time it was some weeks later—in the full summer with its splendid sunshine and its glowing heat, surrounded by the promise of a harvest rich and plentiful, Pamela unpacked a picnic basket, very nearly at the same spot on the borders of the Great West Road. This time, however, the basket had been carefully packed with her own fingers by Mrs. Henderson, the housekeeper of Brockenhurst Park. There was a great deal more elaboration in this repast. The fine, heavy Brockenhurst silver had been freely used. The tumblers and wine-glasses, zealously protected, were of the finest glass. The chickens had been selected by the chef himself and the wines had been decanted and poured into carafes of Venetian form and beauty. The salads came from the famous Brockenhurst walled gardens and the chef himself had mixed the dressing. For the first time for many days Pamela laughed almost gaily as she handed Martin his damask napkin and a basket of green figs and peaches, resting on their own dark, cool leaves.

"Is this what you will have to live up to all your days, my dear?" she asked.

"If I do, you will," he answered briskly.

Perhaps at that moment they both of them realized that it was the first time they had approached a great subject. There was a brief silence. Martin shook the cocktails. Pamela, with the wooden spoon and fork, stirred round the contents of the salad bowl. Apparently, they both came to the decision that the moment was inopportune for serious talk. True, the larks had ceased to sing. There was a touch of relief in the heat, in the burning sunshine and the warm grip of summer which had succeeded the soft joy of the late spring. The seasons had marched on, the urge for serious conversation faded. Yet Pamela, who was a person of infinite tact, made no effort whatever to avoid the serious thoughts that sometimes obtruded themselves upon their intimate talk. Never, since the day of the funeral, which seemed to have brought half the County into the small churchyard, had they shrunk from speaking of the wonderful passing of Martin's father.

"Just where we are sitting now," Pamela said quietly, as she raised her glass and drank half of its contents, "just where we are sitting now, Martin, on our way down I was wondering how I should like your father and how he would like me, which then seemed so much more important."

"Never in the whole course of my life," Martin declared, "have I seen such an absolute and complete capitulation as his. You knew it, of course; you must have felt it. He loved you from the first moment you arrived and he gave you his hand to help you out of the car. It was a moment of great joy to me, Pamela. I don't think that I have ever been happier than when I saw the light in his eyes as he bent over towards your fingers. He said so little to me, too—even afterwards. He knew that every little action of his, every little turn of the head, every little cadence of his voice was telling me what I wanted to know."

"It is so wonderful to think of," she whispered quietly.

"Every thought one has of that day, Pamela, is like an inspiration to me. Not any part of that time will ever pass from my thoughts. It is the inspiration which will drive us both on to what must and shall happen."

"Dear, confident man," she murmured, patting his hand. "I love you in your overbearing moods. You seem to have caught a touch of that old ancestor of yours of whose face one saw so little, whose bearing, the splendid carriage of whose head even, made one feel that he was riding to the Saracens in a holy cause and with the overpowering will born in his blood. Martin, are you never afraid that you will be disappointed?"

He leaned over and kissed her. It was a joy which he felt day by day, but never for one second had there been any false pretences between them. She wiped her lips and demanded more, and the little laugh with which he yielded to her was a perfectly natural and joyous impulse.

"Pamela, my dear, I have no fear," he assured her. "The world was given us to conquer, not that we should submit to it."

"Hear how proudly he talks!" she laughed. "Martin Spencer Campbell, Eleventh Viscount Brockenhurst! So you will govern the world—you will bend its laws?"

"I will do all those things," he replied, "so long as I win the prize which in the spirit is always mine."

They ate and drank and smoked. Then they changed their places a little whilst Janien, who had followed them in a small shooting-brake, came and packed up. Late in the afternoon they drove slowly into London.

"You will come up to my studio with me, please?" Pamela begged, when they reached her block of flats. "Leida will be there, I know, but I shall not be happy unless you come with me."

"I must," he interrupted her, lightly but firmly. "We have spoken of this before, dear. Everything shall be done as we have planned."

\* \* \* \* \*

Together Pamela and Martin stood for a few minutes, looking curiously round the large room. Pamela silently lifted the sheet which concealed the picture she had been painting. She looked at it for a moment, sighed, and replaced its covering. Then she turned round and followed Martin to the communicating door where he was waiting for her. They passed into her flat and from room to room they made their way, searching, examining, suspicious of every possible place of hiding. With every movement her step grew lighter.

"Martin," she told him, as she clung to his arm, "I have no more hysterical fears. They are all gone. I don't believe for a moment that he would do me any harm, even if he were here. He has had the money he asked for. Apparently, he has succeeded in making it answer his purpose. We shall hear nothing more about Richard Lebur."

"I am not so content with that as you are, my dear," he said.

She smiled. There was not a sign of any possible dispute or disagreement in her face. More than ever in that quiet glance at her, in his appreciation of her slow, almost eager smile, he realized how completely she had given herself into his keeping. He had only to speak and she was his. But she was as sure as of her own existence that he would speak only when the time came. The time was, perhaps, impossible. He would make it possible.

"You will sleep tonight?" he asked, as they completed their search of her rooms.

"Marvellously, dear Martin," she declared. "Don't think that I haven't appreciated the splendour of Brockenhurst—I revelled in it. I was as happy there as a woman could be. Somehow or other it seems to have exorcised fear from my heart. I am back here where once I prayed for death, because fear was so horrible a thing, and I am back here with a heart as light as when I tripped up the steps for the first time in my life, aching to commence work. The ugly patch has gone, Martin—gone for ever. Soon I shall go round and see Simon. You know why?"

He shook his head.

"I shall stay and go with you, I think," he suggested.

"It is not fear that will take me," she assured him. "It is a joy. I asked him once, when I was a little afraid, about your father, Martin, and he answered me very simply but as a man as intense as he is might be, when speaking to his God. He simply said, 'Lord Brockenhurst—he is the greatest gentleman God ever made.' Really, that was one of the reasons, and because he was your father, that I had no fear. Have some tea, Martin? You told me you always loved it after motoring. Then, if you like, we will both drive round and see Simon."

"Delightful!" he agreed.

\* \* \* \* \*

They found Simon Lebur poring over a wonderful book of Florentine prints, with that marvellous date of 1477 printed in Gothic characters on the title-page. He rose a little tremulously to his feet, but they pushed him back again.

"I am very honoured," he acknowledged. "This is a great joy to me, although it is a great sorrow to have to say those few words to you, Lord Brockenhurst."

"Don't say them, Simon," Martin begged, arranging his cushions a little more carefully. "I know how you feel, and I think there was never a man for whom the whole world felt so acutely what we all feel. He was a great gentleman, Simon, and I am as proud to think of his death as I was proud of his living. He had met Pamela and he was happy. He knew that some way or other, somehow, we were coming together and the Brockenhursts would go on. He died with that happiness in his face," he murmured. "Don't think that anything could spoil it."

Simon Lebur hid his face for a moment or two. They seated themselves, one on either side of him. Martin took up the book of prints with which he was fascinated. He put it down as soon as Simon raised himself from the little seat.

"My old friend," Martin said, "Pamela and I have made a decision. We have kept to it wonderfully and it has made things very, very easy. We talk of important things without a single shiver. Tell us, is there any news of your son?"

"It is strange," Simon confided, "but there is very little news. Inspector Charlesworth has been down here and talked with me. Apparently, he too knows nothing, but—I tell you because I was not altogether satisfied—I think he knows more than he was willing to tell even me, the man's own father."

"I have read the papers every day," Martin reflected.

"He is still free?" was the quiet answer.

"The newspapers could not keep it out of their columns if he had been arrested. He is still free. They say that he has gone abroad, but no one knows—no one knows."

\* \* \* \* \*

Presently they drove back to Pamela's home. She paused before descending.

"At what time does my lord and master propose to dine?" she asked. "And where?"

"I will be candid," he replied. "I should like to dine—if it doesn't interfere with the free movements of your cook—*chez vous*. That long drive through the beautiful country has put me out of humour with restaurants. Tomorrow night we might have a picnic at my rooms and the next again, I think, somewhere in the country."

"They will love it at my place," Pamela declared. "They really have not enough to do. What time will you be round?"

"At a quarter to eight."

"What a convenient man you are," she sighed. "That was just the time I was going to suggest. I have a fancy for an hour's work. It is just the right light, or rather, it will be in half an hour's time."

They blew kisses to one another and parted. Ten minutes later Martin was shaking hands with Charlesworth in the latter's grim, bare apartment.

"Terribly sorry about your father," Charlesworth said, with that faint note of respect and sympathy in his tone which an Englishman finds it hard to avoid when he alludes to the passing of a peer. "I never had the honour of meeting him, but he seems to have been tremendously popular."

"In his younger days," Martin admitted, "my father was a well-known figure in a good many capitals, especially those where pictures are. It was a great blow, of course, Charlesworth, and thank you very much. But he died exactly as he would have wished to die—completely happy and completely resigned. You can guess what I am after, of course?"

"I can guess," the Inspector admitted. "I don't quite know whether you will consider my news good or bad, but, such as it is, you may as well know the truth. Lebur seems as though at last he had really brought off a clean escape from Dartmoor. Once or twice my men—if they are telling the truth—have been within an ace of a capture, and there was another time, as you know, when I could have taken him myself, although, for heaven's sake, don't let the Governor of Dartmoor know that. He seems to have vanished off the map, and this," the Inspector continued, after a cautious glance round the room, "notwithstanding the fact that that woman was only aching for a chance to give him away."

There was a little twinge, almost of pain, in Martin's face.

"Tell me how you know that," he asked.

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"She rang up from a call-box," he confided. "Insisted on speaking to me. Well, I went to the instrument and asked who it was. I didn't recognize her voice, but there was no doubt that she was deadly frightened. 'I am the Inspector you are asking for,' I said. 'What do you want with me?'"

"Do you still want that Dartmoor escaped criminal they are looking for?" she asked abruptly.

"Of course I do," I replied. "It is our business to want him."

"Is there any reward for his capture?" she asked.

"About the usual," I told her. "Two hundred pounds or something of that sort."

"It isn't much," she said, discontentedly.

"I knew who she was then—hateful beast of a woman."

"If you send a man across Albert Bridge and tell him to take the first gate on the left into the Park, you will find him sitting on the seventh seat, reading a newspaper. He is to wait there for me. I want someone to come there for him in an hour's time. You had better hurry things up, though. He gets very nervous sometimes."

"Someone shall be there," I promised, "before that time."

"And what about the reward?" she asked.

"You can ring me up tomorrow morning for an appointment," I told her.

"I think,' she grumbled, 'the reward ought to be more. He would kill me if he knew.'

"Well, he won't know,' I assured her."

"What did you do?" Martin asked.

"I took a taxi down there," the Inspector confided. "Got out at the gate and there he was on the seventh seat, reading the *Daily Mail*. I recognized him quite well from where I was, though. I didn't go any nearer. I had half a mind to give the lady away. It would have served her right, but I could not have faced what would certainly have happened afterwards. I got back into my taxi and came back to work. I have been in Battersea Park half a dozen times since and I have had those flats opposite searched just in case we could come across him."

"What would you do if you did come across him, Inspector?" Martin asked curiously.

"Well, I will tell you," the former replied. "Why do you think he changed his plea? Why do you think he is still in hiding? Why do you think he doesn't get away somewhere where it is safer? I will tell you what I think is the explanation of all these things. I think he is shielding someone else—that beast of a woman, most likely. I think he knows all right who killed David Culpepper, but he is keeping it to himself. Use a little common sense, my friend. If it isn't the woman he's shielding, who would it be?"

Martin opened his mouth and closed it again.

"Even if I knew, that is the one secret in my life I should feel like keeping even from you," he said.

"More fool you," the Inspector told him.

Martin rose to his feet.

"Aren't we all fools, Inspector, in one or two things?"

"Even a peer of the realm?" the Inspector asked with mild sarcasm.

Martin picked up his stick and hat.

"Even a peer of the realm, my friend," he assented. "All the same, even a fool, though, can sometimes give good advice."

"Well, what is it?" the Inspector demanded.

Martin hesitated for a moment. Then he spoke.

"If I were in your position, Charlesworth," he said, "I should feel it my duty to find out what has become of Mrs. David Culpepper."

"You think he has made away with her?"

But Martin was already half-way down the stairs.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Martin was feeling very happy when, having parked his car carefully and disposed of his hat on a hall chair, he presented himself in Pamela's little dining-room a few minutes before dinner-time.

"Good news?" she exclaimed, smiling at him from her task at the sideboard. "How pleased you look with yourself, Martin! Has everything been going well?"

"Quite well," he answered. "But I didn't know that I was showing it to that extent. I don't know that there is anything to send either of us into the seventh heaven of delight. I have seen Charlesworth. The woman—well, I always told you she was a cursed creature, only I left out the definition of her which the world in which she was brought up would have chosen. She tried to give him away and earn two hundred pounds."

"I am very sorry," Pamela said sadly.

"He found her out, it seems. They must have spent some time together. She must have felt the *ennui* coming on, or he hadn't enough money, or she wanted to break loose. One of the three—I don't know which—but she did just what a creature of that order would do. She went to a telephone kiosk, rang up the Inspector and asked whether there was any reward for the apprehension of the Dartmoor convict, Lebur. He fenced with it, but had to tell her the truth—it would probably be worth two hundred pounds to her. She told him where he would be at a certain time and rang off. He went there. True enough, the man was sitting on the seat she had indicated in Battersea Park. The Inspector had a glance at him and came away."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"It was Inspector Charlesworth, the man who shares my rather curious belief in your husband's innocence," he replied. "Anyhow, he had a peep at him and returned to Scotland Yard. When she rang up in the morning to make an appointment—hoping, I suppose, for the two hundred pounds—he lied. He said that he had passed the spot but there was no one there. He also gave the lady to understand that he wished to have nothing more to do with the affair. So that was that!"

Pamela was quite silent for several moments. In fact, she waited until she had squeezed the juice of three lemons into a proper receptacle, emptied it into a cocktail shaker, and added the requisite amount of ice, gin, and Cointreau before she spoke. Then, after indulging in a little vigorous shaking and pouring out the contents from the shaker, she asked Martin a question.

"Tell me, Martin, why have you always been so certain that my husband was innocent?"

"Well," he admitted, after a moment's thought, "that is a very reasonable thing to ask, darling, and I wonder you have not asked me before. I just am sure, but it is very hard for me to tell you why. You know my whole history. You know what my amiable profession was—that I was the police constable who was boosted into this case through the accident of his beat. You know that I was at the inquest. You know that I was at the trial. I was there during the few minutes when Sir Frederick Leversen had that short, but very agitated, conversation with him while he was still in the dock, and I was also in court when Leversen appealed to the Judge for permission for his client to alter his plea. His barrister was just as surprised as the rest of the court, the Judge, and I were, but the thing was done. The Judge did not hesitate, but granted the plea. I was in court when Lebur staggered away and was taken down to his cell. I was there when he was brought up and sentenced to penal servitude for life. I was there when he swung round and cried out, so that every person in court could hear him—'It's a lie I have told. I did not murder Culpepper—I am not guilty!' He was waved away. The legal part of the assembly seemed a little shocked, but the thing was



over. His revised plea had been accepted. He had pleaded 'Guilty' and he was sentenced to penal servitude for life."

"I am not sure, Martin," she declared, "that you have not mistaken your profession. I love the rise and fall of your voice sometimes when you are talking to me, sometimes when you are whispering to me, often when there is no one in the world there to whom it can make any difference, and I adore it when you are reading poetry. When you use your voice as you did just then, I find it curiously and thrillingly dramatic. As a barrister or an actor, Martin, you would have been a very famous man."

"I am a famous man now," he declared. "I am the future husband of the Princess Pamela Orsini."

She permitted herself a little grimace.

"The world would not admit it," she declared, "and I should hate to hear you described as Pamela Orsini's husband."

He finished his cocktail and set down the glass. Pamela's perfect parlourmaid was waiting to serve the soup. He took his place opposite his hostess.

"Oh, I should still be a proud man," he declared.

"And the meaning of all this is?"

