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THE
YELLOW HOLLY

BY

FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "THE RAINBOW FEATHER,"
"A COIN OF EDWARD VII.," "THE PAGAN'S CUP,"
"CLAUDE DUVAL OF NINETY-FIVE,"
ETC.

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
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Lola pulled a white packet from her breast and ran with it to the fire. George shot past her, snatched them out before they could catch alight, and thrust them into his pocket.—(*Page 296.*)

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	"Mrs Jersey Receives"	7
II.	Brendon's Story	22
III.	The Next Morning	36
IV.	A Nine-Days' Wonder	51
V.	A Lovers' Meeting	66
VI.	What Mr Ireland Knew	81
VII.	The Red Man	95
VIII.	A Bacchante	110
IX.	Clever Mrs Ward	126
X.	Diplomacy	140
XI.	Mr Bawdsey at Home	155
XII.	A Fireside Tyrant	171
XIII.	A Woman Scorned	186
XIV.	Mrs Ward's Trump Card	201
XV.	A Recognition	216
XVI.	The Pipe of Peace	231
XVII.	Lord Derrington Explains	243
XVIII.	Miss Bull's Story	256
XIX.	The Inquiry Agent	269
XX.	The Trouble of Lola	282
XXI.	The Confession of a Jealous Woman	297
XXII.	Who Bawdsey Was	311
XXIII.	The Turning of the Lane	323
XXIV.	A Startling Surprise	336
XXV.	The Truth	347

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CHAPTER I

"MRS JERSEY RECEIVES"

SHE did not put the sacramental phrase on her cards, as no invitations were sent out. These were delivered verbally by boarders desirous of seeing their friends present on Friday evening. Mrs Jersey dignified her gatherings with the name of "At Homes," but in truth the term was too majestic for the very mild entertainment she provided weekly.

It was really a scratch party of nobodies, and they assembled as usual in the drawing-room on this especial evening, to play and not to work. Mrs Taine laid aside her eternal knitting; Miss Bull dispensed with her game of "Patience"; Mr Granger sang his one song of the early Victorian Epoch—sometimes twice when singers were scarce; and Mr Harmer wore his antiquated dress-suit. On these festive occasions it was tacitly understood that all were to be more or less "dressy," as Mrs Jersey put it, and her appearance in "the diamonds" signalized the need of unusual adornment. These jewels were the smallest and most inferior of stones; but diamonds they undeniably were, and the boarders alluded to them as they would have done to the Kohinoor.

In her black silk gown, her lace cap, and "the diamonds" Mrs Jersey looked—so they assured her—quite the lady.

Was she a lady? No one ever asked that leading

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question, as it would have provoked an untruth or a most unpleasant reply. She admitted in expansive moments to having seen "better days," but what her actual past had been—and from her looks she had one—none ever discovered. The usual story, produced by an extra glass of negus, varied so greatly in the telling that the most innocent boarder doubted. But Mrs Jersey was always treated with respect, and the boarders called her "Madame" in quite a French way. Why they should do so, no one ever knew, and Mrs Jersey herself could not have explained. But the term had become traditional, and in that conservative mansion tradition was all-powerful.

Few friends presented themselves on this particular Friday evening, for it was extremely foggy, and none of them could afford cabs. Even those who patronized the nearest bus line, had some distance to walk before they knocked at the Jersey door, and thus ran a chance of losing their way. Either in light or darkness the house was hard to find, for it occupied the corner of a particularly private square far removed from the Oxford Street traffic. As a kind of haven or back-water, it received into its peace those who found the current of the River of Life running too strong. Decayed ladies, disappointed spinsters, superannuated clerks, retired army officers, bankrupt dreamers—these were the derelicts which had drifted hither. Mrs Jersey called these social and commercial failures "paying guests," which flattered their pride and cost nothing. She was something of a humbug, and always ready with the small change of politeness.

It was quite an asylum for old age. None of the guests were under fifty, save a newcomer who had arrived the previous week, and they wondered why he came amongst them. He was young, though

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plain-looking; he was fashionably dressed, though stout, and he chatted a West-End jargon, curiously flippant when contrasted with their prim conversation. This was the first time he had been present at Madame's reception, and he was explaining his reasons for coming to Bloomsbury. Mrs Jersey introduced him as "Leonard Train, the distinguished novelist," although he had published only one book at his own cost, and even that production was unknown to the boarders. They read *Thackeray* and his contemporaries, and manifested a proper scorn for the up-to-date novelist and his analytical methods.

Mr Train, with a complacency which showed that he entertained the highest opinion of his own powers, stood on the hearth-rug, and delivered himself of his errand to Bloomsbury.

"Fashionable novelists," said he, in a still, small voice, which contrasted curiously with his massive proportions, "have overdone the business of society and epigrams. We must revert to the Dickens style. I have therefore taken up my residence here for a brief period to study Old-World types." Here he looked round with a beaming smile. "I am glad to find so rich a field to glean."

This doubtful compliment provoked weak smiles. The boarders did not wish to be rude, but they felt it was impossible to approve of the young man. Not being sufficiently modern to court notoriety, one and all disliked the idea of being "put in a book." Mrs Taine, conscious of her weak grammar, looked uneasily at Miss Bull, who smiled grimly and then glared at Train. Granger drew himself up and pulled his gray mustache; he was the buck of the establishment, and Harmer nodded, saying, "Well, well!" his usual remark when he did not understand what was going on. Only Madame spoke.

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Train had taken a sitting-room as well as a bedroom, therefore he must be rich, and as he had not haggled over terms it was necessary that he should be flattered. Mrs Jersey saw a chance of making money out of him.

"How delightful," she said in her motherly manner; "I hope you will say nice things about us, Mr Train."

"I shall tell the truth, Madame. The truth does not flatter."

Mrs Jersey became still more motherly and paid a compliment. "That depends, Mr Train. If the truth were spoken about you, for instance."

It was really a very nice compliment; but Miss Bull, with malice aforethought, spoilt it in the utterance by laughing pointedly. Train, who had already set his face for a smile, grew red, and Madame darted a look at Miss Bull quite out of keeping with her motherly manner. More than this, she spoke her mind. "I hope, Mr Train, that you will speak the whole truth of *some* of us."

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders, and in direct contradiction to the traditions of the evening produced her pack of cards. She played a complicated game called "The Demon," and never went to bed until she had achieved success at least thrice. Even when driven from the drawing-room she would finish the game in her bedroom, and sometimes sat up half the night when her luck was bad. To abstain on this society evening always annoyed her, and since Madame had been rude Miss Bull seized the opportunity to show her indifference, and enjoy, by doing so, her favorite pastime. She was a small, thin, dry old maid, with a pallid face and bright black eyes. Her mouth was hard, and smiled treacherously. No one liked her save Margery, the niece of Mrs Jersey. But Margery was

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supposed to be queer, so her approval of Miss Bull mattered little.

"Perhaps Mr Granger will oblige us with a song," suggested Madame, smoothing her face, but still inwardly furious.

Mr Granger, who had been waiting for this moment, was only too happy. He knew but one song, and had sung it dozens of times in that very room. It was natural to suppose that he knew it by heart. All the same he produced his music, and read the words as he sang. Margery played his accompaniment without looking at the notes. She was as familiar with them as she was with the moment when Mr Granger's voice would crack. This night he cracked as usual, apologized as usual, and his hearers accepted the apology as usual, so it was all very pleasant. "'The Death of Nelson,'" said Granger, "is a difficult song to sing when the singer is not in voice. The fog, you know——"

"Quite so," murmured Train, politely. "Do you know 'Will-o-the-Wisp,' Mr Granger?"

Mr Granger did not, much to his regret, and Mr Harmer joined in the conversation. "Now there's a song," said he—"'Will-o-the-Wisp.' I knew a man who could bring the roof down with that song. Such lungs!"

"I don't love that loud shouting, myself," said Mrs Taine in her fat voice. "Give me something soft and low, like 'My Pretty Jane!'"

"Ah! you should have heard Sims Reeves sing it," said Harmer.

"I have heard him," said Leonard, to whom the remark was addressed.

Harmer was annoyed. "Perhaps you have heard Grisi and Mario also?"

"No, sir. But my grandfather did."

"Probably," said Harmer, glancing at his fresh

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face and bald head in a near mirror. "I was a mere child myself when I heard them. Do you know much about music, Mr Train?"

"I have heard it a good deal talked about," replied Leonard, with the air of saying something clever.

"And great rubbish they talk," put in Mrs Taine, smoothing one hand over the other. "In my young days we talked of Wagner and Weber. Now it is all Vagner and Veber—such affectation."

"Ah! manners are not what they used to be," sighed another old lady, who prided herself on her straight back and clear eyesight.

"Nor singers," said Mr Granger. "There are no voices nowadays, none."

"What about Calve and Melba?" asked Leonard.

"Those are foreigners," said Mr Granger, getting out of the difficulty. "I speak of our native talent, sir."

"Melba comes from Australia."

"She is not English—a foreigner, I tell you. Don't talk to me, sir."

Mr Granger was becoming restive at being thus contradicted, and privately thought Leonard an impertinent young man. Madame, seeing that the old gentleman was ruffled, hastily intervened. "If Mrs Taine will play us the 'Canary Bird Quadrilles' how pleased we shall be."

Mrs Taine obliged, and Harmer hung over the piano, quite enraptured at these airs which recalled his hot youth. Afterward he begged for the "Mabel Waltz." Meantime Margery was sitting in the corner with Miss Bull, and both were engrossed with "Patience." Madame, under cover of the music, talked with Train.

"You mustn't mind the guests," she said; "they are old and require to be humored."

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"It's most amusing, Madame. I shall stop here three weeks to pick up types."

"Oh! you must stay longer than that," said Madame, smiling and patting his hand, still in a motherly way; "now that you have found us out, we cannot lose you. By the way—" here Mrs Jersey's eyes became very searching—"how did you find us out?"

"It was a friend of mine, Madame. He knew that I wanted to get into the Dickens world, and suggested this house. I am not disappointed—oh, not at all——" and Leonard glanced at Margery, who was fat, dull and stupid in her looks. She certainly resembled one of Dickens's characters, but he could not recollect which at the moment.

"Do I know the gentleman?" asked Madame, who seemed anxious.

"I don't think so. But he is coming to see me tonight."

"You must ask him in here and introduce him. I should like to thank him for having recommended my house."

"We were going to have a conversation in my room," said Train, dubiously; "he's such a shy fellow that I don't think he'll come in."

"Oh! but he must; I love young people." Madame looked round and shrugged. "It is rather dreary here at times, Mr Train."

"I can quite believe that," replied Leonard, who already was beginning to find the Dickens types rather boring. "Who is that tall old man with the long hair?"

"Hush! He may hear you. His name is Rasper. A great inventor, a most distinguished man."

"What has he invented?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," replied Mrs Jersey, vaguely. "His name is quite a household word in

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Clapham. See, he's inventing something now." Mr Rasper, who had rather a haggard appearance, as though he used his brains too much, was glooming over the back of an envelope and the stump of a pencil. He frowned as he chewed this latter, and seemed bent upon working out an abstruse problem. "But it will really will not do, Mr Train," said Madame, shaking her head till "the diamonds" twinkled; "this is our evening of relaxation. But Miss Bull, against all precedent, is playing 'Patience,' and here is Mr Rasper inventing." She rose to interrupt Mr Rasper, but remained to ask Leonard if his friend was stopping the night.

"He will if he comes at all," replied Leonard, looking at his watch; "but if the fog is very thick I don't know if he'll turn up. It is now nine o'clock."

"We usually disperse at eleven," said Madame, "but on this night I must break up at ten, as I have—" she hesitated—"I have business to do."

"I won't trouble you, Madame," said Train; "my friend and I can have supper in my room."

"That's just it," said Madame, and her voice became rather hard. "I beg, Mr Train, that you and your friend will not sit up late."

"Why not? We both wish to smoke and talk."

"You can do that in the daytime, Mr Train. But my house is most respectable, and I hope you will be in bed before eleven."

Leonard would have protested, as he objected to this sort of maternal government, but Mrs Jersey rustled away, and he was left to make the best of it. Before he could collect his wits a message came that he was wanted. "By Jove! it's George," he said and hurried out of the room. Mrs Jersey overheard the name.

"I suppose his friend is called George," she

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thought, and frowned. Her recollections of that name were not pleasant. However, she thought no more about the matter, but rebuked Mr Rasper for his inattention to the "Mabel Waltz." "It is so sweet of Mrs Taine to play it."

"I beg pardon—beg pardon," stuttered Rasper, putting away his envelope and looking up with a dreamy eye. "I was inventing a new bootjack. I hope to make my fortune out of it."

Madame smiled pityingly. She had heard that prophecy before, but poor Rasper's inventions had never succeeded in getting him the house in Park Lane he was always dreaming about. But she patted his shoulder and then sailed across to Miss Bull. "The music doesn't please you, Miss Bull," she said in rather an acid tone.

"It's very nice," replied the old maid, dealing the cards, "but I have heard the 'Mabel Waltz' before."

"You may not have the chance of hearing it again," said Madame.

Miss Bull shrugged her shoulders to signify that it did not matter.

"I suppose that means Mrs Taine is about to leave us," she said.

"There may be changes in the establishment soon, Miss Bull."

"It's a world of change," replied Miss Bull, in her sharp voice. "Margery, was that a heart?"

Margery pointed a fat finger to the card in question, and Miss Bull muttered something about her eyesight getting worse. Madame knew that this was just done to annoy her, as Miss Bull's sight was excellent. To revenge herself she took Margery away. "Go and tell the servants to send up the negus and sandwiches," she said sharply.

Margery rose heavily. She was a huge girl of twenty years of age, and apparently very stupid.

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Why sharp little Miss Bull, who loved no one, had taken to her no one knew; but the two were inseparable. Seeing this, Madame usually kept Margery hard at work in other quarters so as to part her from the old maid. But with the cunning of an animal—and Margery was very much of that type—the girl managed to see a great deal of her one friend. Madame had an idea of the reason for this, but at the present moment did not think it was necessary to interfere. She was quite capable of crushing Miss Bull when the need arose. Meantime she vented her temper by sending Margery away. The girl departed with a scowl and an angry look at her aunt. But Miss Bull never raised her eyes, though she was well aware of what was going on.

Madame was not to be beaten. "I tell you what, dear Miss Bull," she said, smiling graciously, "since you have broken through our rule, and have produced the cards, you shall tell all our fortunes."

"Yours?" asked Miss Bull, looking up for the first time.

Madame shook her head. "I know mine. Tell Mr Rasper if his invention will succeed. Or, perhaps, Mr Granger?"

"I am at Miss Bull's service," said the polite old gentleman, bowing.

Miss Bull swept the cards into a heap. "I'm quite willing," she said in a voice almost pleasant for her. "Anything to oblige dear Madame."

Mrs Jersey smiled still more graciously and sailed away to send Mr Harmer to the cards. But she wondered inwardly why Miss Bull had given way so suddenly. There was some reason for it, as Miss Bull never did anything without a reason. But Mrs Jersey kept her own counsel, and still continued to smile. She had quite made up her mind how to act.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, standing in

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the middle of the drawing-room, "we must disperse to-night at ten. I have some business to attend to, so I request you will all retire at that hour. In the mean time, Miss Bull has kindly consented to tell your fortunes."

It was extraordinary to see how those withered old people crowded round the table. Their several fates had long since been settled, so what they could expect the cards to tell them, save that they would one and all die soon, it is difficult to say. Yet so ineradicable is the wish to know the future in the human breast that they were as eager as youth to hear what would befall them. And Miss Bull, wholly unmoved by their senile excitement, dealt the cards with the air of a sphinx.

Madame meantime retired to her throne, and saw that the servants arranged the tray properly. She had a gigantic chair, which was jokingly called her throne, and here she received strangers in quite a majestic way. It was a sort of Lady Blessington reception on a small scale, as Mr Harmer assured her, and, as he had been to Gore House in his youth, he knew what he was talking about. Knowing his courtly manners, and being greedy of compliments, Mrs Jersey always tried to make him say that she resembled Lady Blessington. But this Mr Harmer refused to do. Not that Mrs Jersey was bad-looking. She had a fresh-colored face, bright black eyes, and plenty of white hair like spun silk. Her figure was stout, but she yet retained a certain comeliness which showed that she must have been a handsome woman in her youth. Her manners were motherly, but she showed a stern face toward Margery, and did not treat the girl so kindly as she might have done. As a rule, she had great self-command, but sometimes gave way to paroxysms of passion, which were really terrifying. But Mar-

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gery alone had been witness of these, and Mrs Jersey passed for a dear, gentle old lady.

"Mr Harmer is to be married," announced Mrs Taine, leaving the circle round the card-table; "how extraordinary!"

"So extraordinary that it can't possibly be true," said Mr Harmer, dryly; "unless Madame will accept me," he added, bowing.

"I should recommend Miss Bull," replied Madame very sweetly, but with a venomous note in her voice. She might as well have thought to rouse the dead, for Miss Bull paid not the slighest attention. In many ways the self-composed old maid was a match for Madame.

At this moment Train entered, and after him came a tall young man, fair-haired and stalwart. He was handsome, but seemed to be ill at ease, and pulled his yellow mustache nervously as Train led him to the throne.

"This is my friend," said Leonard, presenting him. "He just managed to get here, for the fog is so thick——"

Here he was interrupted. "Madame!" cried Mrs Taine, "what is the matter? Mr Harmer, the water —wine—quick."

There was need of it. Mrs Jersey had fallen back on the throne with a white face and twitching lips. She appeared as though about to faint, but restraining herself with a powerful effort she waved her hand to intimate that she needed nothing. At the same time her eyes were fastened, not so much on the face of the stranger as on a piece of yellow holly he wore in his coat. "I am perfectly well," said Mrs Jersey. "This is only one of my turns. I am glad to see you, Mr——"

"Brendon," said the stranger, who seemed astonished at this reception.

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"George Brendon," interpolated Train, who was alive with curiosity; "have you seen him before, Madame?"

Mrs Jersey laughed artificially. "Certainly not," she replied calmly, "and yours is not a face I should forget, Mr—Brendon."

She uttered the name with a certain amount of hesitation as though she was not sure it was the right one. George nodded.

"My name is Brendon," he said rather unnecessarily, and Mrs Jersey nodded in her most gracious manner.

"I bid you welcome, sir; any friend of Mr Train's is also my friend. If there is anything to amuse you here?" She waved her hand. "We are simple people. Fortune-telling—a little music, and the company of my guests. Mrs Taine, Mr Harmer!" She introduced them, but every now and then her eyes were on the yellow holly. Brendon remarked it.

"You are noticing my flower, Mrs Jersey," he said. "It is rather rare."

"Most extraordinary," replied Mrs Jersey, coolly. "I have seen holly with red berries before, but this yellow——"

"There was a great bush of it in my father's garden," said Mr Harmer, "but I have not seen any for years."

"Perhaps you would like it, Mrs Jersey," said Brendon, taking it from his coat.

She hastily waved her hand. "No! no! I am too old for flowers. Keep it, Mr Brendon. It suits better with your youth," she looked at his face keenly. "I have seen a face like yours before."

Brendon laughed. "I am of a commonplace type, I fear," he said.

"No; not so very common. Fair hair and dark eyes do not usually go together. Perhaps I have met your father?"

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"Perhaps," replied George, phlegmatically.

"Or your mother," persisted Mrs Jersey.

"I dare say!" Then he turned the conversation. "What a delightful old house you have here!"

Mrs Jersey bit her lip on finding her inquiries thus baffled, but taking her cue expanded on the subject of the house. "It was a fashionable mansion in the time of the Georges," she said. "Some of the ceilings are wonderfully painted, and there are all kinds of queer rooms and cupboards and corners in it. And so quiet. I dare say," she went on, "this room was filled with beaux and belles in powder and patches. What a sight, Mr Brendon—what a sight! Will you have some negus? Port-wine negus, Mr Brendon."

She was evidently talking at random, and offered him a glass of negus with a trembling hand. Brendon, evidently more and more astonished at her manner, drank off the wine. He made few remarks, being a man who spoke little in general company. Train had long ago gone to hear Miss Bull tell fortunes, and, from the laughter, it was evident that his future was being prophesied.

"No! no!" cried Train, "I shall never marry. A literary man should keep himself away from the fascinations of female society."

"Do you agree with that, Mr Brendon?" asked Mrs Jersey, curiously.

He shook his head and laughed. "I am not a hermit, Mrs Jersey."

"Then Miss Bull must prophesy about your marriage. Come!"

At first Brendon was unwilling to go, but after some persuasion he submitted to be led to the table. Miss Bull was quite willing to do what was asked of her, and spread out the cards. Brendon waited beside Mrs Jersey with a most indifferent air. She was far more anxious to hear the fortune than he was.