"What shall we call it? An inspiration! I carried away from the court with me that day—an inspiration. I sent in my resignation to Scotland Yard on an inspiration. I felt that things went on in law which would pain the ordinary human being. I didn't believe at that moment that your husband was guilty. I have never believed it."

"It is awfully hard lines on him if your inspiration is a true one, Martin," she said, glancing at the empty space behind her chair which Leida had temporarily quitted.

"Not so much so as it would seem, Pamela," he declared. "Supposing your husband was not guilty, then if we wished to do so, we might, with that fact in our minds, study his career from the time he married you. What was he worth as a man? Nothing, less than nothing. Fate repays always, you know. If he was not guilty of that crime for which he was sentenced, he was guilty of a greater one because he took a sweet and marvellously sensitive woman like you and, save for her own strength, save for her own friends, save for her own dignity of spirit, he would have broken her heart and poisoned her soul. Therefore, as you see, it has never given me a sleepless night to believe that he was found guilty of a crime which he never committed. He committed another for which he deserved even worse punishment. My sense of justice is troubled, but not to any amazing extent. He was innocent of one crime, but he was guilty of another. Not much odds all the same, you can see. If I could set him at liberty, I would. You, out of a woman's pity, were willing to do what you could for him. I, from my masculine sense of justice and my queer inspiration, have also tried to do what I could for him. Between us, we certainly have done great things. I am not content even now to let it alone. What more can be done shall be done. Do you think I don't appreciate that one fine deed of his when he sent me those papers, Pamela? Let there be no words between us as regards that. I decided, as you have decided. I am happy in the feeling that nothing but a strange and wonderful scruple, which has its basis in one of the finest impulses a woman can feel, is keeping us apart. I pass on from that, but if you think I have given up for ever the hope I once conceived, that my father died believing, that our union was soon to be perfectly consummated, you are very wrong, dear. I live for that and I don't admit the possibility of failure. I am not going to kill your husband to get my way. It will come. Meanwhile, I claim that we are the two most sensible, charmingly conducted, reasonable human

beings alive upon this earth. Leida is coming in at the door, dear, and I should like—well, let us say, another potato."

"It is perfectly true," she laughed across the table at him. "Leida," she said, "serve the potatoes, if you please, to Monsieur."

\* \* \* \* \*

After dinner there were portents of a thunderstorm, but in the meantime the air was heavy with threats and the heat was intense. They drove through the parks and up to Hampstead Heath, where they faced with joy the cool winds that blew in their faces. All the time the clouds were gathering.

"So we are back in London, dear Pamela," he said, as they looked down on the slowly arriving lights, pin-pricks of fire, in their quiet places.

"We are back in London, Martin, my sweet," she whispered, slipping off her glove and holding his hand fondly. "Only it is a different London, don't you know. I hope you, too, feel that the world is such a different place when one really loves anybody. The air you breathe is different, the streets you walk, the shops into whose windows you look, the faces of strangers in the streets—it is all so different. I feel it all the time. A picture comes to me with its inner meaning more fully revealed, a chord of music comes quivering into existence from some more distant place in the well of melody. I played some trifle of Debussy's while I was waiting for you and I swear that I felt something in the music of those chords which I have never felt before. Life is different. I hope you will feel that soon, too, Martin. It will be such a bond between us. It will help so much—and, listen—I have not your splendid courage, I have not that fine patience of yours, but I believe, too, and I believe what you say. It will come if we just go on waiting. It will come, and I feel drawn nearer to the spiritual world because I have had the joy of finding another person besides myself who is fine enough to want to wait with me until the time comes. I think it will be very wonderful."

The first spot of the storm came. He touched his starter and they glided off down the hill, towards the city, where the lights, from being pin-pricks, had become almost a blaze. He pulled up outside her home before the real bursting of the storm.

"You will come in, please," she begged. "A thunderstorm together—all these elements in life are different now, and more wonderful."

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## CHAPTER XIX

Diana was a very talkative young woman, with expensive ways and habits, but she knew very well when to be silent. She slipped off her stool, on an evening not long afterwards, when Martin came into the Club, and grasped his hands feelingly.

"How nice of you to come, Martin!" she exclaimed. "We were all so sorry. Dad was terribly cut up about it."

"You are very kind indeed," he said. "It is difficult for me to remember whether I wrote all the personal letters I ought to have done, but you received yours, I hope?"

"Indeed I did," she answered. "It was just like you—very simple, very short, and very pertinent. Had you any idea that he was really so ill?"

"Frankly, I had," he confessed. "I had a private letter from the doctor. That is why I decided to go down and see him when I did."

"And you arrived just in time?"

Martin nodded.

"And only just," he answered. "It was all very beautiful down there, Diana. It is a beautiful part of the world in which to live—it is a beautiful part of the world, too, in which to die."

"Have you opened up the mansion again?"

He shook his head.

"I shall never do that unless and until I marry," he answered. "It is just a little overpowering in its size as well as its beauty."

"Why don't you marry, Martin?" she asked. "Everyone was wondering, when you reappeared—it seems such a short time ago. I don't think they have quite left off yet."

"Why don't you tell them?" he smiled.

She boxed his ears lightly.

"They wouldn't believe me," she declared. "I don't suppose there is any girl of my age, especially with my past, dear Martin, who wouldn't jump at the idea of marrying you with Brockenhurst Court in Devonshire, a house in town, and, I suppose, still your French estates."

"You seem very glib about my possessions," he observed. "Perhaps you have answered your own question. I am waiting to find someone who loves me for myself alone."

"There are plenty," she sighed, "who would do that—plenty, who only want a word of encouragement. You are a modest man, Martin, not to say shy. Why did you come here tonight? Did you come out of some freakish whim, or because you were hungry or thirsty, or did you perhaps come to see me? I think you ought sometimes to remember that we are only a trifle removed from being first cousins."

"Well, I came here for every one of those reasons," he answered. "But the one that is most insistent just now is the first. I have been to a very tedious dinner with my lawyer. We have talked a good deal about things that happened some time ago. A lawyer's house—especially when he has never moved out of the Temple—has a sort of musty effect on one. I have a dry throat, Diana, with which preamble, I am going to beg you to have a drink."

"In another moment," she said, "I should have had to ask you."

"Tim!" Martin continued, addressing the barman, "I don't know what terrible concoction Madame is now engaged in consuming—"

"Champagne cocktail," the man interrupted.

"A disgraceful drink!" Martin insisted. "Champagne is too good a wine to be made into a cocktail, and effervescence and cocktails don't go together at all. I don't know what to offer you, Diana—you must choose for yourself. When you are satisfied, I shall ask for a simple gin and tonic, but there must be a big lump of ice in it. I might mention, too, that I await it with impatience."

"His Lordship has acquired new habits with his new dignity," Diana smiled. "Serve him quickly, Tim. When he is quite happy, I will decide. Do you hate drinking alone, Martin?"

"Not so much as I should hate to have to drink with that young man who has just come in," Martin confided, inclining his head slightly towards the door.

"Oh! Leversen," she answered. "I don't blame you, Martin; indeed, I can't think how he became a member. If ever I go out of town for a fortnight, I find that half the strange people of the pavements seem to be either up for election or to have just become members."

"And yet they call yours the most exclusive show in London!" Martin murmured. "I read about you in the social news and I wonder how I ever got elected."

"I sometimes wonder why you ever joined," she observed. "I don't see what use a night-club is to you, Martin. How old are you?"

"Thirty-eight, my child," he answered. "Why don't you have a look at your Debrett now and then instead of embarrassing me? Only you had better be careful or you will be catching me up before long. That fellow, Leversen—" he broke off.

"But why talk about him? Let me still preserve the illusion that you came to see me."

"Darling, of course I did," he assured her. "But he always reminds me of a time when I got a real rise out of his terrible father."

"How did you do it?" she asked.

Martin went on: "Well, he is about the finest criminal lawyer there is and has the biggest practice anywhere. They say he will get anyone off any sort of conviction if they go to him directly the crime's over, and tell him the whole truth. He will never touch any business unless he knows, or thinks he knows, the whole truth. Of course all the best barristers work for him, too. If you get a brief from the great firm of Leversen and Leversen when you are a rising young man at the Bar, your fortune is pretty well made."

"So much for the lawyers. Tell me about that exquisitely beautiful young woman you brought here one night. You made us all very unhappy, Martin. Why can't we all have a flair and charm like that?"

"I am glad you approved of her," he said calmly. "I think, myself, that in her quiet, distinguished way, she is very beautiful."

"And her paintings!" Diana said. "After I heard who she was, I went to see them in that small gallery of old Simon Lebur's. Martin, they are beautiful. I wish I had taken to something like that—something that would have made me think and made me want to live with beautiful things. It's rather a rotten sort of show, doing this all the time."

"Come! Be just to yourself," he begged. "Diana, you should never talk like that. I think you have a delightful range of sports and taste. You can fly a plane and do it properly. You are as good on a horse as anyone I ever saw. If you had not been Lady Diana, you would certainly have been in the front rank of the

tennis people. You dance beautifully and you talk French, Spanish, and Italian. I call you a young lady of accomplishments. Why you haven't made a greater success of marriage I can't understand."

"Ah, well—all very flattering," she sighed. "Let's leave it alone, Martin. How do you know? How should you know anything? Dance with me, please. I am the hostess-in-chief. It is your duty to ask me to dance."

"Is it Leversen's duty also?" he asked, with a spice of malice twinkling in his eyes.

"Not like you, my sweet!" she answered. "From him that doesn't go."

"I will dance with you with the greatest of pleasure. I shall then hope to be allowed to give you the drink we spoke of, which has not yet materialized. I shall also finish my own gin and tonic."

They danced for a while in silence, perhaps because they were both experts enough to enjoy the movement for its own sake. Then Martin asked a question.

"Any more tragedies in the kitchen?"

"Thank goodness, no!" she answered. "The mystery of that last one is still unsolved."

"Odd piece of business that was," he remarked.

"It seems more than odd to me," Diana agreed. "Why should anyone want to poison one of my clients? And supposing they did want to—how could they so nearly have got away with it without being found out?"

"As the possible client for whom those sandwiches were intended," Martin observed, "I am naturally somewhat interested."

"I wonder you ever came here again," she declared frankly. "But I must tell you this, Martin—it came out in the evidence—there is a small stock of sandwiches which is always held in reserve. So many people who just get bottles of wine here ask for a sandwich when they want that bottle produced and they hate to wait for it. So, although you might have been involved, there is no certainty about it. It was the first man who asked for a sandwich here who was going to get the tummy-ache, whatever the chef may have to say about it."

"I am not nervous, my dear," he assured her. "I have lived for years a pure and upright life. I have not, to the best of my knowledge, an enemy in the world, and I can't believe that immaculately clad artist of the ovens has any real desire to get rid of me."

"You aren't troubled with nerves, are you, Martin?" she observed.

"Not a bit," he admitted.

"I am," she confided with a little grimace. "I can't see one of those Leversens enter the place without shivering all over. The old woman comes now and then, and one or two of the brood seem to be always hanging round. If ever you hear of my selling the Club quickly, it will be because of that family."

"Why not offer them a good round sum to resign en bloc?" Martin suggested.

"They'd bring an action against me," she laughed. "And, as Leversen and Leversen have the name of winning every time they go into court, whatever the nature of the action is, I am not running the risk."

Daddy says he has no money, though where it goes to I can't imagine. What are you going to do with your millions, Martin?"

"Not buy a night-club," he assured her. "As a matter of fact, I don't think there are any millions. Dad—God bless him—was always the *grand seigneur*. Our villages and one or two of the small townships on the estate are perfectly built, perfectly drained, and perfectly painted pictures of what small houses should be like. That was what kept the dear old boy interested and happy to the end of his days—that and the hope that some day—"

"Yes, I know all about that, Martin," she interrupted gently.

"But in a way, too, he had his wish. I took the woman whom I shall marry some day down to see him just before he died. You may have heard about it?"

"That was wonderful!" she said. "I simply heard there was another guest there."

"It was the lady who was here with me one night," he told her. "The artist."

For a moment there was complete silence. Diana was as nearly out of step as she had ever been in her life.

"That exquisite person who married Simon Lebur's son?" she asked, a little hoarsely. "An Italian, wasn't she?"

"That is so, Diana," he confided. "You are one of the very few to whom I would tell that, but there it is. Some day or other—and I tell you this because in the end I always get my way, however grim the circumstances seem—some day or other, we shall be married. And my father died, knowing no reason why we should not be married almost at once—knowing no reason why those lads he loved to picture round the place should not be due to make their appearance quite soon—and he died very happily."

"I feel as though I had received a great rebuke. Do you mind if we sit down at your table?"

They made their way there.

"You should not feel like that, Diana," he remonstrated. "There is no reason for it—not the slightest. Yours was just a casual remark which heaps of people are always making to me. They all want to know why I don't marry. I am just waiting. I shall marry some day, and I shall marry Pamela."

"You will marry one of the most beautiful creatures in the world, then," Diana said quietly. "Of course one knows, Martin, you would not dream of going out very much just now, but, still, you can't sit in those lonely rooms of yours always. Father asked me the other morning whether you could not be brought in to dinner one night, quite quietly with us. Mother would love to see you, too."

"Oh, yes, I'll come with great pleasure," he promised. "You know, I have always stuck out about being drawn into this social whirl here in town because there are so many things I like to do better than going to parties, where I am ill-acquainted with the people—and we have not the same ideas, anyway. But just your old friends—of course I'll come, but don't have a crowd, there's a dear."

"I won't, I promise you, Martin," she said. "But tell me, dear, sometimes you are so gay and you are always very much more interesting when we are alone. Did anything ever happen to you in your younger life that put you off people?"

"Nothing, I give you my word of honour," he answered. "In fact, my experience as a boy rather made me like people than the reverse. Only, you see, in a sense I think it broadened my vision. I could not stand the same little crowd of people, all doing the same things, all calling one another by their Christian name, and, not only that, but speaking of everyone else they ever came across in the same intimate way. Society, as you and your people live in it, is like a great family party. If anyone's name outside it is mentioned, you all look at one another in wondering surprise, *Who could this be?*"

"Don't go on, Martin," she begged. "You will make a convert of me, too. I do hate the eternal grind of it all, myself, sometimes. However, I am striking out on my own a little nowadays. I know you go sometimes to the Morenstein recitals, don't you?"

"I seldom miss one," he acknowledged.

"Well, you would never look upon me as a musical genius, I know, but I practise an hour a day always and I have lessons from Morenstein. Not so bad for a lazy young woman who runs a night-club?"

"I love you for it," he declared. "I think it is wonderful—I am delighted. May I add, a little surprised?"

"If it won't spoil your evening, I will play to you Morenstein's last sonata—'The Sonata of Caprice,' as he calls it—the night you come to dine with us. Of course, he has never played it in public or I would never dare to do it, but it is beautiful. Aren't I right in believing that Pamela—you don't mind if I call her that?—is also a musician?"

He nodded.

"She plays every day in her studio for an hour or so," he confided. "Sometimes I go there and listen. Tell me some more things you do that are unusual."

She laughed.

"I could tell you two things you would never believe I was capable of. They help to fill up my life, which is a pretty worthless affair, anyway."

"You keep them in reserve?"

The elder of the young generation of Leversens passed their table and bowed to Diana. She returned his greeting without any pretence at cordiality.

"You wouldn't have thought I had literary tastes, would you?" she went on, continuing her conversation with Martin.

"I don't see why not," he answered. "Some of your family have been quite well known that way, you know. The trouble of it is," he continued, with a twinkle in his eyes, "that they never appealed to a very large circle. Wasn't it your grandfather who wrote *The Ethics of Justice* with the idea of proving that the French and English schools of jurisprudence were founded on entirely different bases? The preface explaining this took up half the volume."

She laughed softly.

"That is right," she admitted. "Father's own father did that—and what a storm there was! There was no literature in that book, though. I found it very hard to read even the first few chapters. Dad confessed to me once that he had never read it through, but then, Father's peculiar. He kept a diary for many years with

the idea of writing his memoirs, but he left off quite suddenly, never made another note in his diary and tore up the first two chapters."