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"You are in trouble," announced Miss Bull in a sepulchral tone, "and the trouble will grow worse. But in the end all will be well. She will aid you to get free and will bestow her hand on you."

"She?" asked Brendon, looking puzzled.

Miss Bull did not raise her eyes. "The lady you are thinking of."

Brendon was rather taken aback, but seeing Mrs Jersey's curious look he crushed down his emotion. "At my age we are always thinking of ladies," he said, laughing.

Train touched his arm. "It is——" he began, but Brendon frowned, and Leonard was quick enough to take the hint. Miss Bull went on telling the fortune. There were the usual dark and fair people, the widow, the journey, the money, and all the rest of the general events and happenings which are usually foretold. But there was always trouble, trouble, and again trouble. "But you will come out right in the end," said Miss Bull. "Keep a brave heart."

"I am sure Mr Brendon will do that," said Madame, graciously.

While George bowed to the compliment, Miss Bull again shuffled the cards, and fastened her keen black eyes on Madame. "Will you have your fortune told?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, certainly!" said Mrs Jersey in a most gushing manner; "anything to amuse. But my fortune has been told so often, and has never come true—never," and she sighed in an effective manner.

Miss Bull continued her mystic counting. She told Madame a lot of things about the house which were known to most present. Mrs Jersey laughed and sneered. Suddenly Miss Bull turned up a black card, "You will meet with a violent death," she said, and every one shuddered.

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CHAPTER II

BRENDON'S STORY

IF Miss Bull wished to make Madame uncomfortable she certainly succeeded. From being voluble, Mrs Jersey became silent, the fresh color died out of her face, and her lips moved nervously. Twice did she make an effort to overcome her emotion, but each time failed. Afterward she took a seat by the fire, and stared into the flames with an anxious look, as though she saw therein a fulfillment of the dismal prophecy. Her depression communicated itself to the rest of the company, and shortly before ten the friends took their departure. The idea of being alone seemed to cheer Mrs Jersey, and she accompanied her departing guests to the front door.

It was a comparatively thick fog, yet not so bad but that the visitors might hope to reach their homes. For some time Mrs Jersey stood in the doorway at the top of the steps, and shook hands with those who were going. The boarders, who were old and chilly, were too wise to venture outside on such a dreary night, so Mrs Jersey had the doorstep all to herself. "If you lose your ways," she called out to the visitors, "come back. You can tell the house by the red light." She pointed to the fanlight of crimson glass behind which gas was burning. "I will keep that alight for another hour."

The voices of thanks came back muffled by the fog, but Leonard and George waited to hear no

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more. They walked upstairs to Train's sitting-room, which was on the first floor. The windows looked out on to a back garden, wherein grew a few scrubby trees, so that the prospect was not cheering. But on this night the faded crimson curtains were drawn, the fire was lighted, and a round table in the middle of the apartment was spread for supper. On one side a door led to Leonard's bedroom, on the other side was the room wherein George was to sleep. As the fire-light played on the old-fashioned furniture and on the mellow colors of curtains and carpet, Leonard rubbed his hands. "It is rather quaint," he said cheerfully, and lighted the lamp.

"Not such a palace as your diggings in Duke Street," said Brendon, stretching his long legs on the chintz-covered sofa.

"One must suffer in the cause of art," said Train, putting the shade on the lamp. "I am picking up excellent types here. What do you think?"

"There's plenty of material," growled Brendon, getting out his pipe.

"Don't smoke yet, George," interposed Train, glancing at the clock. "We must have supper first. After that, we can smoke till eleven, and then we must go to bed. "

"You keep early hours here, Leonard."

"I don't. Mrs Jersey asked me particularly to be in bed at eleven."

"Why?" Brendon started, and looked hard at his friend.

"I don't know, but she did."

"Is it an understood thing that you retire at that hour?"

Train shook his head and drew in his chair. "By no means. I have sat up till two before now. But on this night Mrs Jersey wants the house to be con-

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sidered respectable, and therefore asked me to retire early. Perhaps it's on account of you, old man." Here he smiled in an amused manner. "She hopes to get you as a boarder."

"I wouldn't come here for the world," retorted Brendon, with quite unnecessary violence.

"Why not? Have some tongue!"

"Thanks," responded George, passing his plate. "Because I don't like the house, and I don't care for Mrs Jersey."

"Why did you advise me to come here, then?" asked Train, pouring out a glass of claret.

"Well, you wanted something in the style of Dickens, and this was the only place I knew."

"How did you know about it?"

George deliberated for a moment, and then fastened his eyes on his plate. "I lived here once," he said in a low voice.

"Dear me," gasped Train, "what an extraordinary thing."

"Why so? One must live somewhere."

"But you didn't like Mrs Jersey."

"She was not here then."

"Who was here?"

"My grandfather on the mother's side. That's fifteen years ago."

Leonard looked at the handsome, moody face of his friend, musingly. "I never knew you had a grandfather," he said at last.

"Do you know anything at all about me?" asked Brendon.

"No. Now I come to think of it, I don't. I met you three years ago at Mrs Ward's house, and we have been friends ever since."

"Acquaintances, rather. Men are not friends until they become confidential with one another. Well, Train," George pushed back his chair and wiped

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his mouth, "to-night I intend to turn you from a mere acquaintance into a friend."

"I shall be delighted," said Train, rather bewildered. "Won't you have more supper?"

Brendon shook his head, lighted his pipe, and again stretched himself on the sofa. Train, being curious to know what he had to say, was on the point of joining him. But he was yet hungry, so could not bring himself to leave the table. He therefore continued his supper, and, as Brendon seemed disinclined to talk, held his peace.

Train's parents were dead, and had left him a snug little income of five thousand a year. Not being very strong-minded, and being more than a trifle conceited as to his literary abilities, his money speedily attracted round him a number of needy hangers-on, who flattered him to the top of his bent. They praised him to his face, sneered at him behind his back; ate his meat, borrowed his money, and kept him in a fools' paradise regarding human nature. Poor Leonard thought that all women were angels, and all men good fellows with a harmless tendency to borrow. Such a Simple Simon could not but be the prey of every scoundrel in London, and it said much for his moral nature that he touched all this pitch without being defiled. He was called a fool by those he fed, but none could call him a rogue.

It was this simplicity which inspired Brendon with a pitying friendship; and Brendon had done much to save him from the harpies who preyed on this innocent. In several cases he had opened Train's eyes, at the cost of quarreling with those who lost by the opening. But George was well able to hold his own, and none could say that he benefited pecuniarily by the trust and confidence which Leonard reposed in him. To avert all suspicion of this

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sort he had refused to become Train's secretary and companion at an excellent salary. Brendon was poor and wanted that salary; but he valued his independence, and so preferred to fight for his own hand. However, he continued his services to Leonard as a kind of unofficial mentor.

Now that Train came to think of it, Brendon was rather a mysterious person. He lived by writing articles for the papers, and was always well dressed. His rooms were in Kensington, and he seemed to know many people whom he did not cultivate. Train would have given his ears to enter the houses at which Brendon was a welcome guest. But for the most part George preferred to live alone with his pipe and his books. He was writing a novel, and hoped to make a successful career as a literary man. But as he was barely thirty years of age, and had been settled only five years in London, his scheme of life was rather in embryo. He appeared to have some secret trouble, but what it was Train never knew, as Brendon was a particularly reticent man. Why he should propose to be frank on this especial night Leonard could not understand. After supper he put the question to him.

"Well," said Brendon, without moving or taking his eyes from the fire, "it's this way, Train. I know you are a kind-hearted man, and although you talk very freely about your own affairs, yet I know you can keep the secret of a friend."

"You can depend upon that, George. Anything you tell me will never be repeated."

Brendon nodded his thanks. "Also," he continued, "I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds."

"A thousand if you will."

"Three hundred will be sufficient. I'll repay you when I come into my property."

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Train opened his eyes. "Are you coming into money?" he asked.

"That I can't say. It all depends! Do you know why I suggested this house to you, Leonard?" he asked suddenly.

"To help me in my literary work."

"That was one reason certainly, but I had another and more selfish one, connected—" George sat up to finish the sentence—"connected with Mrs Jersey," he said quietly.

This remark was so unexpected that Leonard did not know what to say for the moment. "I thought you did not know her," he gasped out.

"Nor do I."

"Does she know you?"

"Not as George Brendon, or as I am now."

"What do you mean?" Train was more puzzled than ever.

"It's a long story. I don't know that I can tell you the whole."

Train looked annoyed. "Trust me——"

"All in all, or not at all," finished Brendon; "quite so." He paused and drew hard at his pipe. "Since I want money I must trust you."

"Is it only for that reason that you consider me worthy of your confidence?" asked Leonard, much mortified.

George leaned forward and patted him on the knee. "No, old man. I wish you to help me also."

"In what way?"

"With Dorothy Ward," replied George, looking closely at his pipe.

"Was she in your mind to-night when that old maid was telling the cards?" asked Train, sitting up with a look of interest.

Brendon nodded. "But I do not wish you to mention her name. That was why——"

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"I know. I was foolish. Well, she's a pretty girl, and as good as she is pretty."

"Which is marvelous," said Brendon, "considering the fashionable mother she has."

Train smiled. "Mrs Ward is certainly a leader of fashion."

"And as heartless as any woman I know," observed Brendon. He glanced affectionately at the yellow holly. "Dorothy gave me this to-night."

"Did you see her before you came here?"

"Yes. I went to afternoon tea. We—" Brendon examined his pipe again—"we understand one another," he said.

Leonard sprang to his feet. "My dear chap, I congratulate you."

"Thanks! but it's too early for congratulation as yet. Mrs Ward wants her daughter to make a good marriage. George Brendon will not be the husband of her choice, but Lord Derrington!"

"Does she want her daughter to marry that old thing?"

"You don't understand, Leonard. I mean that if I become Lord Derrington when the old man dies Mrs Ward will consent."

Train sat down helplessly and stared. "I don't understand," he said.

"I'll put the thing in a nutshell," explained Brendon. "Lord Derrington is my grandfather."

"Your—but he never lived here?"

"No. The grandfather who lived here, and with whom I stayed, was my mother's father. He was called Lockwood. Derrington is my father's father. Now do you understand?"

"Not quite! How can you become Lord Derrington when he has a grandson—that young rip Walter Vane!"

"Walter Vane is the son of my father's brother,

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and my father was the elder and the heir to the title."

"Then, if Lord Derrington dies you become——"

"Exactly. But the difficulty is that I have to establish my birth."

Leonard jumped up and clutched his hair. "Here's a mystery," he said, staring at his friend. "What does it all mean?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you!"

Leonard resumed his seat and glanced at the clock. "We have a quarter of an hour," he said, "but I think we'll defy Mrs Jersey and sit up this night."

"No," said Brendon, hastily; "we may as well do what she wants. I wish to conciliate her. She is the only person who can help to prove my mother's marriage."

"Humph! I thought there was something queer about her. Who was she?"

"My mother's maid! But I had better tell you from the beginning."

Train sat down and produced a cigarette. "Go on," he said; "no, wait! I want to know before you begin why Mrs Jersey was so struck with that yellow holly?"

This time it was Brendon who looked puzzled. "I can't say, Leonard."

"Do you think she connected it with some disaster?" asked Train.

"From her looks, when she set eyes on it, I should think so!"

"Does Miss Ward know Mrs Jersey?"

"No. She knows nothing about her."

"And it was Miss Ward who gave you the yellow holly?"

"Yes. When I was at afternoon tea."

"Then I can't see why Mrs Jersey should have

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made such a spectacle of herself," said Leonard, lighting his cigarette. "Tell your story."

"I'll do so as concisely as possible," said Brendon, staring into the fire. "My mother was the daughter of Anthony Lockwood, who was a teacher of singing, and lived here. She—I am talking of my mother—was very beautiful, and also became famous as a singer at concerts. The son of Lord Derrington, Percy Vane, saw her and loved her. He subsequently eloped with her. She died in Paris two years later, shortly after I was born."

"And you came to live here?"

"Not immediately. I was but an infant in arms, but my father would not part with me. He kept Mrs Jersey—she was my mother's maid, remember—as my nurse, and we went to Monte Carlo. I am afraid my poor father was a bit of a scamp. He was at all events a gambler, and lost all his money at the tables. He became poor, and his father, Lord Derrington, refused to help him."

"He was angry at the marriage, I suppose?"

"That's the point. Was there a marriage? But to make things clear I had better go on as I started. My father went to San Remo, and from that place he sent me home to my grandfather Lockwood."

"With Mrs Jersey?"

"No. By that time Mrs Jersey had left; I had another nurse, and it was she who took me to this house. My grandfather was delighted to have me, as he always insisted that there was a marriage. I grew up here, and went to school, afterward to college. My grandfather died, but there was just enough money to finish my education. The house was sold, and by a curious coincidence Mrs Jersey took it as a boarding establishment. Where she got the money I don't know. But I passed out of her life as a mere infant, and I don't suppose she thought

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anything more about me. Perhaps she recognized me to-night from my likeness to my father, as she mentioned that she had seen my face before. But I can't say."

"What became of your father?"

"That is the tragic part of the story. He was murdered at a masked ball at San Remo. The assassin was never discovered, but it was supposed to be some passionate Italian lover. My grandfather Lockwood was so angry at the way in which his daughter had been treated that he never stood up for my rights. I would not do so, either, but that I love Miss Ward. Now, it is my intention to see Mrs Jersey to-morrow and get the truth out of her."

"What does she know?"

"She knows where the marriage was celebrated, and can prove that my birth is legitimate. That is why I came here, Leonard."

"Why did you not speak to her to-night?"

"I think it is better she should be in a quieter frame of mind," said Brendon. "She has never seen me since I was a small child, and my name of Brendon is quite unknown to her."

"Why do you call yourself Brendon?" asked Train.

George began to pace up and down the room. "Pride made me do that," he declared. "When my father was murdered at San Remo, Lord Derrington denied the marriage, and refused to do anything for me. My grandfather Lockwood gave me his own name, and I was called George Lockwood for many a long day. At the age of fifteen Mr Lockwood died, and then a note came to my guardian saying that Lord Derrington proposed to allow me a small income."

"For what reason?"

"I can't say. Perhaps it was remorse."

Train shook his head. "I have met Lord Derring-

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ton, and if such an old Tartar feels remorse, then there is a chance that pigs may fly."

"That's an elegant illustration, Leonard," observed George, with a smile; "but to continue (as I see it is nearly eleven), even as a boy I felt the indignity put upon me. I refused, with the permission of my guardian, the offered sum, and continued at school. When I left to go to college I changed my name so that Lord Derrington should not have the chance of insulting me further or of knowing who I was. My guardian suggested Brendon, so as that was as good a name as another I took it. Hence Mrs Jersey can't possibly know me, or why I came to see her. She will be wiser in the morning," added Brendon grimly.

"But she evidently saw in you some likeness to your father."

"Evidently. From all I have heard Mrs Jersey was in love with my father, even though she was only a lady's maid. But I know very little about her. My business here is to learn.

"But why has she kept silent all these years?"

Brendon shrugged his shoulders. "She has had no inducement to speak out," he said; "that is why I wish you to lend me three hundred pounds, Leonard. She will require a bribe."

"And a larger one than that, George. A woman like Mrs Jersey would not part with such a secret for so small a sum."

"Oh, I can pay her what she demands when in possession of the estates. But at present she will want to see the color of my money."

Train stared into the fire meditating on this queer story, which was quite a romance. Then he saw an obstacle. "George," he said, "even if you prove that you are the heir you won't get any money. Lord Derrington is still living."

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"Yes, and from all accounts he means to go on living like the truculent old tyrant he is. But the estates are entailed, and must come to me when he dies, and, of course, the title is mine, too, when he is done with it. If Mrs Jersey learns these facts, she will come to terms, on a promise of money when I inherit."

"Then you will speak to her in the morning?"

"Yes. She is the only person who can right me. But I mean to be the husband of Dorothy Ward, and my only chance to get round the mother is to prove my legitimacy."

"I don't think Miss Ward cares much for her mother."

"Who could?" asked Brendon, cynically. "She is a worthless little canary-bird. But I tell you, Leonard, that frivolous as Mrs Ward appears to be, she is a most determined woman, with an iron will. She will make her daughter do as she is bid, and will sell her to the highest bidder. As Lord Derrington's grandson and acknowledged heir, I have a good chance. As George Brendon—" he stopped as the clock struck eleven—"as George Brendon I am going to bed."

Train rose to light the candles which stood on a side-table, yawning as he did so. He was much interested in Brendon's story, but the telling of it had tired him. "I shall sleep like a top to-night."

"Well, get to bed. I'll put out the lamp," said George, and did so.

"No," said Leonard, taking a candlestick in either hand. "I'll see you to your virtuous couch," and he preceded him into the bedroom.

It was a quaint apartment, with heavy mahogany furniture and a Turkey carpet. Entering from the sitting-room, George saw that the bed was directly opposite the door. It's been moved since my time."

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"What?" cried Leonard, setting down the candles, "is the furniture the same your grandfather had?"

"Yes. Mrs Jersey bought the house and its contents. They are old-fashioned enough in all conscience. Look at that ugly wardrobe." He pointed to one against the inner wall and opposite the window. "The mirror in that used to frighten me as a little chap. It looked so ghostly in the moonlight. Humph! it's years and years since I slept in my old bed," said Brendon, taking off his coat. "I should dream the dreams of childhood now that I am back again. But you needn't say anything of this, Leonard."

"Of course not," replied the other. "And you need not smash your yellow holly by leaving it in your coat all night. Put it in water."

"No." George stopped the too officious Leonard. Dorothy put it into my coat, and there it shall remain. The berries are firm and won't fall. I'll see to that. Hush!"

"What's the matter?" asked Train, startled.

For answer, Brendon quickly extinguished both candles, and pointed to the door of the sitting-room, which stood half open. "Not a word," he murmured to Train, grasping his wrist to enforce attention. "I heard a footstep."

The two men stood in the darkness, silent and with beating hearts. A glimmer of light came from the fire and struck across into the bedroom. Leonard listened with all his ears. He distinctly heard stealthy footsteps coming along the passage, which was on the other side of the wall against which stood the wardrobe. The footsteps paused at the sitting-room door. They heard this open, and scarcely dared to breathe. Some one entered the room, and waited for a moment or so, evidently listening. Then the door was opened and closed

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again, and the footsteps died away. Even then Brendon stopped Leonard from lighting the candles.

"Go to bed in the dark," he said softly.

"Was it Mrs Jersey?" asked Leonard.

"Of course it was. She came to see if you were in bed."

"But why should she?"

"I can't say. There's something queer about that old woman. Get to bed, Leonard. You can light your candle in your own room. I shall not light mine."

Train was bursting with indignation. "But it's absurd to be treated like a couple of schoolboys," he said, taking his candlestick.

"There's more in it than that," said Brendon, pushing him to the door. "Get to bed, and make no noise. We can talk in the morning."

Train darted across the sitting-room, and retired. Brendon closed his door softly, and listened again. There was no return of the footsteps, so he slipped into bed without relighting the candle. The clock in the sitting-room chimed a quarter past eleven.

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CHAPTER III

THE NEXT MORNING

"FOGS and smokes and chokes," said the fat cook, her elbows on the table, and a saucer of tea at her lips. "I wish I were back in Essex, that I do."

"The fogs come from there," cried Jarvey, who was page-boy in the Jersey mansion, and knew more than was good for him. "If they drained them marshes, fogs wouldn't come here. Old Rasper says so, and knows a lot, he does."

"He don't know Essex," grunted the cook. "A lovely county——"

"For frogs," sniggered Jarvey, devouring his slice of bread.

The housemaid joined in and declared for Devon, whence she came. The Swiss manservant talked of his native mountains, and was sneered at by the company generally as a foreigner. Jarvey was particularly insolent, and poor Fritz was reduced to swearing in his own language, whereupon they laughed the more. It was a most inspiriting beginning to the day's work.

The kitchen in the basement was a large stone apartment, and even on the brightest of days not very well lighted. On this particular morning the gas was burning, and was likely to continue alight during the day, as the fog was as thick as ever. The servants collected round the table were having an early cup of tea. To assist the progress of digestion they conversed as above, and gradually

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drifted into talking of their mistress and of the boarders. Miss Bull in particular seemed to be disliked.

"She's a sly cat, with that white face of hers," said the cook. "Twice she said the soup was burnt. I never liked her."

"Madame don't, either," said Jarvey, ruffling his short hair. "They've been quarreling awful. I shouldn't wonder if Madame gave her notice."

"Ah! Miss Margery will have something to say to that," chimed in the housemaid; "she likes Miss Bull."

"'Cause Miss Bull makes much of her, and no one else does."