"We are all apt to be too impetuous sometimes," Martin sighed. "I had a great idea once—I won't tell you what it was about—and for weeks I worked on it. Then there came a day when life seemed all upside-down to me. I decided that even my idea must go on the ash-heap—and go there it did!"

"Why did you come here tonight, Martin?" she asked abruptly.

He looked at her a little surprised.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "I sometimes get such unexpected ideas, Martin, that I really think I must in a way be something of a genius. When I saw you come into the room, I felt perfectly convinced that you had come here for some definite purpose. Every now and then the idea has come back and I have wondered. Is there anything you want from me? Had you any curiosity as to how our little drama in the kitchen worked out? Or was there any other reason?"

Martin had not been smoking the whole of the evening, but he suddenly produced his case and lit a cigarette with great deliberation.

"Odd, you should ask me that question," he ruminated.

"Why odd?"

"We don't often say what is in our mind."

"That would have been a very natural question for me to have asked you at any moment. Once or twice I have felt just like putting my hand on your shoulder and saying, 'What made you come here tonight?'"

"Do it now," he begged. "I should rather like to have your hand on my shoulder."

"A man so hopelessly and so gloriously in love, Martin," she sighed, "should never trifle with a poor innocent girl's heart."

"Something in that, of course," he admitted. "But patting a shoulder isn't a very advanced form of courtship, is it? It wouldn't be considered compromising, for instance?"

She leaned over, carried out her threat, her long, finely-shaped fingers lingering for a moment on his shoulder, patted his hand and then leaned back in her place.

"And now, my beloved," she demanded, "what brought you to the 'Evening Star' this particular evening?"

"Well, here is your answer," he replied. "I came because in the Strand I saw two people talking earnestly. One of them was young Mr. Leversen who has just passed you with that courteous but somewhat despairing salute, and the other was a boy who was at one time—he may be now for all I know—employed under your chef in your wonderful kitchen."

"And that brought you round here this evening?" she asked, a little bewildered.



"It did," he admitted. "Now, will that cure you of asking strange questions? I was just wondering whether to undo a pile of books and make myself comfortable for an hour or so when I remembered the glimpse I caught of those two. My pocket-knife was open. I hesitated for a few moments and I closed it without cutting the string of my parcel. I rang the bell for my servant and I told him that I had changed my mind—I was going out; and I came. It was because I saw those two standing at that particular corner in close conversation."

"But, why?" Diana persisted.

"Vicious, overpowering curiosity."

"But, why shouldn't they have been talking together?"

"Why should they?" he argued. "What possible link could there be between Mr. Samuel Leversen and your cook-boy?"

"Well, they were fellow-witnesses in the same inquest," she pointed out. "Leversen probably took down the boy's evidence."

"But, I ask you!" Martin protested. "Look across the room at this minute. Look at Mr. Samuel Leversen—a snob, isn't he? I should say, an utter and complete snob."

Diana assented.

"Then why should he preserve an acquaintance with a cook-boy just because they came together in this casual manner?" he demanded.

She looked at him with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Martin, you astonish me," she declared. "This is the policeman cropping up, I suppose."

"You may be right," he admitted. "The policeman sometimes retains a curiosity in cases over and done with. The lawyer, having been paid his fee, would certainly have no more interest in it. That might explain these two meeting at the corner of a street and commencing a conversation which they were evidently carrying on with emphasis, gestures, and interest."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't help it, Martin," she answered, "but I can't feel myself able to develop the slightest grain of curiosity as to those two wearisome people talking at the corner of the Strand or associating them in any way with your being here this evening. Of course, I should rather you had said 'To see you,' but, since it did not occur to you to be gallant, I am willing to accept any reason. You saw a cook-boy connected with this Club talking to one of the members—all right! I asked the question and I am answered. Wait one moment, though!"

She leaned forward and gave a message to a passing waiter. He disappeared hastily towards the service department.

"I am beginning to be ashamed of what really was, I suppose, very childish curiosity," Martin declared. "Perhaps it doesn't matter so very much, after all. But, anyhow, I have found out one or two interesting things about you, Diana, through my visit, haven't I?"

"That I play the piano?"

"Well, that really does interest me," he admitted. "I have never thoroughly disliked anyone who played the piano well, and I am perfectly certain that you never attempt anything that you don't do well."

"Don't wait for the dinner," she begged. "You shall have a private recital any afternoon or evening you choose, Martin!"

"Tomorrow at six?"

"I am very grateful for your choosing tomorrow evening at six," she smiled, "because it gets me out of a stupid cocktail party."

"I shall be there."

Gustave, the chef, made his way respectfully to the table.

"My Lady wished to speak to me?"

"Answer me a question, will you?" Diana replied with a little nod. "You once had a boy—Adolph, I think was his name—whom you occasionally allowed to bring special dishes with you from the kitchen—"

"Yes, indeed, Madame," the chef broke in. "But at my special request Mr. Branson dismissed him after his carelessness in leaving Monsieur's sandwiches lying about. I could not tolerate such inattention."

"Do you know where he went to?"

"I have not heard the subject mentioned, your Ladyship," was the quiet reply. "I only trust sincerely that he never sets foot in this place again. I will not have boys in my kitchen on whom I cannot rely implicitly."

Diana dismissed him with a little wave of her hand.

"Well, there you are, Martin," she pointed out. "The young man was dismissed. He probably met Mr. Leversen, whom he would recognize as a member of the Club, and he stopped to do a little begging on his own account. Considering it was Mr. Leversen's evidence that exposed the lad's carelessness, I think he had rather a nerve—but there you are! Curiosity satisfied?"

"Completely."

Diana rose to her feet to respond to an urgent call from the secretary.

"I must return to the world of affairs. Don't dance with any of my little butterflies, Martin, or I shall be jealous. And remember, I shall expect you punctually at six o'clock tomorrow evening."

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## CHAPTER XX

Martin was without a doubt very susceptible to music and he listened to Diana's playing on the following afternoon with keen pleasure. She lacked the grace and easy flow of Pamela's sweeping fingers, nor had

she the same delicacy of touch, but her execution was wonderful and she had evidently made a great study of the particular composer to whose work they were both devoted. For an hour or more Martin was happily and completely enthralled. He rose to leave with genuine reluctance.

"I have loved playing to you, Martin," she told him. "Your father was the first person who really encouraged me. You know how fond he was of what a great many people call 'the barbaric note' in music. I suppose it must have appealed a little to me, too. I have strong wrists and I think sometimes I am disposed to make too much of my physical strength. But I can't help it—we all have our faults and I am grateful for such gifts as I possess. The creation of melody of any sort is wonderful. Are you going to stay and see Father? He will be back presently."

"I would like to see your father," Martin assured her, "but I cannot tonight. Any news from Lionel lately?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Lionel's news is never very good to have," she sighed.

"I am sorry," Martin regretted. "At one time he seemed to be settling down so well in India."

"We all hoped he might," she replied. "I am afraid it's all up with that job now, though. We had a telegram from Bombay to say that he is on the way home. Dad didn't tell me for some days, but I could see he was worrying about something. I'm afraid he's given up his post. However, I didn't ask you here to worry you about our family affairs, Martin. Perhaps you will come and dine one night next week quietly. We did arrange that the other day, didn't we? I believe Father would love to talk to you about it."

"I will come with pleasure, as I promised, if you don't mind making it a small party," he begged. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, Diana."

"Oh, I dare say it's nothing serious," she said. "He has been declaring for a long time that the climate did not agree with him, but his time for leave is not up yet, so we don't quite understand it."

"Can I ask a question of an old friend, Diana?"

"You can ask me anything you like," she told him after a moment's hesitation. "I won't promise to answer."

"The Club?" he asked. "Is it paying financially?"

She made no answer for a moment. She was standing by the piano and seemed to be engaged, picking out the notes of an old melody. Suddenly she left off.

"Why do you ask me that just now?"

"You don't look your usual bright self," he explained, "and I don't like you to be worried about trifles."

"Why should you care?" she asked bluntly.

"Oh, we are quite old friends, aren't we?" he protested. "Why not answer my question?"

"Well, the Club started well enough," she owned. "But recently it has been getting wobbly. It is not doing anything like as well as it was. In fact, I am a little worried about it."

"Your father doesn't altogether approve of it, does he?"

"He hates it," the girl admitted. "That is why I shall rather hate going to him for money. All the same, I'm afraid I may have to."

"Is the secretary all right?" he asked.

"He's honest," Diana confided, "but he is not a financial genius."

Martin walked thoughtfully to the window and back again.

"Look here, Diana," he said, "I never like to see my friends trouble about things that really aren't worth while. You tried to make the place pay and you worked jolly hard at it. The thing is—can the running of it be altered to make it pay, do you think?"

"I am not sure," she replied. "I sometimes feel inclined to throw up my hands, tell Dad the whole truth, ask him for the money, however much it is, and wind it up."

"I wouldn't do that for the moment," Martin advised. "I tell you what, Diana—I am a man of figures myself just now. That is to say, the accountants are setting up a proper scheme for keeping books for the estates as they should be kept. Will you let me send someone in to look through your system of book-keeping and see if there is any chance of making the concern pay? It won't cost you anything, and if he gives a favourable report, we might be able to arrange something in the way of a small company. I would take some shares with pleasure."

"You are good, Martin!" she exclaimed. "That was just the sort of idea I had in my mind. But why should you go to all this trouble?"

"Friends, my dear," he answered. "We do things for our friends, don't we? Or what is the good of having any? Will you tell your secretary that I will send someone round there tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock?"

"He will have to spend a few evenings there as well, to look round and see the way the place is being run. I will see that he is entertained properly," Diana promised. "You are a brick, Martin! Why aren't there more like you in the world, I wonder?"

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Martin drove slowly away in the direction of Pamela's studio, feeling a little puzzled. He went in to pay his usual evening call and found her happily at work.

"Simon's been round," she told Martin. "Quite like his old self. I got something from him I haven't had for ages. I got just that fixed look of lowering intelligence which he used to have when he bought or sold a picture. It's the old Jewish trait in him that I have missed lately, but it is so important to his portrait as a whole."

"Dear old fellow," Martin murmured. "I hope you didn't tire him out?"

"He had three cups of tea," she confided, "and, for once in his life, he admitted that my tea was as good as his!"

"No news?"

She shook her head.

"He never mentioned his son at all. He seems completely to have vanished from the news, too. I wonder if he really has got away?"

"Shouldn't be surprised," Martin observed. "He would, I think, have every chance of success, unless he trusted that woman."

"You think," she ventured, "that she would make another effort to give him away?"

"I am sure of it, dear," he replied. "There are bad women and good women of that type, you know, Pamela. She is one of the bad ones."

"There was Mary Magdalene," Pamela pondered.

He shook his head dubiously.

"Authentic records, my dear, of the past life of that lady are missing, you must remember. The little we know of her dates from after her purification."

"By the by, did you bring me any message from your delightful Mrs. Janien?" she asked abruptly.

"I couldn't," he replied. "I haven't been home since breakfast-time. I lunched at the Club."

"Then I ask you, my dear one, where do we dine?"

"And I reply, as always, wherever you wish. Was I to have brought a message about dinner?"

"I rang up this morning," she confided, "and I could get no definite answer. 'Unless His Lordship changed his mind,' I was told, 'we were dining here.'"

"That sounds very pleasant," he declared. "It's a queer thing, Pamela, that since we started our delightful in-and-out dining arrangement, I have not cared where we dined. I don't think I do now, really. Your cook is at least as good as mine. So long as we dine together, it doesn't seem to make the slightest difference."

"Nor to me," she agreed. "Only I rather like to see you at the head of the table. You look so imposing sometimes, Martin."

"Sometimes!" he sniffed.

"Oh, I'm not going to spoil you," she went on. "I distinctly saw you look peevish at a guinea-fowl the other night."

"I don't like guinea-fowl," he confessed.

"You should never display your feelings so openly as a guest."

"So far as I remember, I was not a guest," he reminded her. "I was the fool who ordered the *pintade*."

"Well, you are apparently dining with me tonight. Supposing my cook has ordered a guinea-fowl?"

"You shall see what I do to it," he answered. "I am rather hungry, as a matter of fact."

"What, before your cocktail?"

"Yes. I have been hearing bad news. That always gives me an appetite."

"You mean, getting rid of it does?"

"I suppose so. A man in the Indian Civil Service whom I used to know very well seems to have chucked his job and is coming home. I am sorry."

"Anyone I know?"

He shook his head.

"The brother of Diana Malladene who runs the night-club," he told her. "I'm afraid it will worry the old man, and he is such a dear."

"Well, I am sorry. How can I cheer you up about it, Martin?"

"Wear your grey silk with the high neck and the little bit of lace round the top and the long loose sleeves," he begged. "I am dining with you, aren't I?"

"That has been my frantic hope all day," she answered.

"Well, we will come here after dinner and drink our coffee in the twilight," he insisted. "We will have the chairs, not in your painting-window—the other one—and we will look down at the River, and when the tide turns we will watch those clumsy boats come up. It would perhaps add a little charm to the situation if you let me move the divan and we sat side by side."

She laughed as she rose to her feet.

"You are a dear to be such a baby about my clothes, Martin," she said. "Grey ought not to suit me, you know," she wound up, "but I do feel so like Florence when I wear it—I can't help it."

"I have it on the best of authority," he assured her, "that the Signora Andrea del Sarto—"

"The lady with the cousin?" she asked.

"—the lady with the cousin—" he agreed, "seldom wore any other colour."

"Instinct again. Only, instead of Fiesole, you must watch barges."

He rose swiftly and passed her on her way to the door.

"If on your way to your room," he whispered, "the kitchen door should be open and Hannah—"

She pressed her hand upon his mouth.

"Not another word," she insisted. "Besides, if she has chosen that unfortunate bird, I happen to know that there is a sole first and it's our duty not to over-eat, this hot weather."

"A sole first!" he exclaimed cheerfully, as she removed her hand. "You would have dissipated all anxiety in a moment if you had told me that. The penalty"—he kissed her eyes lightly, one by one—"is this."

"And now, of course, I shan't want to bathe my eyes," she laughed, looking back as she disappeared.

Martin, his hands behind his back, walked slowly up and down the long, lofty room, with its shadows and sunlit corners. He had come in brooding over another man's unhappiness. Now he could think of nothing else except that slight shadow which stole up now and then, a menacing cloud, over his own complete content. Suddenly, he stopped short. Just an idea—a gleam of hope! He sat down in the chair by the side of Pamela's telephone, drew out the book and searched until he found a number.

"1312 Southside," he asked for.

There was no immediate response. Then a woman replied, drawling, a little artificial, in a voice ill-pitched and not naturally pleasant.

"Is that Mrs. Culpepper?" he asked.

"It is, and who might you be?"

"Well, you know, we didn't go very far in the way of names those few minutes we talked together at the Gigantic Hotel."

"Is that really you?" she asked, with a complete change in her tone. "You bad man! All this time—and you promised to ring up at once."

"I have been a long distance away," he told her, "down in the country. Besides, I thought you were staying at the Gigantic Hotel for some time."

"They were such terrible people there," she confided. "I had to come away. Besides, there were domestic complications. I must not tell you about those, though. When are you coming to see me?"

"When will you be at home?" he answered.

"Tomorrow afternoon at half-past four," she told him. "Not a moment before that, and you can only stay two hours."

"Two what?" he asked.

"Two hours. Isn't that long enough?"

"Oh, we will see about that," he evaded. "Two hours seem rather a long time to me for an afternoon visit."

"Well, I shall be very glad to see you, anyway," she assured him. "That's very nice of me after all your promises."

"I never made any promises," he said firmly.

"Oh, don't get on your high horse with me," the lady replied. "Perhaps you didn't. Perhaps I am the fool for thinking that you did. You come at half-past four tomorrow and don't you be five minutes late or else I may not forgive you so easily this time."

"Righto!" he promised.

Pamela returned, having completed her toilet, to find Martin with a smile upon his lips.

"Something has happened," she exclaimed as she glided across the room to meet him, "which has given you pleasure—and I was not here. You have been using my telephone! I insist upon knowing with whom you have been talking."

"Never," he declared, "was a man in a more difficult position."

"I thought so. You look guilty. Confess, or I shan't come a step nearer."

He took one step towards her.

"I can think it over better from here," he confided.

"Were you talking to a man or a woman?" she demanded.

"A woman," he replied.

"Don't move an inch!" she ordered. "Tell me the type."

"A loose woman," he acknowledged.

"Martin!"

"Well," he answered, moving a little nearer still.

"I forbid you to move," she insisted.

"And I implore you to come," he protested, holding out his arms.

She rested there for some time, then she drew away, trying in vain to smooth her hair.

"You really are terrible, Martin," she complained. "If your arms weren't so long and if I didn't adore your kisses so much—"

"That is what keeps me at telephone length from everyone else." He smiled. "Well, I had an idea, Pamela. I thought there might be something else squeezed out from the woman in the case."

"That terrible woman who calls herself Mrs. Culpepper?"

He nodded.

"You know best," she remarked. "I admire your good taste as regards the telephone, though."



They wandered arm-in-arm over to a side-table. Everything was set out there as usual. Blocks of ice fresh from the refrigerator, little strips of lemon peel, and two lemons cut in half.

"Shall I put you out of your misery?" she asked, as she placed half a lemon on the squeezer.

"I am not in any misery," he declared. "I am one of the happiest men in London. I am going to have a White Lady given me by you."

"You will never be able to keep it up, Martin," she declared sadly.

"You wait!" he warned her.

"Well, here's the truth, then," she said. "I did look in at the kitchen. Hannah had remembered about the *pintade*. Never another bird of that description will visit our cooking range. In fact, she agrees with you. Tonight we have Dover sole, ortolans with white grapes and raspberries."

"I am sorry, Pamela," he declared, "but no man could have such a menu recited to him by the girl he loves, without—"

"What, another kiss!" she sighed, holding up her lips.

"What makes you feel so perfectly frivolous tonight, I wonder?" Pamela speculated, as the parlourmaid flitted out of the room.

"Can't imagine," he answered. "It's in my blood. It's something breaking loose in me. I feel rather as I did that day when we started on our picnic, going down to Devonshire."

"I hope it lasts," she went on.

"Through the days and through the years, my love," he assured her. "Especially if Hannah remains your cook! The time will come, you know—I am perfectly sure of that, Pamela; I never felt so sure of it in my life—when we shall set up our own little establishment. It really needn't be little," he went on. "In fact, I'm afraid the time will come when we may have to reopen the mansion. But whether it's small or large, I'm perfectly certain that I shall retain exactly the outlook upon life that I have at present, so long as you keep just as far away from me as you are now and never a yard farther."

"I'm not so sure about that sentence, Martin," she demurred, smiling. "Have you tripped a little?"

"Oh, you can come as much closer as you will, dear. In fact—"

"Sit down, please," she begged. "I hear steps outside."

"The gentle Leida," he murmured. "You certainly scored, but, for fear there should be any misunderstanding, let me tell you that the place I like you best is in my arms."

"It is reassuring," she murmured.

Leida came in with a telegram on a small salver. With an apologetic word to her guest, Pamela tore it open and read it.

"An unsigned telegram from Simon," she confided. She passed it over to him at once.

OUR VISITOR FROM THE WEST REPORTS ALL WELL AND HOPES TO ATTAIN COMPLETE SECURITY AT THE END OF WEEK. MEANWHILE HE URGENTLY DEMANDS BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN. COULD YOU ARRANGE THAT HERE THIS EVENING. HAVE TELEPHONED MARTIN. THEY REPORTED DINING WITH YOU. TELEPHONE REPLY

Martin smiled.

"I knew something good was going to happen," he declared. "That fellow's got something up his sleeve that may be just what we need to help Richard."

"May I telephone that you will be there?" she asked.

"Of course," he answered. "You, too, I should think."

She hesitated.

"Don't you see?" he pointed out. "Suppose he has gone off the rails again. This might be a ruse to find you easily and alone. Mind you, I don't think it's possible, but, where you are concerned, I shall never take a risk."

She patted his cheek.

"Of course, you're right, dear. I shall come to Simon's with you. Very likely there will be no need for me to see Richard. Seriously, though, Martin," she went on, as she put down the receiver and afterwards resumed her seat, "what help is there, beyond what we have done, that we could give him?"

"My dear," he replied, "I should only be building up false hopes if I started guessing. I only know that it will come some day, our freedom, and it's just as likely to come through a miracle as in any other manner. Look! One of your cook's cheese omelettes! A course of dinners here would make me very greedy."

She laughed.

"You are certainly a very charming guest this evening, Martin," she declared.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "I may be an even more charming supper companion. We may come back brimful of news."

\* \* \* \* \*

They found Simon Lebur curiously well when they called together at the time he had appointed. He was looking, for him, almost happy. He sent Pamela into the music-room while he took Martin into his small, untidy study. His secretary, who looked almost as old as he did, took his leave at a gesture from his employer.

"I was anxious to speak with you, Lord Brockenhurst," he said quietly. "Very anxious, indeed, because I know how much you have suffered through this terrible business. I saw my son only a few hours ago. He has been back with that woman—living with her in a quiet flat, Battersea way."

"Don't distress yourself too much, Simon," Martin begged him. "There's no hurry. If ever anything fresh is to come to light, it must be through that woman."

"This tragedy," Simon Lebur went on, "has hurt you badly, Martin Brockenhurst, but it has hurt me differently. I never hesitated to believe—horrible thought though it was—that my son was a murderer, a cold-blooded murderer, too, for the sake of a wanton woman. Doubt has come to me. I feel there is a chance, a great chance after all, that he is innocent. It may be that he has wilfully taken up another person's burden of shame. If that is so, after all, there is something of the heroic in Richard. He is not so bad as I have feared him."

"In plain words, you think that he may have been shielding the woman?"

"I think that it is possible," Simon Lebur admitted. "And there is another thing. I believe that they have somehow or other the same idea at Scotland Yard. I believe that they could have taken him once lately, if not twice. They let him go—why? There was no other reason. If they failed to arrest him, it must have been because they were waiting to be able to nail the truth on to the guilty person, so that two things could have come together—Richard's justification and the other's arrest."

Martin was suddenly depressed. All that Simon Lebur was struggling to tell him might be the truth, but, if so, who was the one who had weakened? Who was the one who was coming to the front and going to tell the whole story?

"Tell me the rest, Simon," Martin begged, "but don't hurry. You are out of breath now. Take it quietly, please. Tell me just what your son said to you."

"It's so ghastly a story," Simon said. "There are times when I tell myself it must all be a bad dream. Richard was never a liar. When he was a boy he had many faults, but I never remember his telling a deliberate falsehood."

"But, Simon," Martin reminded him gently, "you have told me nothing new. You say that you have seen your son. Did he come to you here?"

"He came here," Simon admitted. "And I can't help believing that the man whom I saw strolling up and down outside my house some of the time that he was here was from Scotland Yard and was watching him."

"Yet there was no arrest—nothing of that sort happening?"

"Nothing," Simon Lebur replied; "and that's perhaps the centre of my new hopes."

Martin was disappointed. He was also puzzled.

"I hoped you had something more definite to tell me," he confessed. "But, in any case, what you have told me is interesting. I have had some experience, as you know, and I can't conceive Scotland Yard treating your son the way they are doing."

The old man leaned across the table and tapped with his pencil.

"Can't you see?" he pointed out. "There could be only one reason for it. They have come to the conclusion that he was not guilty."

"Then why the mischief isn't something done about it?" Martin asked. "Why isn't the case reopened? Or why doesn't someone in the House of Commons ask a question and challenge the Police as to why they make no attempt to rearrest an escaped convict who was found guilty of a serious crime?"

Simon Lebur smiled.

"You have interested yourself in the case, Lord Brockenhurst," he said. "You are a man now of distinction and weight in the country. It is for you to make a move."

"But how am I to get at Richard?" Martin demanded. "I should want to have some new facts to go upon before I flung myself at Scotland Yard again. I have had one go at them, you know."

"They know more than they knew then," the old man declared feverishly. "You take a turn down that way, Lord Brockenhurst."

Martin picked up his hat.

"You are all very mysterious," he said. "All the same, I will follow your advice, Simon. I will call at the Old Shop and have a few more words with the Chief Inspector."

Simon picked up his stick and hobbled to the door with his guest.

"Let me know," he begged. "Let me know the moment you hear anything. I am not too strong these days, Lord Brockenhurst. I have prayed each day that I might live long enough to see Richard a free man once more. I want that to happen, but I want other people to see him, too. I want them to know that he is a free man because the authorities have decided that he was not guilty."

"I will go and see if there is anything more to be done," Martin promised. "But, remember, Simon, it was a cast-iron case—don't expect too much."

Simon Lebur was looking up towards the ceiling. He made no answer. He simply hurried his visitor away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Now, my friend," were Martin's first words when he presented himself in Inspector Charlesworth's office next morning, "you are up against it."

"Really?" was the somewhat frigid reply. "Who gave you leave to walk into a Sub-Commissioner's office and address him in that style?"

"Since when?"

"Forty-eight hours."

"My hearty congratulations!" Martin declared warmly. "You deserve it, Charlesworth. I won't say that your handling of this case in which I am particularly interested has been exactly brilliant, but, still, you have had the sense to keep an open mind for a long time—six or seven years, isn't it?"

"Now, what have you got to say about that case this morning?" the new Sub-Commissioner asked quietly.

"I have come to hear if you have anything fresh to tell me about it. I have also come to know whether you are taking any steps to arrest this escaped convict, who seems to be strolling about London when and where he pleases."

"Not quite like that, your Lordship," Charlesworth protested.

"Don't 'your Lordship' me, Sub-Commissioner," Martin replied. "But, seriously, what are we going to do about this?"

"Why are you so infernally interested?"

A moment later the Sub-Commissioner would have very much liked to withdraw his words. There was a light in Martin's eyes that he had never seen there before, something in the stiffening of his manner which warned him of the unknown.

"I have my reasons, Charlesworth, but they are not reasons I can talk about. I have gone as far as this before. I have told you that I am deeply and seriously interested in the case. I am more so now than ever. I thought that I had all that I wanted, but I was a selfish brute and I got it in the neck. Now, if anything, I am more eager than ever for the truth."

"Sit down," the Sub-Commissioner invited.

Martin, who had been pacing up and down the room all the time, sank into a comfortable chair.

"Well," he sighed, "here I am."

"What you really want to know, I suppose," Charlesworth meditated, "is why Scotland Yard are, apparently, not particularly eager upon the rearrest of an escaped Dartmoor criminal?"

"There are times, Charlesworth," Martin said slowly, "when your intelligence appears to me to be nothing short of phenomenal. Get on with it, then. Why don't you lighten the sorrows of the Governor of Dartmoor Prison and hand him back his little piece of treasure, who has no business at all wandering in the London streets?"

"Well, we keep our eye on him," the Sub-Commissioner pointed out. "And he has about as much chance of obtaining a passport and scuttling off to foreign countries as I have of becoming Chief Commissioner. But, on the other hand, it would suit our book better if some enthusiastic philanthropist who had Lebur's case on his mind and conscience were to take the initial steps in the matter."

"Why don't you take the lady's word for it? She's had a word or two with you, hasn't she?"

The Sub-Commissioner appeared shocked.

"My dear Lord Brockenhurst," he expostulated, "you don't suppose Scotland Yard exists for the purpose of encouraging crime, do you? You don't suppose that we should really be interested in allowing a lady who, out of pure kind-heartedness, has ventured to give us a piece of information she thought might be useful, to face the assassin's knife or revolver, or whatever he might choose to use? No, sir, we couldn't do that. We are not going to encourage the lady to tell us anything. Besides, you know, it is astonishing how often the lady's evidence goes wrong for some reason or other, and, furthermore, this—if Richard Lebur has been shielding that woman all these years, why should he suddenly throw up the game?"

"Oh, you are clever devils," Martin acknowledged. "You have got to see your way perfectly clear ahead, haven't you, before you move? Well, have it your own way. Tell me how a blundering philanthropist could stumble into this matter and succeed in keeping a poor fellow from being dragged back to Dartmoor, and succeed, also, in clearing him of the crime he never committed?"

Charlesworth stroked his moustache for a moment carefully. He was looking at his visitor with blank eyes. Here was, he decided, a genuine and real philanthropist. He knew Martin to be furiously in love with Lebur's wife, and he knew him to be just as anxious to keep Lebur out of prison.

"Well, bearing in mind your final object," he said, "I should do what we would like to do ourselves and daren't. We should like to walk into the offices of Messrs. Leversen and Leversen, and we should like to ask for an interview with the senior member of the firm, and we should like to ask him—whether under the seal of confidence or not—precisely why a member of that famous firm in the middle of that very sensational trial leant across to the doomed man—and he was doomed, mind, at that time—and gave the prisoner a certain piece of advice, a piece of advice which led to his changing his plea and saved his neck at the expense of his liberty."

"Well, there are no cross-purposes about our game, at any rate," Martin said, with a smile. "You know what you are after, Charlesworth, as well as I do. Perhaps I can give you a little bit of a shaking, though. Over a year ago I did precisely what you have suggested."

The Sub-Commissioner was frankly startled.

"What was the reply?" he asked quickly.

"Exactly what you might expect. I was an unknown, retired police-constable at that time, and I was ordered to leave the offices and never, under any circumstances, to enter them again. What do you think of that, Sub-Commissioner?"

"Of whom did you ask that question?"

"Of Sir Frederick Leversen."

"Ah!" Charlesworth observed. "I wonder what the result would be if you, Lord Brockenhurst, were to ask the same question again?"

"You think it would be different?"

"With such a man," Charlesworth replied, "you never can tell."

"I am quite sure that the interests of the firm would prompt them to deliver a different reply. Strange though it may seem, there have been cases known in legal history where the interests of the firm have been placed above the interests of the individual."

"You have been quite right all the time in some of your surmises, Lord Brockenhurst. I don't believe that Richard Lebur killed David Culpepper. It's a sad confession to make, but I make it."

"And your suggestion?"

"I suggest that you start the business by asking that question once more, you yourself, mind, and ask it of Sir Frederick himself."

Martin glanced at his watch.

"This very morning," he said, "the mine shall be sprung."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was barely half an hour later when Brockenhurst entered the modernized and very fine offices of Leversen and Leversen. He paused for a few moments studying the list of partners on a mahogany board and noting with whom an interview might be possible and those who at that moment were sternly denying themselves to all callers. The majority of the firm, he discovered, were out, which meant that they were either engaged in some great financial scheme or endeavouring to aid some distinguished client to escape from the meshes of the Law. Supposing that neither of those assumptions was correct, Martin decided that they might have gone to their clubs early for lunch.

He abandoned the meditation with a little shrug of the shoulders, paused to light a cigarette and was turning away, having read that Sir Frederick was out, when he suddenly felt a little touch upon the shoulder. A fulsome and yet rather troubled voice sounded in his ear. It was scarcely a year since their last few remarks had passed between them and Sir Frederick Leversen had changed very little. His complexion was still waxen, his eyes had retained their ferret-like shape.

"This is surely Lord Brockenhurst," he said. "Oh, yes, I am sure it is Lord Brockenhurst. Was your Lordship by any chance planning a call upon any member of our firm? I noticed that you were studying the board."

"As a matter of fact, I was," Martin acknowledged. "I was about to enquire if I could have a few minutes' conversation with Sir Frederick, and I honestly believe—indeed I certainly recognize—that you are he. I was remarking to Lady Diana only the other night, at a club which we do not talk about too freely in this august neighbourhood, on the resemblance between yourself and your son, who was pointed out to me."

Sir Frederick smiled, but it was not a very pleasant gesture.

"Ah! yes. My younger people go there quite often. I, too, have visited the 'Evening Star' on one occasion," he admitted. "Amusing little place—good food, too."

"Except the ham sandwiches," Martin observed, inspired by some spark of devilment. "Yes, it's a very pleasant place, Sir Frederick. But I didn't come here to talk to you about the 'Evening Star.' You weren't there last night by any chance, were you?"

"I was not," was the prompt reply. "Why should you ask?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, you look a little pale about the gills this morning. You look as though someone had taken you by surprise."