"Well, for my part," said the cook, "I'm always civil to Miss Bull, though she is a cat. If the mistress died, Miss Margery would govern the house, and Miss Bull governs her. I don't want to lose no good situation through bad manners."

"Madame ain't likely to die," said Jarvey; "she's as healthy as a stray dog, and as sharp. I don't care for old Miss Bull, or for stopping here, as I'm a-going to get a place as waiter at a club."

"Ach, leetle boy, you will be no vaiter," said Fritz.

"Shut your mouth, froggy," snapped Jarvey, and produced a cigarette.

"Don't you smoke here, you brat," shrieked the cook, and, snatching it from his mouth, flung it into the fire. "Here's Madame's tea. Take it to her sitting-room. She's sure to be up and waiting."

Jarvey showed fight at first, but as the cook had a strong arm he thought discretion the better part of valor, and went grumbling up the stairs. Mrs Jersey was an early riser, and usually had a cup of tea in her sitting-room at seven o'clock. After this refresher she gave audience to the cook, looked over

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her tradesmen's books, and complained generally that the servants were not doing their duty. Madame was not at her best in the morning, and Jarvey went up most unwillingly. The housemaid should have gone, but when she could she sent Jarvey, and when he refused to go Fritz was dispatched to bear the brunt of Madame's anger. She usually scolded Fritz in French.

When the boy went the servants continued chatting and eating. It was just on seven, and they were reluctantly rising to begin their duties, when a crash was heard and then a clatter of boots. "There," cried the cook, "that brat's been and smashed the tray. Won't Madame give it to him? Mercy! mercy!"—her voice leaped an octave—"he's mad!"

This was because Jarvey, with his hair on end and his face perfectly white, tore into the kitchen. He raced round and round the table, his eyes starting from his head. The servants huddled together in fear, and the cook seized the toasting-fork. They all agreed with her that the page was mad. Suddenly Jarvey tumbled in a heap, and began to moan, with his face on the floor. "Oh! the blood—the blood!"

"What's he saying about blood?" asked the scared cook.

Jarvey leaped to his feet. "She's dead—she's murdered!" he shrieked. "I see her all covered with blood. Oh—mother—oh, I want my mother!" and down he dropped on the floor again, kicking and screaming.

The boy was scared out of his life, and Fritz laid hold of him, while the other servants, headed by the valiant cook, ran up the stairs and burst into Madame's sitting-room, which was on the ground floor, and no great distance from the front door.

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The next moment they were out again, all shrieking murder and calling loudly for the police. The sleeping boarders took the alarm, and in the lightest of attire appeared on the stairs with white faces. The terrible word shrieked by a dozen voices through the silent house curdled the blood in their aged veins. What with the early hour, the fog, the gas, and the crying of the servants, it was like a nightmare.

An hour later the police were in the house, summoned by Miss Bull, who alone of the boarders retained her head. As Margery, who was next in command after her aunt, could not be brought to do anything, Miss Bull took charge. It was Miss Bull who first ventured into the sitting-room where Madame, huddled up in a chair drawn to the table, lay face downward in such a position as to reveal a gaping wound in her neck. And it was Miss Bull who sent the servants back to the kitchen, who closed the door of the death-chamber, and who told Jarvey to fetch the nearest policeman. Consequently it was Miss Bull whom the inspector addressed, as she seemed to be the sole person in authority. Mrs Taine retreated to her bedroom with a prayer-book, Mr Granger went for a walk in the fog, Margery sat in a stupor, her eyes dull and her slack mouth awry. The little old maid, from being a nonentity, became a person of first-class importance. She displayed perfect tact and self-control in dealing with the terrified old men and women, and no one would have given her credit for such generalship. But the hour had come for Miss Bull to assert herself, and she proved to be equal to the occasion.

"Now, then," said the inspector, when he had posted his men and was alone with Miss Bull in the drawing-room, "what do you know of this?"

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Miss Bull, her face white and drawn, her eyes sharper than ever, and her manner perfectly composed, shook her head. "I know absolutely nothing," she said in her monotonous voice. "Last night we had our usual reception, but it broke up at ten o'clock. Madame dismissed the guests at that hour, and stood in the doorway to do so. I retired to my bedroom with Madame's niece, and after a game of 'Patience' I went to bed."

"Does Mrs Jersey's niece sleep with you?"

"Margery? No! She sleeps in a room above. It was a few minutes to eleven when she left me. I was in bed shortly after the clock struck the hour. I am sure Margery had nothing to do with it. She was quite devoted to her aunt, and as the poor girl has no money, I don't know how she will live now that Madame is dead."

The inspector thought for a moment. He was a tall, thin man, rather military in appearance, and with a wooden, expressionless face, which he found of great service in hiding his thoughts when examining those he suspected. He certainly did not suspect Miss Bull, and seemed inclined to make her his coadjutor. In proof of this he made her accompany him to the room wherein Mrs Jersey lay dead.

"It's not far from the front door," mused Inspector Quex. "Could any one have entered?"

"No, I am sure of that," put in Miss Bull, emphatically. "Madame always locked the front door every night herself and kept the key. It could not be opened in the morning until she chose."

"Who opened it this morning?"

"I did. I knew that the key would be in Madame's pocket."

"And it was?"

"Yes. She must have locked the door as usual,

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and then have gone to put the light out in her sitting-room before going upstairs."

"Was that before eleven?"

"I can't say. I did not leave my room after ten. But Margery may have seen some one as she went up to her bedroom when she left me."

"I'll question the girl," said Quex, and entered the sitting-room.

It was of no great size, with one window, which looked out onto the square. This was locked, and, even if it had not been, no one could have climbed in, as Quex saw that the area was below. "And Madame chained the area gate every night with her own hands," explained Miss Bull, who was watching him.

The inspector turned suddenly toward her. "It seems to me that the deceased was over-cautious. Was she afraid?"

"I think she was," admitted Miss Bull. "She had a habit of looking over her shoulder, and, as I have stated, was particular as to bolts and bars. But she was a secretive woman, and never said anything to me about her fears, if she had any."

"Were you great friends?"

"No," replied the old maid, bluntly, "we were not. Madame behaved in an extremely rude manner, and had she lived I should have given her notice. I never liked her," added Miss Bull, with feminine spite.

"You'll be all the more likely to speak the truth then," said Quex, cynically, and turned to examine the body.

Madame was still in the black-silk dress which she wore on the previous night. Seated at the round center-table, she had evidently been struck from behind, and killed before she had time to cry out. Her arms were on the table, and her head had fallen

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forward. The furniture of the room was not in disorder, the red table-cloth was not even ruffled. The murder had been committed without haste or noise, as Quex pointed out to Miss Bull.

"Whosoever murdered her must have been a friend," said he.

"It doesn't seem a friendly act to kill a defenseless woman," said Miss Bull, looking coldly on the limp figure.

"You don't quite understand. What I mean is that Mrs Jersey knew the person who killed her."

Miss Bull shook her head. "I don't agree with you," she observed, and Quex was astonished that she should dare to contradict. "She was struck from behind, before she had time to turn her head."

"Quite so. But the assassin must have entered the room, and unless the deceased was deaf——"

"Madame had particularly sharp ears."

"Then that makes it all the more certain. Had any one unexpected entered she would have been on the alert; there would have been a struggle. Now we see that the furniture is not disturbed, therefore we can argue from this that Mrs Jersey was in friendly conversation with the assassin. She was seated at the table, and the assassin was at her back, which shows a certain amount of trust. In fact, Miss Bull, the person who committed this murder was the last person Mrs Jersey expected to hurt her in any way."

"She had no enemies that I knew of."

"I talk rather of friends," said Quex, coolly. "You have not been listening to my argument."

"Oh, I quite understand. But I don't fancy that Madame had any friends either. She was a woman who kept very much to herself."

"Do you know anything of her past?"

"Absolutely nothing. She took this house some

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fourteen or fifteen years ago, I believe. I have been here ten, and was very comfortable, save that Madame and I disagreed on many points. She was always rude to me, and I don't think she was a lady." Miss Bull drew herself up. "My father was a general," she declared proudly.

But Quex was too busy examining the room to attend to Miss Bull's family history. He searched for the weapon with which the crime had been committed, but could find none. There was no blood on the furniture, although some had trickled down from the wound onto the table-cloth. The blow must have been struck strongly and surely, and with the power of a deadly hatred. It was at this moment that the doctor arrived, and, turning the body over to him, Quex conducted Miss Bull back to the drawing-room, where he examined all who were in the house. "Has any one left this morning?" he asked. Jarvey had seen Mr Granger go out, and said so. Even while he was speaking Mr Granger returned, and, filled with suspicion, Quex examined him first.

Granger, when he saw what the inspector was bent upon, expressed the greatest indignation. "How dare you accuse a gentleman of such a thing?" he cried. "I went out to compose my nerves."

"Into the fog?" asked Quex, doubtfully.

"Yes, sir, and I should have gone out into snow and hail if I had desired. There was no intimation that none were to leave the house. Had a notice been given to that effect I should have remained."

"I beg your pardon," said Quex, seeing that the old gentleman was fuming, and seeing also that such a senile creature, with so sheeplike a face, was innocent enough, "but it is my duty to be suspicious."

"But not to accuse innocent people of a crime, sir."

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"No. But, for the sake of an example, will you tell me what you did with yourself since leaving the drawing-room last night at ten?"

"Certainly. I have no reason to conceal my doings, officer," said Mr. Granger, angrily. "I retired to my bedroom at ten and to bed. The last I saw of Madame she was standing on the door-step bidding farewell to her guests. In the morning I was awakened by the news of the murder, and went out to walk off the horror produced by the sight of that poor woman."

"Did you see the body?"

"We all saw the body, till Miss Bull——"

"I turned them out and locked the door," put in Miss Bull, sharply.

"It was as well that nothing should be disturbed in the room till the police arrived. That was my argument."

"And a very good one," said Quex, approvingly. "You have a head on your shoulders, Miss."

"My father was a general," replied the old maid, nodding, "and I inherit his talent for organization."

The next witness examined was Margery, and she refused to open her mouth unless she sat by Miss Bull. The old maid held Margery's hand and coaxed her into answering when she proved recalcitrant. Quex could not but admire the way in which Miss Bull managed the lumpish creature.

"You left the drawing-room with this lady?" he asked, indicating Miss Bull, and speaking in a persuasive tone.

"Yes. We played 'Patience' in Miss Bull's bedroom. I did it twice."

"At what time did you leave?"

"About eleven—just before it."

"Did the clock strike the hour when you were in your own bedroom?"

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"No," said Margery, trying to collect her wits, "when I was in the passage."

"What were you doing in the passage? It would only take you a few minutes to get to your room, would it not?"

"Yes," put in Miss Bull. "My bedroom is on the second floor, and Margery's is on the fourth, right above my head. You could easily have got to your room before the clock struck, Margery."

"I did try to," admitted the girl, "but my aunt kept me talking."

Quex sat up. "Did you speak to your aunt at that hour?"

"Yes. She met me walking up to my room, and scolded me for being out of bed at that hour. I said I had been with Miss Bull, and——"

"And Madame made polite remarks about me," said the old maid, grimly. "Oh, I can well understand what she said. But it would seem, Mr Inspector, that Margery was the last person to see Madame alive."

"We'll see," said Quex, who was not going to be taught his business even by so clever a person as Miss Bull. "Was there any one else about?" he asked Margery.

"No. My aunt said that every one was in bed but me, and that she would not have it. The clock struck eleven, and she called me names. She then took me by the arm and pushed me into my room and locked the door. Yes, she did," nodded Margery, vindictively; "she locked the door."

"Why did she do that?" asked Quex, staring.

"I don't know. I wasn't doing anything," grumbled Margery, "but she said she wouldn't have me wandering about the house at all hours of the night and locked me in. I couldn't get out this morning till Miss Bull let me out."

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"Margery usually brings me my cup of tea," explained Miss Bull, "and as she did not come this morning as usual I was anxious. When the alarm came I went to look for Margery in her room. The key was in the door, but the door was locked. I released Margery."

"Oh, the key was in the door," mused Quex. "It would seem, then, that the deceased simply turned the key and left it. Humph! I wonder why she locked the girl in?"

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders. "It was spite on her part," she said. "Madame never cared to see Margery with me."

"Because I love you so," said the girl with an adoring look, and Miss Bull patted her hand fondly. It was strange, thought the inspector, that so clever and refined a woman should love so stupid and coarse-looking a girl. But like does not always draw to like.

While Quex was thus examining the witnesses, Train and Brendon were seated in the sitting-room of the former, discussing the crime. Brendon was gloomy, for in the unexpected death of Mrs Jersey he saw the downfall of his hopes of proving his legitimacy. "There's no chance of my marrying Dorothy now," he said with a sigh. "I'll remain plain George Brendon to the end of my days, and a bachelor at that."

"It's awful!" gasped Leonard, who was white and haggard. "I never expected that my search for types would lead me into the neighborhood of a tragedy. Who could have killed her?"

"I can't say."

"I wonder if her death has anything to do with your affairs?"

Brendon looked up suddenly and with a stern, flushed face. "Train," he said sharply, "whatever

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you do, say nothing about what I told you last night."

"Yes. But what you told me might lead to the discovery of the assassin."

"I don't care if it does," said Brendon, angrily, and rising to his feet to emphasize his determination, "you are to keep my confidence."

"Oh, I shan't say anything. But do you think——"

"I think nothing. But I am sure that my affairs have nothing to do with this death. I came to see Mrs Jersey, and this morning I should have had the truth out of her. But she is dead, and so all my projects go to the four winds. But I don't want them spoken of."

"You can depend upon me," said Leonard, dominated by the strong will of his friend. "But who could have——"

"I tell you I don't know," cried George, restlessly. "How you do harp on that subject."

"It is the subject of the hour," retorted Train.

"And a most unpleasant one. Here I shall have to remain until that police-officer questions me."

"What story will you tell?"

"Any story but the one I told to you," retorted Brendon.

"Well," said Leonard, after a pause, "you can rely upon me. I shall not say anything to get you into trouble."

Brendon laughed, but not pleasantly. "My good fellow, I have done nothing wrong. Even if my tale were told I could not be accused of having to do anything with this murder."

"Oh, I didn't mean that for one moment," protested Train, uneasily.

"I know you didn't. Nevertheless, if this police inspector knew that I told you he might get it into his stupid head that—well." Brendon broke off

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abruptly. "I don't know what he mightn't think. However, I shall answer his questions as to my visit here and then go away."

"I'll go also," said Train with a shudder. "I can't stop here after what has occurred. It's terrible. To think of that poor woman murdered. How lucky I locked my door last night!"

Brendon stopped in his walk and looked sharply at the young man. "Why did you lock your door?" he asked surprised.

"Well, you see, after Mrs Jersey came into the sitting-room I didn't like to think of her prowling about. One is so helpless when one is asleep," and Train shuddered.

"Did you expect her to murder you?" asked Brendon, derisively.

"I didn't expect anything," retorted Leonard, rather nettled, "but I didn't want her to come into my rooms, so I got out of bed and locked the sitting-room door."

"Not your bedroom door?"

"No, the sitting-room door; so both you and I were quite safe from her prying."

Brendon looked steadily at Train and gave a short laugh. "Yes. As you locked the sitting-room door she could as little enter as you or I could go out. Leonard—" he paused and pinched his lip—"I do not think it will be wise for you to tell the inspector this."

"Why not? You and I are innocent."

"That goes without the saying," answered George, sharply; "but the less we have to do with this unpleasant matter the better. I suppose we, in common with every one else here, will be called to give evidence at the inquest. Once that is done and Mrs Jersey is safely buried I wash my hands of the whole affair."

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Train shuddered. "So do I," said he; "I am the last man in the world to wish to pursue the subject. But who can be guilty? It must be some one in the house!"

"I suppose so," replied Brendon, "unless Mrs Jersey had a visitor last night."

"She might have had," said Leonard. "When I locked the sitting-room door, and that was about half-past eleven I think, I heard the closing of the front door."

"The deuce you did."

"Yes, I put my head out and listened to see if all was quiet. I distinctly heard the front door close."

"She must have had a visitor," said Brendon, thoughtfully; "yet as she alone could have let that visitor out, and as she must have been alive to do so, the visitor cannot be the assassin."

"The visitor might have killed her and then have closed the door himself."

"Himself? How do you know the visitor was a man? It might have been a woman. Besides, Miss Bull told me that the door was locked as usual, and that she took the key this morning to open it from Mrs Jersey's pocket. No, Train, the person who killed Mrs Jersey is in the house. But were I you I should say as little as possible to the inspector about this."

Leonard took this advice, and, when questioned, simply stated that he had retired to bed at eleven and had heard nothing. Brendon made a similar statement, and Quex saw no reason to doubt their evidence.

He questioned all the boarders and all the servants, but could learn nothing likely to throw any light on the darkness which concealed the crime. No one had heard a noise in the night, no one had

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heard a scream, and it was conclusively proved that every one in the house was in bed by eleven o'clock; the majority, indeed, before that hour. Jarvey had been the last to retire, at half-past ten o'clock, and then he had left Madame in her sitting-room with a book and a glass of negus. She sent him off in a hurry and with, as he expreseed it, "a flea in his ear"—being somewhat out of temper. It was thus apparent that Margery, who saw Madame at the striking of the hour, was the last person to see her alive. Mrs Jersey went to her own sitting-room and there had been struck down.

"It was about twelve o'clock that she was stabbed," said the doctor, after he had made his examination; "but I can go only by the condition of the body. I should say a little before or after twelve. She was stabbed in the neck with a sharp instrument."

"With a knife?" said the inspector.

"No," rejoined the doctor, decisively, "it was with a dagger—by a kind of stiletto. It was not by an ordinary knife that the wound was inflicted," and then the doctor who loved to hear himself talk, went into technical details about the death. He proved beyond doubt that Mrs Jersey must have died almost immediately with hardly a groan. For some reason Quex took one and all into the chamber of death and showed them the corpse. Perhaps he expected that the sight would shake the nerves of the murderer, supposing the murderer was among those who saw the body. But no one flinched in the way he expected. Mrs Jersey was as dead as a door-nail, but no one knew and no one could prove who had struck the blow.

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CHAPTER IV

A NINE-DAYS' WONDER

ON account of its mystery the murder of Mrs Jersey made a great sensation. The season was dull, and there was nothing of interest in the newspapers, therefore the mysterious crime was a godsend to the reporters. They flocked in shoals to Amelia Square and haunted the Jersey mansion like unquiet ghosts. Whenever any boarder went out for a walk he or she would be questioned by eager gentlemen of the press. Idle sightseers of a morbid turn of mind came to look at the place where the crime had been committed, and pictures of the house appeared in several papers. From being a peaceful neighborhood, Amelia Square became quite lively.

The boarders found all this most unpleasant. This rude awakening from their sleepy life was too much for them, and the majority made preparations to leave as soon as the inquest was over. Until then they were under police surveillance and could not leave the neighborhood, a restriction which in itself was sufficiently unpleasant. Brendon found it particularly so, as he was anxious to get back to his own rooms at Kensington and to his work. But even when he told Inspector Quex that he was merely a visitor and knew nothing about the matter, that zealous officer objected to his going. Perhaps, had Brendon insisted, he might have gained his point, but he did not think it was worth while to make the fact of his stay in the Jersey mansion too

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public, and therefore held his peace. He stopped with Leonard as usual, but the two men were not such friends as they had been.

Why Train had changed toward him Brendon could not understand. But ever since Leonard had been submitted to the ordeal of seeing the corpse he had been an altered man. From being gay he was now dull; instead of talking volubly, as he usually did, he was silent for hours at a stretch, and he appeared to shun Brendon's company. George knew that Train was impressionable and sensitive, and thought that the sight of the dead and the ordeal of the examination had been too much for his weak nerves. This might have been the case, but Leonard never gave him the satisfaction of knowing if his diagnosis was correct. After a time George ceased to ply him with questions, and contented himself with the usual courtesies of life. But in his heart he felt the change deeply. Fool as Train was, Brendon liked him sufficiently to resent his altered demeanor.

At the inquest nothing was discovered likely to elucidate the mystery. The boarders all gave the same evidence they had already given to Quex. Certainly it came out that Miss Bull had prophesied that Madame would die a violent death, but when questioned on this point she merely said that she had done so because the death card had been turned up. Taken in conjunction with another card, according to the reading employed by fortune-tellers, a violent death was assuredly prophesied. But, as Miss Bull said, no one was more astonished than herself at the speedy fulfillment of the prediction. "I told the fortunes on that night for amusement only," she said, "as I do not believe there is any sense in such things. It was mere chance, nothing more. I am not a believer in cards as prophets."