"Very good of your Lordship to notice," Leversen observed. "If you had a little matter of business to go into with the firm," he added, "perhaps you would do me the honour of mounting to my private room. I should be delighted to see if there is anything we could do for you."

"Take care of my estates, I suppose?" Martin asked with a smile.

Sir Frederick Leversen held up his hands, half ecstatically, half in horrified fashion.

"We should never presume to hope that your Lordship would place that much confidence in us," he said. "Besides, as a matter of fact, it really is not in our line of country. We are criminal lawyers."

"Well, I will come with you and ask my question," Martin agreed. "I will begin by asking a favour. I am used to being addressed as 'your Lordship' rather too often by the waiters at the Club, who think that because the title is new to me, out of sheer kindness of heart they will use it often that I may accustom myself to my new dignities. I have now reached that point. An occasional 'Lord Brockenhurst' in a business conversation like ours is in order, but not so much of it, there's a good fellow!"

"Just as your—just as you wish," Sir Frederick replied. "Will you follow me, Lord Brockenhurst?"

They passed along a broad passage-way, up and down which countless young men, mostly bespectacled and mostly carrying basketfuls of letters, were rushing. At last they entered a door towards the end of the row, upon which was painted, in white letters, Sir Frederick Leversen.

Martin entered and followed his host a moment or two later to a desk-table at the end of the room. The young lady who was occupying a seat opposite a typewriter was waved unceremoniously away. This time Sir Frederick was not going to be robbed of his cheaply won glory.

"Unless your Lordship has notes to give me which might require a shorthand transcriber," he suggested, "the young lady might leave us."

"I have no notes to give you of any sort," Martin told him, with a pleasant smile at the disappearing figure. "The young lady will excuse our unceremonious entrance, I am sure. I shall sit opposite you at the table and our few words, Sir Frederick, will not require an audience."

Once more the great lawyer was becoming a little uneasy. His fears, however, were all too vague to materialize. He seated himself in a comfortable leather chair and leaned forward towards his visitor in a gesture of polite attention.

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## **CHAPTER XXI**

"Will you smoke?" Sir Frederick asked, as he pushed a handsomely decorated box across the desk. "These are very good tobacco, I believe."

"Thank you very much," Martin replied. "I won't smoke. I came to have a few words with you, Sir Frederick, about a case which I expect you have almost forgotten."

Sir Frederick looked very much as though it certainly was a case which he had forgotten. He also looked as though he wished devoutly that it was a case that he had never heard of and that his present visitor had no real existence.

"The name of the case?" he murmured.

"The Lebur murder case," Martin confided. "The Crown, I believe, were represented as usual in such cases by Herriott White. You briefed Charles Margate and Stokes—both of them very prominent in those days but, unfortunately, both dead at the present moment."



Leveresen was pulling himself together in great style, but he was very pale and there was something about his manner which suggested an intense distaste for the subject of their conversation.

"I remember the case perfectly," he pronounced, "because there was a very singular episode connected with it. The prisoner was permitted by the Judge, at my request, to change his plea to one of 'Guilty.'"

"That is the episode which is responsible for my visit," Martin confided.

"Another unusual episode," Sir Frederick continued, "is the fact that the prisoner, who was sentenced to penal servitude for life, has recently made his escape and is at the present moment, unless he has been arrested within the last few days, wandering about the country, a free man."

"That, I am informed, is the exact situation," Martin assented.

"And may I ask, Lord Brockenhurst, what your interest is in this case or why you have come to see us about it?" was the somewhat shielded question with which Martin was faced.

"You certainly may," was the equitable reply. "It's a case which I happen to have studied a little. I have come to the conclusion that the prisoner was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted."

"Innocent?" Sir Frederick repeated in a tone of shocked surprise. "It is very seldom that a prisoner who is found guilty of a crime—for which, by the bye, he has already pleaded 'Guilty' and has served six years of his sentence—is subsequently found to have been improperly convicted."

"It is a fortunate thing for the state of society at large," Martin rejoined, "that the occurrence to which I am alluding *is* unusual. However, that happens to have been so in the present case. I have come to you in the first place, Sir Frederick, to ask if you could tell me any circumstances connected with the trial which might have weighed with the Judge in his unusual consent to an unusual plea."

"God bless my soul, no!" was the astonished reply. "How should I know anything about it? No, I haven't the faintest recollection of there being anything else in this case containing unusual circumstances. I suggested the change of plea to the prisoner as the only means of saving his neck, as I happened to know that the Judge who was trying the case had the utmost dislike to pronouncing the death sentence."

"In plain words," Martin, who was in a grim way rather enjoying himself, remarked, "you want to know what on earth business it is of mine."

"I should scarcely put it so bluntly," Sir Frederick agreed, "but that idea is at the back of my mind."

"Well, I have no objection to satisfying a certain portion of your curiosity," Martin observed. "My father had a great liking and a great respect for old Simon Lebur. It is one which, I suppose, to some extent I inherit. Simon Lebur is a broken man through his son's conviction. He is slowly, at the present time, dying of grief. He, himself, is tortured with certain doubts. He knew that his son was not an amiable character. He knew that he was a young man who had been a great trouble to him all his life, but he didn't believe he was a man likely to have committed a murder, especially so cold-blooded a murder as this one seems to have been. My interest is, in a way, perhaps an inherited weakness. My father was greatly interested in the affair. He was, as you may know, a famous connoisseur of pictures himself, and Simon Lebur visited his gallery and collection at Brockenhurst at various times. We spoke on this subject some little time before he died. Although I can't pretend that he would ever have taken an active part in such investigations as I propose to set on foot, he would, I am sure, have been greatly interested in any possibility for the old man's closing years being made more happy."

"What, may I ask, Lord Brockenhurst, are these investigations you propose to set on foot? A case settled six years ago will be a very difficult one to reopen—very nearly impossible."

"I suppose so," Martin reflected.

Sir Frederick agreed enthusiastically.

"Still, if there were any new evidence which came to light, the proper authorities would, I am sure, be disposed to investigate them thoroughly. By the proper authorities you will realize that I refer to the Police. It will give me great pleasure to give you my card, which you can present to the Chief Commissioner with my compliments. He will show you, I am sure, every attention."

"That is very kind of you," Martin observed. "I was wondering, however, if by chance these facts came into the hands of members of the outside public and they brought them to you, whether you yourself would be prepared to take action in the matter?"

Sir Frederick shook his head firmly.

"A Crown case is dealt with by the Crown," he said. "Our interference would be regarded as unwarranted. If new evidence did arise, it would be laid before Scotland Yard, who, I am convinced, would at once act upon it. I am afraid that is all the encouragement I can give you, Lord Brockenhurst, in your quest."

"Well," Martin reflected, "I didn't expect much beyond that. There would be no money in the case, would there?"

"None whatever, except that, if the new evidence were of such a sort that the sentence was found unjustified, notwithstanding the prisoner's plea, the cost of his subsistence in prison for the last six years might become a charge upon the relatives of the falsely convicted man."

Martin laughed very softly for several moments.

"You think this would be rather a dangerous matter for the relatives or friends of the convicted man to touch, then?" he observed.

"Unless they were convinced that they had absolutely fresh evidence having a direct bearing on the case, I should certainly advise them to leave it alone," was Sir Frederick's decision.

"Because of the fear of involving themselves in these difficulties you have spoken of?" Martin enquired.

The lawyer was silent for a moment.

"I will not go so far as to say that that would be the chief object of any self-respecting lawyer or court," he said, "in letting things remain as they are. But it would have to be a consideration. In any case, it is very expensive to trifle with Law. I don't remember in all my experience any case in which good has come from such a course."

Martin remained silent for some time.

"Well, Sir Frederick," he said at last, "I find that I have not succeeded in arousing your sympathies for Richard Lebur."

"May I be permitted to point out," Sir Frederick said, "that as yet you have not told me what this new evidence is that might have reversed the process of the trial if it had been made known at the time?"

"Quite true, I have not," Martin replied. "I will tell you why I have not. This, as you have admitted, is a Crown case, and I should have to be a little more convinced of the proper procedure before I went any further. You see, if I were to place the evidence I possess, or which I think I possess, in the hands of the Law at the present moment, the Crown would at once, I presume, examine it and, if it discovered a flaw, they would not only refuse to reopen the case, but it would be closed for all time. Am I not right there?"

"I should say you probably are," Sir Frederick admitted, after a brief hesitation.

"Therefore," Martin continued, "unless I can interest you in the case, unless I can win you round to a decision to take a real interest in it and endeavour to secure an amendment of that false verdict, I should do very much better to leave you alone, and either find a lawyer who would be willing to work for me—I being responsible for the expenses—or drop it altogether."

"If your evidence amounted to proof of any description," Sir Frederick said gruffly, "you would scarcely find a respectable firm of lawyers who would not appeal to the Crown to be allowed to state a case."

"Still, if our opinions differ as to this evidence," Martin pursued, "I should be running the risk of the firm whom I had consulted wishing me 'Good morning' and telling me to go about my business. There are times, Sir Frederick, when your directness is absolutely refreshing. This is one of them. I see that you do not believe in my hidden evidence."

"Unless I am told what it is, your Lordship, how can you expect me to believe in it?" Leversen persisted.

Martin rose slowly to his feet.

"Well, sir," he said, "I am sorry to have taken up quite a good deal of your time to no purpose."

"I hope very much," the lawyer said, "that I have convinced you of the folly of taking any further action in the matter."

"Well, I can scarcely go as far as that," was the dubious reply. "But you have helped me to realize the difficulties of the situation."

"If I might be permitted," Sir Frederick, concluded, "as a—I won't presume to say as a friend—but as a well-wisher, Lord Brockenhurst, I would beg you, for your own sake, to drop these vague ideas of yours at once. They are not likely to lead anywhere or to do you any good. In my opinion, Lebur was extremely fortunate in being permitted to change his plea and get out of court without losing his neck. I am not going to suggest for a moment that that leniency would be altered in any way if the case were tried again, but I do say that any reopening of the case would be very largely to the disadvantage of any hopes the man may have had of a mitigation of his sentence in years to come."

"Very nicely put," Martin admitted. "You will forgive me, I am sure," he added, picking up his hat and gloves, "for having taken up so much of your time. I shall not, of course, intrude upon you again."

Martin, with a brief nod, turned towards the door. His one idea and hope was to escape without being compelled to shake hands with the man whom he had come to visit. He kept both of his own behind his back and clutched his hat. His companion walked in a somewhat undignified fashion by his side.

"I should not be doing my duty," Sir Frederick concluded, as they drew near the door, "if I didn't reiterate to you my urgent, my most impressive advice to leave this Lebur case alone. There is nothing to be got out of it which would bring you any satisfaction whatever—no benefit to the criminal now or in the future. Believe me, the Law has taken its course and it has delivered its final judgment upon the case of Richard Lebur."

"You may be right," Martin admitted, looking steadily at the door handle. "You may, of course, be right. We shall see."

The lawyer's last effort was a failure. Martin's hands were everywhere except in the direction of the proffered hand. At the last moment, when well across the threshold, he looked behind with a slight nod.

"Think it over from my point of view, Sir Frederick," he advised. "There, you see, I am offering advice instead of taking it. Good morning, sir."

The lawyer shook his head dolefully.

"You are a very obstinate man, I fear, Lord Brockenhurst," he said, lingering wistfully on the threshold of his office.

\* \* \* \* \*

The lady in the Battersea flat rose from her couch with much rustling of her skirts, a joyful smile of welcome on her lips, and outstretched hands. Yet it was perfectly obvious that she was not too sure who this very personable visitor might be.

"I believe you have forgotten all about me," Martin remarked, as he tactfully avoided an embrace and subsided into an easy-chair by her side. She made a plunge and it was a successful one.

"The Gigantic Hotel!"

He nodded.

"Quite right," he admitted. "Here bothering you again. I expect you will be very angry with me."

"If I am very angry," she said severely, "it is because you never kept your promise to come and see me."

"But the flowers I sent you?" he reminded her.

She ventured upon a little gesture which was as near scornful as she dared make it.

"Flowers!" she exclaimed. "Well, flowers are all very well, but they never have very much to say to me. I like a little note inside with an invitation to lunch or dinner. Besides, I don't believe you sent any flowers, anyhow."

"You might find something very much more tangible, Mrs. Culpepper," he assured her, "if you came into partnership with me in a little scheme I have on hand."

She withdrew a little in her place. It was almost at the same moment that she smoothed down her skirts with the air of a modest lady who has discovered that she is showing too much leg.

"Are you going to begin again?" she asked severely.

"You took a wrong view of my previous enquiries," he assured her. "Things have changed a little since then, however. This fellow, Lebur, seems to have kept out of the way of the Police all this time, and, if he gets in touch with his father and they put their heads together, I should not wonder if they didn't get this case reopened. I told you that before, you know."

"I don't believe it," she answered obstinately. "Cases can't be tried over again when a verdict has been given."

"I don't suppose they can," Martin admitted. "But there is just one thing I should like to ask you, since this subject has come up—do you honestly believe that Richard Lebur killed Culpepper?"

"Why, that's the same damn silly question you asked me before!" she exclaimed angrily.

"Very likely," he answered. "I keep on worrying about it."

"More fool you," she snapped. "You tried to frighten me the last time and make me believe Richard would do me a bad turn if he came across me. You wanted me to get out of the country, I remember. Shucks! I am not going. Once and for all, you had better get that into your head."

"By the by, there is something else I always wanted to ask you," he went on. "Was it you who tried my door, then knocked on the panelling, and then rang me up on the telephone that night we talked together at the Gigantic Hotel?"

She laughed at him.

"You are a bad man," she exclaimed coyly. "As if I should do such a thing!"

"Well, I was never quite sure," he meditated.

"Well, you come down to the Gigantic Hotel this week-end and see what happens to you," she suggested.

"My dear lady, I daren't," he assured her. "You see, I have become engaged to be married since the last time we met."

"More fool you," she replied. "I can't think what you men get married for. Aren't there plenty of nice-looking women about in the world you can have a spot of fun with if you want to, without tying yourself up for life?"

"That certainly is one way of looking at it," he admitted. "But listen! I am going to ask you one more question and then we will talk about lighter things."

"Well?"

"I have gone on with my enquiries since we met last," he told her, "and I have found out one thing. There was another person that afternoon who could have killed Culpepper."

He sat watching her and what he saw was illuminating. He saw every scrap of colour drain from her cheeks. The last time he had even hinted at such a thing, she had scoffed at it. This time, it had thrown her into a cold agony of terror.

"Anyone else in my flat that day!" she gasped. "It's a lie! There was no one—there could have been no one!"

"So we all thought," he answered. "We know differently now. There was someone, Mrs. Culpepper. Blast the woman!" he added, gazing at her ruefully. "Here, sit up! You can't faint here."

She stretched out her hand.

"Hélène! Hélène!" she murmured.

He rang the bell, then came back to her side and held a tumbler of water to her lips. She spat out the liquid and aimed a wild blow at Martin. Then, to his immense relief, the door was softly opened and the girl who had sat at the table with her at the Gigantic Hotel glided into the room. She closed the door and crossed the floor towards them.

"The same man," she murmured deprecatingly. "Why are you always upsetting this poor woman? You did it once before in the hotel. The idea of offering her water, too!"

The girl crossed the room to the sideboard, brought out a decanter of brandy and filled a wineglass. She laid her hand on the woman's forehead, pushed her head a little back and held the glass to her lips. The woman drank it eagerly. She struggled a little higher in her seat, but she was still in a semicomatose state.

"This man will kill me," she exclaimed. "Do you know what he says, Hélène? He tells me there was another man in the flat the day Culpepper was murdered!"

Mademoiselle Hélène appeared unaffected.

"What are you?" she asked, looking curiously at Martin. "A detective—that you keep worrying this poor woman? What if there was another man? No one saw him, if there was. The case is all over and finished with. Why are you trying all the time to rake things up?"

"I belong to a little company of one or two men who think there may have been a mistake," he confided. "You see, the man who was found guilty is serving a sentence of penal servitude at Dartmoor, and he doesn't like it. He is free now temporarily and he wants to know if something can't be done about it. That is why I came to try to persuade Mrs. Culpepper to tell me the truth."

"Too late for anything of that sort, I'm afraid," the girl said brusquely. "The case is over and done with. Go away now, please, sir. You see what a state you have thrown this poor woman into. She is going to faint again in a minute."

Martin rose to his feet.

"Perhaps you are right," he acknowledged. "I will leave you to look after her. I think I have found out the most important thing I wanted to know. Were you there that day?"

"I was a witness," she replied calmly.

"Do you think that anything was left out that should have been told?"

"You can't ask questions like that when that poor woman's lying there half listening," the girl rejoined angrily.

He tore an envelope from a letter in his pocket and scribbled a few words on it.

"Just for the moment," he said a little brutally, "I don't think that Madame is listening. I was only guessing before. I have convinced myself now that there was or had been someone else in Madame's flat. If at any time you should feel like earning a thousand pounds, you can come and tell me his name or how to find it out."

Whereupon Martin bowed to the fainting woman, smiled at the girl, who was standing with the envelope in her hand, picked up his hat and stick and took his departure, feeling just about as ashamed of himself as he had ever felt before in his life.

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## CHAPTER XXII

Simon Lebur was brooding over a volume of engravings, which he had bought at Christie's a few days before, when Martin was shown into his office next afternoon. He laid it down on the table with a gesture of relief.

"News?" he demanded with a little gasp.

"No news," Martin replied. "No news, except that I am daily losing a little more self-respect, Simon, in this matter."

Simon's two hands were crossed on the ivory knob of his stick. They trembled for several moments before he spoke.

"If there's a man in this city who can afford to walk with his head in the air all day and every day, it is you, my friend," he groaned. "Why do you have these nervous fits? You have not a thought in your mind that is not for others. There is not an action of which you are ever guilty which is not for the good of others. The desire of your own heart stays there, unchanging, as I know, and yet you speak of self-shame."

Martin patted him on the shoulder as he passed him and threw himself into the easy-chair opposite.

"It is the rotten way I am going about things, Simon, my friend," he confessed. "Yesterday I called on a bad woman and I tried to frighten her into telling me something I very much want to know. I frightened her into a faint and, while she lay in her chair, unconscious, I offered her companion a thousand pounds to tell me the same thing—not before her face, mind, but while her mistress was fainting."

Simon waved a tremulous hand in the air.

"I don't understand," he faltered. "I don't believe that even now, in these evil days, Richard would tell me a lie. He has told me that he has sent you papers which make it possible for you to marry Pamela at any moment, whether he is alive, or dead, or in prison."

"He has done that," Martin assented. "From his point of view it was the deed of an honest man, and he did it unasked, without even a suggestion from me."

"Then why is your face dark with trouble?" Simon asked sadly. "If you love this woman so much—and I know that you do love her and I know that I love her myself; she is one of the happy people of the world because she is good—what then is wrong with you, Martin?"

"Something that your son never thought of," Martin replied. "Something, to tell you the truth, that I never thought of, but something which makes those papers only a mockery. They are the papers which would give a divorce to any woman who possessed them, but, alas, he forgot and I forgot and you forget that Pamela's people from far back in the past are all zealous Roman Catholics."

"God!" Simon muttered to himself, hoarsely. "She would let that stand in the way?"

Martin was very nearly angry.

"Simon," he said, "you are a Jew and you are an honest, self-respecting Jew. You follow your faith to its farthest limit. You know perfectly well that, if your creed forbade divorce, you would feel exactly as Pamela does."

"You have not asked her, then?"

"I shall never ask her—which means, perhaps, that I shall never marry her. But she knows."

"Why have you come to tell me this now, just now?" Simon Lebur asked.

"Because I am a coward," Martin confessed. "I am carrying with me the seeds of a disappointment so great that I can't bear them alone. I have to come whining to others for sympathy. No good saying I'm sorry, Simon. Tomorrow I shall be even more ashamed than I am today. I have been working desperately to find out if an old conviction of mine was not the truth, to gather proof, if possible, that it was not your boy who murdered Culpepper. Your heart was full of gratitude to me for this. I didn't deserve it, Simon. I was working more for my own sake. I have known for days now that it is the only chance I have in life. While he lives, Pamela can be nothing more to me than she is now—my dearest and most wonderful friend. That is my decision—not hers. I should be none the better off if we succeeded in proving Richard innocent tomorrow. Nevertheless, I can't escape from the conviction that he is innocent. I want to prove it for your sake and, in a sense, for hers. For myself, I have little—I have nothing—to hope for."

Simon's face was hidden in his hands. Martin sprang up and hurried to his side, sat on the arm of his chair and passed his arm round the old man's shoulders.

"Simon," he went on, "this is no fault of yours. Other men have had worse troubles than mine, for I can see Pamela all the time. I shall count her as I do now—my dearest friend. It is just the strange way events have worked out!"

"It is a cruel thing," Simon said, with a little break in his voice, "that you, who deserve so much, should gain so little. You, who should be so happy, must pass through life a lonely man. And my son—yes, I must use the words—my son, Martin, if by any chance he gets free through your efforts or anyone else's efforts, he will walk in the mud all his days. He will never have the courage, never have the grace or the will to raise his head and realize what the great God gave him and has now taken away. You are content, Martin, to think that while you are alive and your love is there, and her love for you is there—you are content, for the sake of these strange scruples, to let her pass away out of your love and keeping for ever?"

"I speak for Pamela, Simon," Martin answered. "If you were Pamela and her creed were your creed, you would feel as she feels."

Simon's worn hands once more covered his face.

"The God of Abraham only knows," he murmured sadly.



\* \* \* \* \*

Martin left his old friend with a kindly grip of the hand but with a queer sense of estrangement. He went to Pamela's studio and, curiously enough, he felt a sense of repose and almost contentment in lying quite silently in a low chair and watching her work. Very few words passed between them. They had reached that stage in their joint life when existence flowed on, without explanation, without any need for it. Every now and then she looked away from her work and across at him—looked steadfastly into his eyes, without speech or questioning. For the first few times he carried out his methods of helping her when she was troubled by some difficulties of details, and held up before her a rough charcoal sketch of Simon—a sketch which had formed the basis of her picture. As time passed on, however, she shook her head. He understood at once and leant the picture against the wall. He let her eyes wander towards him, watched a contemplative gleam in them, remained speechless, but made no effort to help her. There came a time when he saw the little tide of weariness which came to her now and then, and at last she laid down her brush.

"It is enough for today," she sighed. "I must sit by your side, Martin. My fingers are cramped and I am brain-weary. Is there any news?"

"None."

"You have seen the woman?"

"I have. She has nothing to tell me. To offer her money would be foolish, for she has no need of it. But I have been low enough to try to bribe her companion. I have offered a thousand pounds for the name of the man who did shoot Culpepper. Richard, himself, is innocent, to that I will swear. But there is nothing that even he can suggest. I believe that at the back of his mind he is convinced, although he would never admit it, that it was she herself who is guilty. He believes that it is she whom he is shielding."

She looked at him curiously. To her this had long ago become a foregone conclusion.

"Tell me one thing more, Martin," she begged, "before we leave this horrible subject alone, for a time, at any rate. Why would you swear that Richard is innocent? Why do you believe it? No one else does."

"I am not so sure about that, dear," he answered. "There is another man, a hard-headed, shrewd servant of the Police, who also believes it. Why should we both have the same idea? The strange thing about it all, too, is that at the back of my mind I find it quite unimportant, except for the sake of that poor old man. I should not have the slightest objection to marrying the wife of a murderer—it would not affect your willingness to marry me. But there is just one thing that keeps you and me apart and, in a sense, will keep us apart for ever."

"You mean?"

"That the ceremony, which would remain always to us a sacrament, would be really a sham. You know what it was my father in his last years prayed for, and what he believed had become a certainty. He died with that smile upon his lips, Pamela, which neither of us could ever forget. We have to be true to the promise which brought it there."

She looked at him and he saw again that quick rise and fall of her bosom. He saw the strange fire blaze out for a moment and then depart from those strangely beautiful eyes.

"Martin!"

He took her hand. She drew willingly and joyfully a little nearer to him. She laid her head upon his shoulder.

"I will not say that I am content," he whispered. "But I have never complained. I shall never complain. My love for you is a thing quite apart from my dreams of possession."

Her lips touched his and it seemed to him there was almost a sacerdotal fire in them.

"Oh, you too feel like that, Martin?" she cried.

"Certainly. I ought not—and I should not if I didn't love you almost to agony," he answered, smoothing back her hair. "Those passion-torn ancestors of ours wouldn't understand it, I suppose. I don't understand it myself some days, some hours, but there it is."

It seemed to him that his heart had suddenly missed a beat. There was no strange presence in the room, only that hideous, mechanical disturbance caused by the soft purring of the telephone. He kissed her eyes, but when he would have drawn away, she pulled him closer to her.

"Let's have finished with the rest of the world, Martin," she begged. "We talk too much to other people. We wear ourselves out too much with strange thoughts and fancies. Stay here with me. Sit the twilight out with me. Those great green leaves flapping upon the window-pane are the leaves from the olive trees in my garden, and that is no city you catch glimpses of beyond. We are passing out of that world, Martin. I want to take you somewhere else. You will come?"

There was the perfume of the magnolia in the uneven billows of her hair and the fire of the scarlet flowers of Florence in her almost fierce caress. He drew her closer and closer into his embrace—and the time came when the telephone ceased to ring.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet in the end the loathsome thing prevailed, for on a third fresh attempt Martin took up the receiver.

"Who are you?" was the somewhat surly reply.

"3098 Chelsea."

"There is a long-distance call for Lord Brockenhurst," replied the operator.

"I am Lord Brockenhurst," Martin answered.

Almost at once Richard Lebur's voice came down the line. There seemed to be no attempt at concealment, but the voice itself sounded strange.

"Brockenhurst?"

"Speaking."

"Hold on to your head. I have news to tell you."

"Go on."

"Your thousand pounds did the trick. You won't fail?"

"How fail?" Martin demanded.

"The girl—she wants her thousand pounds."

"She shall have it," Martin promised. "Send her round to me now, if you will."

"I'll send her straightaway," was the husky reply. "She'll be with you in an hour or so. Somehow, I fancy that you have spent your money wisely, Brockenhurst. Somehow, I fancy you will say that you have received good value for it."

"Why can't you tell me all about it?"

There was a queer little laugh.

"My dear man, I have written it down—two or three clear words, two or three clear paragraphs. Quite a little story! Read it carefully. The girl is bringing it to you. If I have forgotten anything, she will tell you."

"I don't wish anyone to come here," Martin complained. "As you know, I am in your wife's studio."

"Then, keep my wife away from it, if you can. But read the letter the girl brings you. Give her the money you promised and accept my best wishes."

After that—silence.

\* \* \* \* \*

The bell of the outside door was ringing. With fierce unwillingness Martin slipped back the latch. Standing at his full height, he blocked the whole of the threshold. There before him was the girl he had first seen at the Gigantic Hotel—Mrs. Culpepper's companion. She was dressed in the same sombre gown; those two front teeth seemed more than ever prominent, her complexion was bad, her expression sullenly and stoically indifferent.

"What do you want?" Martin asked.

She looked at him indifferently.

"I come with a message for you," she said.

"No one," Martin told her, "can enter this room for the moment."

"Why not?"

"I have no reason to give you," he replied. "If you have a message, give it to me. If you have a letter, I will read it, but you cannot enter this room."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind," she asked sarcastically, "coming with me into the street and sitting in my taxi-cab."

"I will do that," he agreed with great relief.

He stepped outside, felt in his pocket to be sure that the key was there, and closed the door behind him. They descended the staircase into the street. He handed her into the taxi. She took her place in it, looking at him curiously all the time.

"You aren't very hospitable," she said.

"That is not my home," he explained, "and you have come at a moment when I have no hospitality to offer."

"Do I sit here, then, and tell you what I have to say?" she asked.

"I am afraid you must," he replied.

"You offered a thousand pounds for the name of the man who shot David Culpepper."

"I did. You shall have the money as soon as you tell me."

"You will trust my word?"

"I will."

"Then I will trust yours. The name is contained in the letter which I am going to hand to you together with one from Richard Lebur."

"Where is Richard Lebur?" he asked.

The girl smiled. It was not a pleasant gesture. On the other hand, it was inoffensive.

"Richard Lebur for the last five days has been engaged in the purchase of a passport," she confided. "He has secured it for himself and his wife. He was married to the lady who has been known as Mrs. Culpepper at St. Martin's Registry Office a few days ago. They left by plane at four o'clock this afternoon. They are well away by now on their journey—abroad."

"A little sudden, isn't it?"

"It seemed so to me," the girl assented, "but the woman couldn't get her passport without it. Anyway, they have gone, and, as soon as I have collected your thousand pounds, I shall be off, if they will let me."

"Who are 'they?'" Martin asked.

"The Police. I don't know whether they are going to interfere. I began to wonder, myself, whether they were not helping Richard Lebur. I saw them off and there wasn't a question asked. They have gone and I am damn well glad. Here's the letter."

Martin took it into his hands. He slit open the envelope and stared with set, fixed eyes and blank incredulity at the name scrawled out across half a sheet of notepaper. The letter itself fluttered down to his feet, but the girl retrieved it. She picked it up and handed it to him.

"This envelope," she said, "is from Richard Lebur. I know nothing about it. He gave me a little farewell present to come and place it in your hands. There's a document of some sort inside. Before you read it,

there's something else. There's a letter, too, from Richard Lebur. I'm not charging anything for delivery, but—he seemed to think you'd be glad to have it."

He held out his hand, tore open the long mauve envelope, and found himself staring with ever-increasing astonishment at the oblong slip of printed words.

"Bit slow, aren't you?" she scoffed. "Never saw one before, I suppose. I'll tell you what it is, it's a marriage certificate, that's what it is. He wasn't over-keen on parting with it, I can tell you!"

Martin heard nothing. He was staring with fascinated eyes at that slip of paper. A marriage certificate it certainly was, and the name of the man was Richard Lebur, and the girl Gladys Somerly of the King's Arms Hotel, Cambridge, and the marriage between these two had been solemnized nine years ago at St. Mary's Church, Wisbech. A crumpled-up note was pinned on to the certificate. He straightened it out and read:

You take some satisfying, M. B., you and the fine finicky lady, but this will do the trick for you. The girl was a barmaid of the King's Arms. She died three years ago, but she was very much alive and kicking on the day I married Pamela, as anyone in Cambridge would tell you! Help yourself, my friend. Since divorce won't do, I am sending you the proof that I had another wife the day I married Pamela Orsini. Sarah and I are off to S.A. If ever I come back, I'll perhaps tell you who killed David Culpepper. Sarah knows, for all her basketful of lies. Satisfied, I hope.

R. L.

He folded up the scrap of paper and placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

"You have earned your money," he said to the girl.

"I know that," she replied. "I'm waiting here for it, aren't I?"

"You shall be paid at once," he promised, "but be reasonable. I have plenty of money at home, in the bank, in my rooms, anywhere I choose to go for it, but the one place where I have not got a spare thousand pounds is in my pocket."

"More fool you, if you had!" she replied.

He meditated for a minute.

"Would you have any objection to driving with me round to my rooms? They are not very far away. I suppose a cheque will do for a portion of it?"

She looked at him for a moment, curiously.

"Yes," she agreed. "You are honest enough. A bit of a fool, you must be, or you would have dealt with this matter differently. What are you going to do about the thousand pounds—meet me tomorrow somewhere?"

"Not at all," he answered. "I shan't keep you waiting nearly as long as that. If you will sit here quietly in this taxi until I have run up those steps and left a note to explain my absence, I will return within five minutes. You shall drive with me to my rooms, and I think I can safely promise you the whole of your thousand pounds. If I am a trifle short, I shall give you a cheque for the balance."

"I am satisfied," she answered. "Hurry up!"

He ran lightly up the stairs, turned the key, which he was holding in his hand, in the door, and sat down by Pamela's writing-table. He scrawled less than half a dozen lines and no human being but Pamela herself ever saw them. He addressed them to her, rang the bell, and waited. The maid came almost at once. He pointed to the note.