But the coincidence was so extraordinary that

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several of the newspapers hinted that the old maid knew more than she chose to tell. Miss Bull was up in arms at once, and, after consulting her solicitor, threatened actions for libel until such statements were withdrawn. And certainly, on the face of it, the accusation was absurd. The majority of people who did believe in fortune-telling by the cards insisted that Miss Bull was quite an adept. Several urged her to set up in business, promising her their patronage, but the little old maid drew herself up, and, mentioning that her father had been a general, refused to entertain the idea.

Beyond this episode there was little interest to be found in the details of the inquest. It appeared that every one was in bed by eleven, that every one had slept soundly more or less, and that all were astonished and shocked when the tragedy came to light next morning. Train could have created a sensation by stating that he had heard the front door open after eleven; but, true to his promise to George, he said nothing about this. Miss Bull, on the other hand, declared that the front door was locked as usual, and that she had taken the key from the dead woman's pocket to open it when the police entered. It would appear that Mrs Jersey had been murdered by some one in the house. Yet not one scrap of evidence could be found to show that any one in the house could possibly be guilty. The boarders were all old, the servants all ordinary human beings, and no motive could be assigned to any one person for the committal of so cruel a crime. Moreover, the fact that the instrument used was a stiletto (and the doctor held to that) showed that the crime must have been committed by a foreigner. The only foreign person in the house on the night in question was Fritz, the Swiss waiter. But he would not have killed a fly, and, moreover,

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exculpated himself entirely with the aid of Jarvey, in whose room he slept. The jury brought in a verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown, and that was all that could be done toward the elucidation of the Amelia Square crime.

"There's only one thing that wasn't spoken of," said Quex, when he saw the boarders in the drawing-room for the last time; "it seems that Mrs Jersey always put out the light above the door at eleven, or when the guests departed. On this occasion it burned all night, and, as it shines behind crimson glass, such a red window might be a guide to any one who did not know the house, but who had been given that sign whereby to distinguish it."

"I can explain that," said Granger, who was present. "When Madame was bidding farewell to her guests she thought that some of them might be lost in the fog. Therefore she called out after them that she would let the light burn later so that any might be able to retrace their steps."

"Well," said Quex, scratching his head, "that explanation is clear."

"And there is no use for it," put in Miss Bull, "since the front door was locked and no one entered the house on that night."

"That's just it," said the inspector, sagaciously. "As all you ladies and gentlemen are clearly innocent the crime must have been committed by some one from outside. Now, is there any one to whom Madame gave a latch-key?"

"None of us had latch-keys," said Harmer. "Madame would not allow such a thing."

"Oh, I don't mean you, or those like you, Mr Harmer. At your age a latch-key is not necessary. But Mrs Jersey may have given one to a friend of hers who came to see her on that night. Had she any friend in whom she would place such confidence?"

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"No," said Miss Bull, decisively. "She trusted no one that far. And I don't think she had a single friend outside this house."

"And very few in it," muttered Mrs Taine, who on various occasions had suffered from Madame's tongue.

"In that case," said Quex, rising to take his leave, "there is nothing more to be discussed. Who killed Mrs Jersey, or why she was killed, will probably never be known. Ladies and gentlemen, good-day," and the inspector bowed himself stiffly out of the room, with the air of a man who washed his hands of the whole concern.

And, after all, what could he do? There was no proof likely to indicate any one as the assassin, and since Leonard kept silent on the point of the front door having been opened after eleven, it was impossible to say that the criminal had entered the house. Had Mr Inspector known of this he might have made further inquiries; but he knew nothing and departed extremely perplexed. The Amelia Square crime was one of those mysterious murders which would have to be relegated to obscurity for sheer want of evidence.

"When are you going back to Duke Street?" asked Brendon as he took his leave of Train.

"This very day," replied the young man, gloomily. "I don't want to stop a moment longer than I can help in this awful house."

"I expect many of the others are of your way of thinking, Train. But, so far as I can see, there is no hope of learning who killed the woman."

"If you had only allowed me to tell Quex about the door being opened he might have traced the assassin."

"I don't think so." Brendon shook his head. "It was a foggy night, and whosoever entered would be able to slink away without being seen."

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"I am not so sure of that. There is only one outlet to the square, and there stands a policeman on guard."

"The policeman would not be there all the time," argued Brendon, "to say nothing of the fog, which would hide any one desirous of evading recognition, as the assassin assuredly must have wished."

"All the same, I wish I had told Quex."

"Well, then, tell him if you like," said George, vexed with this pertinacity.

"But you asked me not to."

"Only because I fear, with your weak nature, that one question will lead to another, until the whole of my private affairs will come to light. I don't want those to be known at Scotland Yard, let alone the chance that I might be accused of the crime."

"Oh, that's ridiculous! You could not have left the sitting-room unless I had let you out, and there is no door from your bedroom."

"That is true enough," answered Brendon, with an ironical smile, the significance of which was lost on Train. "But if the whole of my story came to light you might be accused of helping me to get rid of the woman."

"I?" Leonard's hair almost rose on end. "How could I be mixed up in it?"

"Well, see here," argued Brendon, who thought it just as well to make Train's own safety depend upon the discretion of too free a tongue. "I tell you about this house, and on my recommendation you come here. I come to stop with you and reveal my reasons for coming. These have to do with the possession of a secret by the murdered woman. All that, to a policeman, would be suspicious. What would be easier than for me to go down the stairs and, when the woman refused to confess as to my legitimacy, to stab her? Then I could return to my

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bed, and you could prove an alibi on my behalf by your tale of having locked the sitting-room door."

Train shuddered. "I see how easily we can get into trouble. I shall say nothing. I wish I had not come here. I shall go abroad until all blows over."

"Why," said Brendon, in scorn, "what is there to blow over? No more will be heard of this matter if you hold your tongue. The inquest is at an end, the woman will be buried shortly, and you will be back leading your own life. So far as I am concerned you know that I am not guilty, and that I could not have left my room since you locked that special door. Then, as to hearing the front door open, that may have been a hallucination on your part."

"No. I am sure it wasn't. I heard distinctly."

"Well—" Brendon shrugged his shoulders, but seemed uncomfortable—"I dare say the assassin came and went in that way. But if he, or she, did, the door was found fast locked in the morning, unless Miss Bull is telling a lie."

"She might be."

"I don't see what she has to gain. But there's no use talking any further. The matter is ended so far as I am concerned."

"What will you do now?"

"I am going to see Dorothy," said Brendon, "and tell her that there is no chance of our marriage. Nor is there, for I cannot see my way to prove my legitimacy. We must part, and I shall probably go down the country for six months or so, to finish my novel and to get rid of my heartache."

Train remained silent, looking at the ground. Then he glanced at his friend in a doubtful way. "What has become of your yellow holly?"

Brendon produced it from his pocket. "It withered, so I took it out of my coat and put it into this envelope."

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"Do you know if Miss Ward gave any one else a piece of yellow holly?"

Brendon stared at this strange question. "Not to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

Train shuffled his feet and looked down again. "It is an exceptionally rare sort of thing," he said uneasily, "and its effect on Mrs Jersey was so strange that I wondered if she connected it with any trouble or disaster."

"You made the same remark before," said Brendon, dryly, "and we could arrive at no conclusion. But in any case I don't see that Miss Ward giving me the holly has anything to do with Mrs Jersey's alarm—if indeed she was alarmed."

"I think she was," said Train, decisively, "and if I were you I would ask Miss Ward why she gave you the yellow holly."

"What would be the sense in that?"

"You might learn why Mrs Jersey was startled."

Brendon laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Your active brain is building up a perfect romance," he declared. "There can be no connection between Dorothy and Mrs Jersey."

"Did she know you were coming to stop here on that night?"

"Yes. I told her so when I met her in the Park in the morning. It was then that she asked me to afternoon tea."

"And at the afternoon tea she gave you the holly?"

"Yes. You seem to think she did it on purpose that Mrs Jersey——"

Train interrupted him quickly. "It is you who are building up a romance now," he said. "I never thought anything of the sort. But I do say that the coincidence is strange."

"What coincidence?"

"That you should have in your coat a flower—I

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suppose one can call berried holly a flower—which awakens unpleasant recollections in Mrs Jersey's breast."

"In a word, Train, you fancy that an inquiry into the circumstances of the yellow holly may lead to a detection of the assassin."

"I don't go so far as that. But I should not be surprised if something of that sort did eventuate."

"Then you do go so far as that," said Brendon with a shrug. "However, there is nothing more to be said. My advice to you is to hold your tongue lest we should both get into trouble."

"I am absolutely innocent."

"So am I if it comes to that. All the same, the less said the better."

Train shook hands with more cordiality than he had hitherto displayed. "I'll be silent for my own sake as well as for yours," he said, and the two parted, Leonard to pack up, and Brendon to journey with his bag for Kensington. Both men were conscious of a relief when they took leave of each other.

"I wish he hadn't come here," said Train when Brendon departed.

"I wish I had held my tongue," muttered George when he was in his cab. "That fool seems to think I know something about this matter."

Of course the economy of the mansion was disordered when the crime was committed. But, thanks to the firm handling of Miss Bull, who now took the reins which had fallen from the hands of Madame, a few days put a different complexion on affairs. Margery knew where her aunt kept the money, and Miss Bull made several of the boarders behindhand pay up. Thus there was enough money to go on with, and Miss Bull decided to wait until after the funeral, before deciding what she intended to do herself. When Mrs Jersey was buried her lawyer

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made his appearance with the will. It was read to Margery, and Miss Bull stopped beside the poor girl as the only friend she had in the world. The will was short and concise, as it seemed that there was very little to leave. The lawyer read it and then looked at Margery to hear what she had to say. The girl simply stared at him blankly, as though not comprehending his meaning, and Miss Bull touched her elbow.

"Do you hear what he says?" she asked rebukingly.

"Yes," replied Margery, "but I don't understand. Haven't I any money?"

The lawyer would have read the will again, but Miss Bull held up her hand.

"She is stunned with grief," said Miss Bull," and is not capable of attending to business. Go and lie down, Margery, and I will speak to this gentleman."

"You do exactly what you like, dear Miss Bull," said Margery, rising, and then turned to the lawyer. "Let Miss Bull do exactly as she likes. I leave all in her hands."

"The most sensible thing you can do," said the legal adviser under his breath, and when Margery had left the room he turned to the old maid. "Is she an idiot?"

"By no means. But she is not very clever. I have taken a great interest in her, as, to tell you the truth, Mr James, she was badly treated by her aunt. If you will explain the will to me I will see what can be done to put things straight. I am sorry for the girl and she is devoted to me."