"See that your mistress has that immediately," he directed. "Tell her, if you please, that I shall be back before very long."

The maid took the note from his fingers. Once more he went down the stairs, gave his address to the cab-driver, and drove off.

"You have started by being well up to time," the young woman remarked, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Keep it up, please."

"You are in a hurry to get back?" he asked.

"So would you be in a hurry to break off altogether with that wretched woman and that madman, if you had been hanging about after them for the last few weeks."

"I may ask you one more question," he begged, as they turned into Piccadilly.

"Oh, for God's sake, get it off your chest, then!" the girl snapped.

"Here you are, then—does Richard Lebur know who your mistress's other visitor was upon that afternoon?"

"Not he!" she answered scornfully. "He's fool enough to believe that she never had any other visitors except himself."

They drove on in silence. She followed him to his rooms. He ordered a whisky and soda from Janien, but he left it untouched when it appeared.

"Don't disturb me again until I ring, Janien," he directed.

The man took his departure. The girl watched him curiously.

"My! He's a quiet one, isn't he?" she remarked.

"Well-trained servant," was the terse reply. "Sit down in that easy-chair, please."

He pointed to one a short distance away. She seated herself a little awkwardly.

He dealt with the safe quickly enough. The heavy door swung open. He brought out a large cash-box, a pocket-book, and a bundle of notes, and he relocked the safe. For ten minutes he was counting. The girl

sat watching him, fascinated. When he had reached the end of the first hundred, she leaned across the table.

"I can't believe it's real money," she muttered. "Give me that to be going on with."

"One hundred," he said. "All right! Take it, young lady. And here's the second," he added, very soon afterwards. "Two hundred."

Up to eight hundred all went smoothly. There was still some left. He turned to the pocket-book, counted out ten ten-pound notes, and twenty fives. He pushed them across the table and threw after them the rubber band in which the last lot had been enclosed.

"A thousand pounds," he pointed out.

"That's right," she assented in a hushed tone. "My God! One thousand pounds!"

He handed her another ten-pound note.

"That's for the answer to the question I asked you in the taxi-cab," he said. "Now, here's another ten-pound note coming for the last question of all. What are they going to do, those two?"

She shook her head. "That is no concern of mine," she answered. "It was no part of the bargain that I should tell you that, even if I knew it."

"Quite right," he admitted. "I don't press it. They are off the map, both of them, so far as I am concerned."

"And me," the girl said, rising eagerly to her feet. "I shall leave you to pay the taxi, sir."

"I will accept the responsibility," he agreed. "Tell me—how are you going to spend your money?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," she answered.

"I don't believe I should," he admitted.

He rang the bell.

"Show this young lady out, Janien," he said. "Tell the taxi to wait."

Janien threw open the door. She looked back past him to his master.

"I hope you will get your thousand pounds' worth, sir," she remarked with a sneer.

"Maybe," he answered enigmatically, his fingers feeling the crumpled-up slip of paper in his waistcoat pocket.

Janien, as soon as he had closed the door, reappeared. He was carrying a salver in his hand. Upon it reposed a large square envelope.

"This has just been left for your Lordship," he announced. "I was begged to see that you had it without delay. There is also a note there which came at the same time from Lady Diana Malladene." Martin signed towards the window. Janien hurried across the room and threw it up.

"Hand me my whisky and soda, Janien," he ordered, as he sank into a chair.

The man obeyed swiftly. He also brought cigarettes and matches, which he placed upon the table. Martin ignored the letter, but he gulped off the contents of the tumbler. He then opened the square, fine envelope with the coronet, addressed to him in an unfamiliar hand. He spread out the letter. It was dated that morning from Malladene House.

The Earl of Malladene requests the company of Lord Brockenhurst at 8:15 this evening, September 17th, to a Mystery Dinner to be held at the above address. Short coats and black ties.

There was a little note in the corner:—

My dear Martin,

I beg, as a compliment to an elderly friend and as a great favour, that you will not fail him.

Martin finished his whisky and soda and tore open the note, the handwriting of which was quite familiar. It was also dated from Malladene House.

Martin darling,

Do be an angel and, whatever you are doing, put it off, and come to Father's funny dinner tonight. I don't know who the guests are, except that I am not one, but Lionel, who has just arrived, will be there, and it seems to me to be connected with some family business with which you are concerned.

Your dear little accountant has been most encouraging, and I have promised him a few shares for himself if the company scheme should come off. Really, I had no idea that on good nights we were making so much money.

Ever yours affectionately,  
Diana

Martin moved over to his desk and scribbled off two notes, the first a formal acceptance of Lord Malladene's invitation, the second a line to Diana.

My dear, [he wrote] of course I shall come. Expect me at 8:15 to the moment. I want particularly to see you afterwards if possible. Martin.



He rang the bell for Janien, dispatched the two notes by urgent messenger, and drove slowly back to Chelsea. Pamela, who let him in, was shocked at his appearance.

"Martin!" she exclaimed.

He forced a smile, sat down by her side on the divan, and caressed her hand.

"My dear," he said, "I am a stricken man. I can't dine with you tonight."

"Where are you going?" she asked breathlessly.

He still held her hand.

"For the first time in my life," he confided, "I am going to keep a secret from you, Pamela."

"For how long?" she demanded.

"Until, I should think, somewhere between ten and eleven," he answered. "About that time I shall be here."

She gave a queer little cry which reminded him somehow or other of a hurt or frightened bird in a foreign country.

"It is something very terrible that has happened?" she faltered.

His fingers clasping hers were full of reassurance.

"It is just one of those shocks that come to us sometimes in life," he confided. "I have been rather stupid about it, Pamela. There is nothing which you need fear. There is nothing which will make the least difference to you or to me. I shall be with you again perhaps before you have finished your coffee, and I think when I come you will be glad."

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## **CHAPTER XXIII**

The Right Honourable Phillip, Earl of Malladene, Supreme Judge of His Majesty's Courts of Justice, received his guests at the function to which he had humorously alluded as his "Mystery Dinner" in an attitude of pleasant and gentle dignity.

He was standing a few yards inside the palatial octagonal dining-room of Malladene House: one of the few great mansions which has preserved its ancient splendour through a stormy period of many divergent influences.

The rumours—and there had been many—of the decaying fortunes of the House of Malladene were ill-supported by the finely cut glass, the pile of exotic flowers upon the table, and the Old Masters still hanging upon the walls. On that memorable night the whole atmosphere seemed to be one of wealth, prosperity, and success. Yet, among the household itself, there was a queer sensation of ill-being. Lady Diana, one of the lightest-hearted of young women, having searched in vain for her father in his own

rooms, and discovering from Sinclair, the family butler, that he was already in the dining-room, took her courage into her hands and went in search of him, regardless of his frown of displeasure when she entered.

Diana went up to her father, thrust her arm through his, and led him out of the room into her own little boudoir on the other side of the hall.

"Dad, we're worried about this dinner," she confided bluntly.

He looked at her smiling.

"To tell you the truth, my dear," he confessed, "so am I."

"Why are you giving it, then?" she asked, "and to all these strange people?"

He swung his monocle gently for a moment by its cord.

"Do you remember a caricature of me years ago in *Vanity Fair*?"

"Of course I do," she replied with a trace of irritation in her manner. "What on earth has that to do with it?"

"Well, the man who wrote the little appreciation spoke of what he called 'traces of Puck-like humour' sometimes detectable in my decisions given from the Bench and, later on, from a more dignified position. He was perhaps right, Diana. I think that I sometimes feel the urge of a queer desire to do something entirely at variance with what the world is expecting. It is owing to a swift and unexpected impulse of this sort that I wrote out those invitations—that I am giving my dinner tonight."

"But, father, what is it leading to?" she demanded. "So far as I can remember, you have never invited that awful lawyer to sit at your table before. What common interests could there be, say, between him and Martin Brockenhurst? And then, old Simon Lebur? What in the name of all that is amazing made you invite that dear old man to what you can only call a cranky dinner?"

Lord Malladene glanced at his wrist-watch for a moment, took out his cigarette-case, passed it to his daughter, and himself lit a cigarette.

"What," he asked, "is your favourite cocktail, Diana? You so seldom dine at home that I have forgotten."

"White Lady," she answered.

He pointed towards the bell. She understood and gave an order to the answering footman. In a few minutes Sinclair entered the room with a small cocktail shaker and two glasses, which he filled and served.

Lord Malladene waved him away.

"Show my guests, when they arrive, into the library, Sinclair," he ordered. "As soon as I have finished with Lady Diana, I will ring, and you can take them into the dining-room."

"Very good, your Lordship."

Malladene raised his glass.

"It pleases me very much, Diana," he said, "to have this little drink with you. If we had time, I would discuss my scheme for this evening; there are points about it which I think might appeal to you. As, however, the hour of eight is already striking, and my guests will be here almost at once, there is nothing more to be said, except that you need not worry about this somewhat unusual function which is about to take place. It will settle a question which has given me a great deal of uneasiness during the last few months. It may cause a certain amount of gossip—never mind. The gossip will die out—some other man will have a strange idea tomorrow, and the world will easily forget."

He raised his glass; his fingers were perfectly steady; it was the girl alone who was still uneasy and troubled. Even whilst she was trying to frame one more question, she felt him stoop over her for a moment, felt the touch of his lips, saw a little glint in his eyes which seemed to be expressing something terribly like a farewell; and then she was alone, and the door-bell was ringing below, and something told her that whatever was to happen could be stayed by nothing she might say nor any question she might ask. It was with a sinking heart that she listened to her father's retreating footsteps.

\* \* \* \* \*

The little company of guests seemed to arrive almost in a body. Their attitude towards the feast itself, and their host, so far as one could gather from their whispered conversation, differed amazingly. Sinclair, the old butler, himself perplexed and anxious, took special care to betray no signs of surprise or discomfiture. This "Mystery Dinner," as he had heard it called, was a whim of his master to celebrate his sixty-sixth birthday. All ladies were banished from the house; an unusual quantity of wine had been requisitioned from the cellars; and it was perfectly clear that more than half of the guests who were shown into that library were thoroughly uncomfortable and ill at ease.

Martin Brockenhurst was the only one of whom Sinclair wholly approved. On the few occasions when Lord Malladene had given what he called a "stag dinner," the men had all been of gentle birth, in his own position in life. What Sinclair thought of the present assembly was completely hidden behind his set features. It was Lord Malladene himself who, after his guests had been ushered in from the library, and duly greeted, placed them at table, and, where necessary, murmured a few words of introduction.

"Martin," he said with a little wave of the hand, "opposite to me, please. Sinclair is holding your chair. Mr. Simon Lebur will sit at your right, and our pillar of the Law, Sir Frederick Leversen, at your left. The new Sub-Commissioner, Sir James Charlesworth, on my right, please, next to my son, Lionel. We shall have to drink your health later, Charlesworth, and congratulate you upon your new dignity."

Malladene paused for a moment while the soup was being served and the sherry handed round. He seemed to be taking note of his guests one by one, assuring himself that there were no absentees. Satisfied at last, he raised his glass, and the fine rigidity of his features lapsed into a kindly welcoming smile in which a close observer might have detected a very faint gleam of humour.

"My guests," he said, and the familiar roll of his voice had never been more pronounced, "I drink your health and bid you welcome. The sherry I offer you is my excuse for my lifelong abstinence from cocktails. A toast before dinner is, I know, exceptional, but I think, before we proceed any further, we should offer our congratulations to the new Sub-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, Sir James Charlesworth."

They all drained their glasses. Charlesworth returned thanks with one all-embracing bow. There was not a single person there, however, who was wholly at his ease, although they were all making a valiant attempt at bluff.

"A glorious wine," Lionel Malladene declared as he drained the contents of his glass. "It would have saved thousands of livers in India if we had been able to get it."

"I believe, Lionel," his father replied, as he settled down in his beautifully-carved chair, "curiously enough, this particular brand of sherry travels badly."

"We would, nevertheless, have given a great deal for a wine like this in our office mess, sir," his son remarked. "Sherry has what I call a 'double temperature.' It is just as good in the hot weather as in the rains."

The subject of wine kept the conversation flowing along smoothly. After the first few minutes, however, the talk needed little artificial stimulus. The host saw to that with complete success. He possessed a rich store of legal anecdotes; and with unfailing memory he kept the table in a continual ripple of amusement. The preliminary embarrassment upon the coming together of an ill-assorted company soon faded away. The Sub-Commissioner turned to his neighbour with a little whisper of admiration.

"Your father is amazing, Mr. Malladene," he remarked. "You must be delighted to find him in such good form; he looks like a young man; he has the air of one, and his memory is miraculous!"

"If it were not that your Lordship is much too young in years," Sir Frederick Leversen said in his thin, squeaky voice, "one feels that you should write your memoirs at once whilst your brain is so active."

There was a curious smile upon Malladene's lips as he bowed slightly towards the speaker.

"I am not sure if yours is good advice, Sir Frederick," he said; "perhaps it would be better for me to wait a little longer until my brain is a little less active and my memory less far-reaching. There are times, you know, when one remembers too much!"

Sir Frederick's lips were momentarily indrawn—he commenced a remark which he never finished; the brief silence which followed seemed to have in it the qualities of an impending thunderstorm. The host of the party, however, restored the situation.

"You are all flattering me disgracefully," he declared; "still, perhaps if I continue to feel like it," he added, a queer little smile twitching the corners of his lips, "I may venture to anticipate to the extent of a single leaf out of a day of my life, a little later on. It contains an incident which may interest you. It will afford me a certain amount of relief to take you into my confidence."

Even then, perhaps, Martin Brockenhurst was the only person in the room who sensed a glimmering of the threatened thunderstorm. The little murmur of interest at their host's words was only conventional; an incident out of the mass of experience which would be used later for publication could scarcely be of supreme importance. The uneasiness in Martin's mind, however, grew; it seemed to him he was beginning to understand the meaning of this party, and the end to which it was moving. If his idea had anything of truth in it, there was drama in its most hideous shape to come.

"I myself decline to be a listener," he said as lightly as possible, "even though our host's description were to be that of the Recording Angel himself. I dislike to be told of events out of their sequence."

Thunder was muttering again. Nearly everyone felt Martin had, in a sense, thrown down a challenge to their host. Something was to happen!

"What is it all about?" Lionel whispered to his neighbour. "The Governor looks as though he had something on his mind, and I never saw Martin Brockenhurst look so much like a man who meant to make himself unpleasant."

"Let us hope it will blow over," the Sub-Commissioner said softly. "Your father seems to have some quaint idea in his head which he wants to get rid of, and Martin Brockenhurst is just as determined that he shall have no opportunity."

"Dash it all! It's Brockenhurst I'm thinking of," Lionel Malladene observed. "He and the Governor have always been the best of pals; to tell you the truth, we all thought at one time that he was coming into the family."

"I don't know what it is between them," the Sub-Commissioner said anxiously, "but I don't believe it is hostility at all. I believe Lord Brockenhurst has a very great affection for your father."

"What is wrong, then? Martin, for all the world, looks afraid of something the Governor is about to say or do."

"He does," the other agreed, "and the worst of it is, I don't believe there is a soul living who can stop him. Look at that!"

What was happening certainly had a sinister appearance. Sinclair, very pale and reluctant, came over from the massive door, and laid a large key on the table in front of his master. A moment or two later, after a slight rearrangement of the decanters upon the table, he left the room by the service door. Distinctly, as they sat there in a sort of stupefied silence, they all heard the turning of another key, and Sinclair disappeared. Without a doubt, they were locked in the dining-room!

"What is all this, sir?" Lionel asked, leaning towards his father. "Have you got up any special entertainment for us?" he added, with a ghastly but well-meant attempt at levity. "Charades, or something of that sort, eh?"

Lord Malladene ignored his son's question. He stood upright at the end of the table, looking around at the little company one by one.

"I have something to say to you all," he began, and his voice had never been clearer, nor his countenance less troubled. "It would give me great happiness if what I have to say could be revealed just to you who are here present, and who are chiefly concerned, and then forgotten, but that cannot be. There are others not present who must still be considered."

The spirit of uneasiness shared by every one of those men seated round the table seemed to be growing. Sir Frederick Leversen stumbled, rather than rose, to his feet. He leaned a little forward, his thin, talon-like fingers clutched at the table as though for support. He looked at his host, and there was ghastly pleading in his eye.

"Your Lordship," he begged, "Lord Malladene, I am not suggesting—you are well in health, of course—you know what you want to say, yet I claim the right to speak one word. You are in the act of committing a crime! You are on the verge of a wicked deed! You are contemplating something which is worse than suicide! Mr. Malladene, Lord Brockenhurst, I appeal to you two—men of the world. Lord Malladene for the moment is not himself, has persisted in this strange enterprise of his. He can do no good—he can ruin lives—blacken reputations, if he persists in this mad business of telling a mad story."

Lionel Malladene was helpless. He had no idea how to deal with the situation.

"Why appeal to me?" he asked vaguely. "I have no idea what it is my father wishes to say."

"Lord Brockenhurst," the lawyer pleaded, turning to Martin, "you know more about this wretched business than anyone else here. Surely you must see as clearly as though it were painted upon the wall in front of you what is coming! Our host has brooded over this business—he has lost his balance—he is about to commit an irretrievable folly!"

Afterwards Martin often reflected with amazement upon what was undoubtedly a fact. It was the foolish, terrified cowardice of Frederick Leversen which was his inspiration that night. His first idea had been to take Leversen by the coat-collar—find a way out of the room somehow—and throw him into the outer darkness, anywhere, so long as that hateful little voice could be stilled, and the trouble which it was to cause might be stifled. Then, suddenly the way became clear. He knew exactly what he had to do, what he had to say, how he had to talk to this little semicircle of men. He even felt that he knew how to talk to Lord Malladene himself.

"You must allow me a few words, sir," he begged.

Lord Malladene, smiling with bitter scorn across the table at the lawyer, who was still muttering incomprehensible words, suddenly turned away from him and faced his vis-à-vis.

"Let it alone, Martin," he enjoined. "Leversen's interruption is unwelcome to me and utterly out of place. I had hoped that at my own table I might have been allowed to tell my own story in my own way. The fates have willed it otherwise. I shall continue, but what I have to say must be a little differently presented."

Martin Brockenhurst, from his slightly superior height, looked down the table and stretched out his hand.

"Malladene," he said, "you were my father's dearest friend, you are the one person to whom I have looked up all my life with the utmost respect—forgive me if I add, with very great affection—forgive me if my behaviour is inexcusable. It is I who am going to tell your story."

The newly appointed Sub-Commissioner, without rising wholly to his feet, leaned a little forward in his place. He looked at Martin—he turned towards Lord Malladene—and there was a queer sort of pleading in the few words he uttered.

"My host," he began, "my friend, and, I think I may say, my one-time associate, Lord Brockenhurst: listen please to just these words of common sense from a man who knows every thought that is in your mind. The words that you two are proposing to speak can never be taken back; once spoken, they will live for ever in the minds of everyone here present; they will do incalculable, irredeemable mischief. Lord Malladene, you are famous amongst every one of your confrères for your judicial mind; and you yourself were the first I ever heard who enunciated this dictum: 'No man can plead, or even state his own case.' Martin Brockenhurst, let me say my few words, and when I have finished, take up, if you will, my story."

There was an end then of that tenseness in the atmosphere, caused by the continual recurrence of that awesome silence. Leversen was still muttering incoherently to himself. Simon Lebur, white-haired, stern, and dignified, sat perfectly still with trembling lips in an attitude of intense listening. Neither Malladene nor Martin, both of whom were deeply impressed by the Sub-Commissioner's passionate earnestness, felt inclined to interrupt him. The latter leaned a little farther forward; his voice was neither so clear as the voice of the Judge, nor so firm as Martin Brockenhurst's. There was a certain gruffness about it which was characteristic of the man, but every word that he spoke was distinctly audible.

"It was Lord Malladene's intention when he rose to his feet," he continued, "to tell you of an incident which occurred in the famous Lebur murder case when I happened to be in his court. Lord Brockenhurst

was there, Sir Frederick Leversen was there, the two counsel representing the prisoner were there, and Lord Malladene himself occupied the dignified and honourable position of Judge. It was Lord Malladene's intention to tell you tonight of the message that Sir Frederick Leversen sent across to him from the prisoner."

Again a brief silence. Leversen's fingers were being drawn across the tablecloth, making a curious, scratching noise. Malladene was as silent and as motionless as the Sphinx.

"You all remember the case of which I am speaking, in which Richard Lebur, the son of our friend Simon Lebur here, was standing in the dock, charged with the murder of David Culpepper. The evidence was almost damning. You were not all in court, but those of you who were there remember the tension when that message was handed up to the Judge. You will remember that Lord Malladene conferred for a few minutes with the Clerk. You will remember the little breath of relief almost, when both announced that the prisoner had sought for and obtained permission of the Judge to change his plea to 'Guilty,' but none of you know, however, at whose advice that plea was offered, and for what reason the Judge decided to accept it. You are going to know now. Lord Malladene invited you here tonight with the idea of telling you. He shall *not* tell you. It is *I* who will tell you, and Lord Brockenhurst who will confirm what I say. Richard Lebur changed his plea to 'Guilty' for one reason—to escape the indignity of being hanged, and of bringing upon his father, and his father's family, the disgrace which could never be wiped out. There was another reason, and that was, to shield the woman whom Richard Lebur had found with a revolver smoking in her hand, standing over the dead man."

The Sub-Commissioner paused, but only for a moment. The drama seemed to have faded from the story. There was something missing. They all felt it—they were all speechless. The Sub-Commissioner hastened on.

"Now, Sir Frederick," he said, turning to the lawyer, "I think you had better resume your seat."

Leversen was indeed a pitiful sight! Conscience he had been born without; cowardice was one of his natural traits; there was no quality he possessed at that moment which could sustain him. He sank across the table, mumbling a little to himself.

"In your younger days," the Sub-Commissioner went on, "when Lord Malladene was a brilliant barrister at the Bar, he had been given briefs by Leversen. The intimacy which must always exist between lawyer and barrister existed between them. There came a night, just before the trial, when Lord Malladene lost his nerve. He sent for Leversen. He made a certain confession. Leversen's advice was promptly given, and though it was scoffed at, at the time, it was finally adopted by Lord Malladene."

"Why don't you tell them the truth, Mr. Sub-Commissioner?" Lord Malladene said gently. "It was given because, otherwise, a confession I had already written out would have been made public, and the disgrace seemed to me worse torment than the hell I have lived since."

"Confession?" Simon Lebur muttered doubtfully.

"It was I," Lord Malladene continued, "who shot David Culpepper. I was the other possible visitor to that lady who lives still, I believe, under the name of Mrs. Culpepper. The man arrived in a fury when I was the guest of the lady in question. He came at me like a madman. How the revolver found its way into my hand, I never clearly remember, but I used it; and sooner than submit to the indignity of a blow, I shot the man who came raging at me. Afterwards I was pushed out of the place. Richard Lebur, who had been waiting in another room, came in after I had left and saw Culpepper dead on the ground. The woman was holding the revolver. He snatched it from her—the rest is quite an old story."

"You were visiting the woman," Lionel Malladene muttered, half to himself, but gazing at his father.

"That is quite true, Lionel," was the grim reply. "She was the one folly of my middle age. You can judge for yourself how I have paid for it."

"Now," Martin intervened, "let me speak to you, Simon Lebur, and to you others here, including Leversen. You must all leave this place knowing the truth. The man who shot David Culpepper was Lord Malladene. Richard Lebur was found guilty of the crime, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment in Dartmoor, from which he made, I shall be inclined to think, a providential escape. He is now a thousand miles away. The Sub-Commissioner here was deeply impressed with the conviction of his innocence, and for that reason he avoided arresting him, which he could have done a few days ago. I myself was convinced of his innocence—I cannot exactly tell you why—but my honest belief at the first was that Richard Lebur was shielding the woman. Just lately I learned the truth. I kept my mouth shut. Listen to me, Simon Lebur. Here is our friend the Sub-Commissioner; he was very slightly to blame for not making more vigorous efforts to arrest Richard Lebur, but, on the other hand, he was perfectly right as it turned out, because Richard Lebur was not guilty. I was much more to blame because, for a period of only a few days, but still for a definite period, I have known the truth. I, too, stumbling upon it by an accident, and guilty of offering a bribe, discovered that Richard Lebur was innocent. Lastly there comes the question of Sir Frederick Leversen."

The lawyer half rose from his seat.

"What about me?" he cried out. "What are you charging me with?"

"It was you," Martin declared, "who, when Lord Malladene sent for you and said that it was beyond his power to try this man, confessed himself guilty of the crime, and asked for your advice, it was you who put into his head the scheme of saving Richard Lebur's life without forfeiting his own. Lord Malladene was ready to make his confession; it was you who persuaded him to keep silent. In your way, you were clever—you knew very well that, sooner than sentence him to be hanged, Lord Malladene would have left his confession behind him, but he would have confessed. There we are, the four of us, Simon Lebur. Looking at the case fairly, you alone should be our judge. What have you to say to us?"

The old man's face was hidden in his hands for a moment. Again the little company was reduced to silence, but this time it was the silence of complete shock. Leversen was groaning slightly to himself. He half staggered to his feet; his voice was scarcely audible.

"I, too, have my confession," he moaned. "I used every effort I had to urge Lord Malladene to keep silence, for I knew that Richard Lebur was bad. Lord Malladene has not told you the worst so far as I am concerned. Month by month, relentlessly, all the time, beginning with small sums, and moving on to larger ones, I have blackmailed him. Over one hundred thousand pounds of his family property and his savings ... I can't go on. I will make restitution—I will return every penny—I swear it!"

He suddenly collapsed. Martin ignored him altogether; his eyes were fixed upon Simon Lebur, who had risen to his feet and was standing with his hand upon Malladene's shoulder. His eyes were bright, the deadly pallor had gone from his cheeks, and his voice was as clear as a bell.

"My friends, if you will all permit me to call you so for a moment, Lord Malladene and I have changed places. I am to be the Judge. Very well, I say this, and I say it to my sorrow, and if I felt that I had failed in any of my efforts when my son was a lad, I should say it also to my shame. His mother and I did all that we could for our only child. We wished him more than anything in the world to grow in righteousness. Where we were to blame, I cannot state, but we failed. Here am I, a very old man, and nothing but the truth can come from my lips. My son was a bad man. The punishment that he has endured should wipe out



the memory of any injustice he may have suffered; the punishment that you, Lord Malladene, have endured wipes out from my consciousness every scrap of revengeful feeling. I pray you, Lord Malladene, from the bottom of my heart—I implore you, as I am sure everyone in this room would implore you, to wipe out from your mind all memory of the past. I pray you to pursue to the end your honourable career. I was bidden tonight by your Lordship," Simon Lebur concluded, "to a 'Mystery Dinner.' Let it, so long as we live, to all of us here remain just that, and no more. The mystery is solved; the dinner is over. All that is needed is—forgetfulness. This is the earnest and devout prayer of a man who has passed his eightieth year; who believes that he is showing you what the justice of the Great Unseen would be."

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The silence which followed the last quavering words of Simon Lebur was tense with repressed and half-joyous emotion. Action followed swift and decisive. Charlesworth's hand dashed underneath the crumpled napkin by Lord Malladene's side—in a moment the small glittering weapon which had been concealed there was in the Sub-Commissioner's hand. The amazed little company seated around the dining-table heard the click of the safety catch, saw the cartridges fall into Charlesworth's hand. Almost immediately they, together with the weapon itself, had disappeared into the pocket of his dinner coat and Charlesworth himself was on his feet. He leaned towards Lord Malladene and it is probable that there had never before been such earnestness in his tone.

"Lord Malladene," he said, "the man Richard Lebur has passed into an unknown land. The law is no longer interested in him. You have heard the pleading of his aged father. I would not be guilty of this presumption save that I know I am only anticipating your own idea. On the first of the month tomorrow morning the time arrives when your voluntary retirement from your present high position becomes a legal possibility. May we drink to your Lordship's health, and wish you long life and happiness in the period of repose which during the service of your country for so many years you have so wonderfully earned?"

Charlesworth hesitated for a moment and then drew a long breath of relief. Malladene's eyes met his and he knew that the crisis was over. All those who had been seated at the table stumbled to their feet. The decanters flashed around, glasses were raised, never was a toast drunk more fervently. Listening upstairs Diana cried aloud with joy as she heard the sound of the hoarse but joyous voices below and the sound of Charlesworth's last words.

"Gentlemen, the toast is Lord Malladene and his happy retirement."

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It was an hour or so later when Martin's trembling fingers turned the key which he had drawn from his pocket, leading into a room that he at first took to be empty. Then he saw her, standing by the side of a picture; saw her hesitation; saw the deeper colour mounting in her cheeks; saw her eyes questioning him fiercely, lovingly, passionately; and then she was too closely wrapped in his arms for him to see anything else, and conversation for a time was difficult. He held her a little away from him at last. He realized that she had on a very lovely dress and was wearing her pearls, and that she looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her before in his life. She pointed to a little table, drawn up in a distant corner.

"Will it bore you very much," she asked, "if we have our celebration feast here alone? I can't share my happiness, even though it is silent, with anyone else but Leida."

"There is no spot in the world," he answered fervently, "where I would rather pass what is left to us of the evening than just here as we are."

She sank down on to the divan by his side.

"I wanted you to say that," she whispered joyfully. "It was here you were to have dined with me. Well, I remembered that you were to have come straight from the Malladene feast. I thought of that, so I ate my few biscuits, and I drank a glass of wine; then Leida and I set out that small Chippendale sideboard that you love. There is fruit, there are sandwiches cut as you like them, there is wine—your favourite wine—and just a few little things, because it may turn out that I am hungrier than you are. When I am happy, you know how greedy I am!"

"It was a divine inspiration of yours," he said. "Although I am not going to make a long story of it, Pamela, there are papers here which you should see, because it is our dedication feast to one another. What your world-famed compatriot would have called a 'Divine Betrothal.' It is not a very beautiful thing," he went on, drawing a crumpled piece of parchment from his pocket, "but this I have carried with me for many days."

"But what is it that you have there?" she cried, struggling to decipher the crabbed printing.

"That is our marriage licence."

She clutched at his arm. "Why," she begged, "what is there that has changed?"

"This," he answered, drawing another document from his pocket. "This may give you a slight feeling of disgust, Pamela. Forget it. We know what Richard Lebur was, although he has now shown himself capable of everything that he could conceive in the way of generosity. He was already married to a barmaid when he married you. This is his certificate. You have never been married to Richard Lebur; all that is a hideous nightmare. Day by day we shall push a little farther back the things that it is a joy to forget, and live only for the days that it will be a Paradise to feel and to remember."

She was sobbing quietly with her face buried on his shoulder.

"Martin," she faltered. "I cannot speak—I cannot believe that this is all real."

"So far as we are concerned," he assured her, "it is all real, and it is the end of our suffering. Tomorrow we will go and talk to a priest. One second," he begged, a little hurriedly, for there was something so exquisite in her face, such a softening in her eyes, he almost feared to listen to spoken words, "only one second, and then you shall hear the popping of the cork, and we shall carry those dishes over from the sideboard and our feast will be served. The Malladene dinner was a great banquet, but it brought us face to face with what might have been an ugly tragedy. It is a long story, sweetheart, but it is not a story to gloat over, only to wonder at and be thankful. You shall hear everything, but it must come slowly, and it must come not so much as a narrative as a revelation."

She caught up her skirts and almost ran to the sideboard.

"We are both too hysterical to have the passions and joys of a lifetime compressed into these few moments," she cried on her way back. "We should be mingling tears with our kisses!"

She laid down the dish of fruit she was carrying and threw her arms around his neck.

"I would not run so terrible a risk," he murmured breathlessly.

He pointed to the window. An unexpected splash of moonlight lay across their table. He pushed back her chair, and drew her to his side upon the divan.

"The 'Divine Betrothal,'" he smiled.

**THE END**

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