"It is lucky she has such a friend," said Mr James, heartily. He did not care much for Miss Bull, whose very presence seemed to inspire mistrust, but she was acting very well on this occasion. Moreover, as Margery was not likely to prove a lucrative

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client, Mr James was anxious to shuffle the business onto Miss Bull's shoulders and get out of it as fast as he could. "What is it you wish to know?" he asked.

"About this will," said Miss Bull, laying one thin finger on the document. "Madame leaves to Margery Watson, her niece, the money in the green box in her sitting-room, and also the jewels, which I presume mean the diamonds."

"Yes. Also, if you will recollect, the clothes of the deceased lady."

"Is there nothing else?" asked Miss Bull, raising her black eyes inquiringly. "What of the lease of this house?"

"That is the property of Lord Derrington, and he only let the house to Mrs Jersey by the year."

"Is not that rather strange?"

"Very strange. But the whole connection of Lord Derrington with my late client is strange. I know that she received from him an annuity of five hundred a year and the lease of this house—by the year, remember—from December to December. Now she is dead the annuity lapses, and the lease naturally will not be renewed after next month."

"It is now the end of November," said Miss Bull, quite composed. "I understand you to say that the lease expires when December——"

"It ends on the 31st of December," explained James, "and as Mrs Jersey is dead it will not be renewed. Lord Derrington, so far as I know, has no interest in Miss Margery Watson."

"What interest had he in Mrs Jersey?" asked Miss Bull, scenting a scandal, and her eyes brightening.

"I can't tell you that, and if I could I would not."

"Quite right. I beg your pardon for asking, but you see in the interests of that poor girl I wish to know exactly how matters stand."

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"They stand as I tell you," said James, and rose to go. "I have nothing more to do in the matter and my connection with the late Mrs Jersey ceases here."

"One moment," said Miss Bull, quietly. "What of the furniture?"

"That is also the property of Lord Derrington. He bought the house as it stood from the executor of the last owner, Mr Anthony Lockwood, fifteen years ago. Mrs Jersey wished to set up a boarding-house, so Lord Derrington placed her in here. Every stick in the place belongs to him. Should Miss Watson leave she goes with the jewels, the money in the green box, and with her deceased aunt's clothes."

"A very poor outfit to start life on at her age," said Miss Bull, rising in her prim manner. "By the way, Mr James, what is the name of the late Mr Lockwood's executor?"

"Roger Ireland," replied the lawyer, looking rather surprised. "Why do you ask?"

"For my own satisfaction, Mr James. If no one else will assist this poor girl I shall do so. Good-day."

James departed with a better opinion of Miss Bull, although at any time he had no reason to have a bad one. But her manner inspired mistrust, and, kindly as she appeared to be acting towards Margery, he could not help thinking that there was morein her action than mere philanthropy. "You're a deep one," thought James. "I shouldn't wonder if we heard more of you."

But so far as James was personally concerned he heard no more of the little woman. Miss Bull collected the boarders in the drawing-room after dinner and made a speech. She said that it was Margery Watson's intention to keep on the house, and that the terms would be as before. If any chose to stop they would be welcome, but those who decided to go could have their bills made out at once. Hav-

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ing thus acted as the mouthpiece of Margery, Miss Bull took the girl away to the sitting-room of the late Mrs Jersey, the very one in which the tragedy had taken place. Margery was unwilling to enter, much less hold a conversation there, but Miss Bull, who had no nerves to speak of and a very strong will, laughed her out of this folly.

"Now my dear Margery," she said, when the girl was seated, "I want you to pay the greatest attention to what I am about to say, and to repeat nothing of my conversation."

"You are my best friend," said Margery, looking at the peaked white face with adoring eyes. "I shall do whatever you say."

"Good child," said Miss Bull, patting the hand that was laid confidingly on her lap. "Listen, child. Lord Derrington is the owner of this house, and he leased it to your aunt by the year—a very strange arrangement, for which there ought to be some explanation. I am going to seek it from Lord Derrington."

"But he won't tell you anything, Miss Bull."

The old maid tightened her thin lips. "I think he will," she said in a rather ominous manner; "at all events, there is no harm in my trying. With regard to the annuity——"

"What annuity?"

"I forgot—you don't know about that. Well, there is no need that you should. But it seems that Lord Derrington allowed your late aunt an annuity of five hundred a year. I don't know the reason why he did so, and as such reason is not pertinent to matters in hand I do not wish to know, but the annuity must lapse. It is not likely that Lord Derrington will continue it to you." She paused and looked at the girl. "Your parents are dead, I believe, Margery?"

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"Yes. For many years I have been with my aunt. She was my only relative, dear Miss Bull."

"All the better. I don't want other people interfering," said Miss Bull in her icy way. "Well, Margery, I shall see if I can get Lord Derrington to renew the lease to you, and I shall be your security. With the money in hand—I have counted it, and with that in the bank it amounts to two hundred pounds—we can continue the boarding-house. A few of the boarders will go, but many will remain, as they will not get anywhere so cheap a place. You will be the nominal head of the house, but in reality I shall manage. Do you agree?"

"I am your slave," cried Margery with melodramatic intensity.

"You are my friend," said Miss Bull, her thin lips relaxing. "I am a lonely woman, Margery, though I still have a surviving sister—" her lips tightened again as she said this—"and I love you, my dear, for your goodness. Well, we shall keep on the boarding-house, and you, poor child, will be preserved from the terrible life which would otherwise be your portion."

"How good you are—how good you are!"

"A little selfish also," said Miss Bull, kissing the girl. "I do not wish to leave this place or lose you. I am growing old, and a change would break my heart."

She said this as though she really believed that she possessed such an organ. Mrs. Jersey always said that a heart was lacking in Miss Bull's maiden breast: but certainly the way in which the old woman was treating the helpless girl showed that she was better than she looked. And perhaps—as Mr James considered—Miss Bull had an ax to grind on her own account.

However this might be, from that moment Miss

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Bull was in charge of the Amelia Square establishment. Whatever means she used to induce Lord Derrington to consent, she certainly managed to get the lease renewed in Margery's name. Some of the boarders went; but others came in their place, and these being younger added to the gayety of the house. So all was settled, and Miss Bull became a person of importance. She was the power behind the throne, and ruled judiciously. In this way did she do away with the reputation of the house as a place where a crime had been committed. In a year all was forgotten.

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CHAPTER V

A LOVERS' MEETING

EVERY one who was any one knew the Honorable Mrs Ward. She was a fluffy-haired kitten of a woman, more like a Dresden china shepherdess than a mere human being. Nothing could be prettier than her face and figure, and nothing more engaging than her manners. With her yellow hair, her charming face, and her melting blue eyes, she managed to hold her own against younger women. The late Mr Ward, Lord Ransome's son, had been a fast young man, devoted to the turf and to his pretty wife. But he was killed when riding in a steeplechase two years after his marriage, and left his widow alone in the world with one daughter for consolation in her affliction. Mrs Ward being in want of money—for her deceased father had been a general with nothing but his pay—played her cards so well with regard to her father-in-law, that he allowed her a good income and thought she was the most perfect of women. But Lord Ransome was the only one of the family who thought so, for the other relatives fought rather shy of the pretty, pleading widow.

Not that Mrs Ward minded. She characterized the women as frumps and the men as fools, and, having enough to live on comfortably, set up a house in Curzon Street. It was thought that she would marry again; and probably she would have done so had a sufficiently rich husband with a title

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been forthcoming. But somehow no one worth capturing ever came Mrs Ward's way, and as time went on she chose to assume the role of a devoted mother, and—as she phrased it—to live again in her daughter. This was quite wrong, as Dorothy Ward was a slim, serious-minded girl of nineteen, not given to gayety, and was one who was anxious to marry a husband with mind rather than with money. How frivolous little Mrs Ward came to have such a Puritan daughter no one ever could make out. She resembled her mother neither in face, nor in manner, nor in tastes. Mrs Ward openly lamented that Dorothy was such a difficult girl to manage, which meant that Dorothy had refused several good matches, and had declined to be guided entirely by her mother's opinion. When the Earl of Summerslea proposed and was not accepted, Mrs Ward was furious, but Dorothy said steadily that she would never marry a brute with a title.

"You'll marry any one I choose," said Mrs Ward when the two were discussing the matter.

"Certainly not Lord Summerslea," rejoined Dorothy, steadily.

"And certainly not that penniless George Brendon," retorted her mother. "You shall not throw yourself away on him."

"He is a good man and a clever man, and a man whom any woman might be proud of winning, mother."

"And a man with no money and no position. Who is he? What is his family? No one ever heard of him."

"They will one day, when he becomes famous."

"Oh, as a writing-person. As though any one cared two pins about that sort of thing. I want to see you a countess."

"You shall never see me the Countess of Sum-

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merslea. I know all about that man. He is bad and dissipated."

"O Lord! as if that mattered," cried Mrs Ward with supreme contempt. "Your father was the same, yet we got on all right."

"I am sure you did," said Dorothy, with bitter meaning, upon which Mrs Ward showed her claws. Her friends called her a kitten, but she was a cat in reality and could scratch on occasions. But all her scratching could not make Dorothy Lady Summerslea.

Hating Brendon, and knowing that her daughter liked him, it was supposed by Mrs Ward's friends that the young man would be sent to the right-about, and that Dorothy would be kept out of his way. But Mrs Ward knew her daughter too well to take such a disastrous course.

"My dear," she said to an intimate friend, "if I did that, Dorothy is just the kind of annoying girl to run away with him and live in a garret. If I let them meet they will not think of marriage, and I dare say Dorothy will get tired of Brendon. He is so shabby in his dress, and so poor, that after a time she will cease to like him. No! No! I'll let him follow her wherever he likes, and meet her on all occasions. They will grow sick of one another."

In an ordinary case this recipe might have answered. But Dorothy respected as well as loved George Brendon, and, every time she met him, grew to admire and love him more. Mrs Ward became quite exasperated, and redoubled her efforts to sicken Dorothy of the "creature," as she called Brendon. She took to praising him on all occasions, and sometimes asked him to dinner. At the same time she constantly abused young Walter Vane, who was Lord Derrington's grandson and heir. He was the man she wished Dorothy to marry, as one day

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he would have a title and fifteen thousand a year. But in spite of this Machiavellian policy Dorothy still continued to love George, and expressed a hearty dislike for Walter Vane, whom she characterized as a "weakling."

"If he had only the grit of his grandfather I might respect him."

Mrs Ward turned pale under her rouge when she heard this. "Oh, no, no! Lord Derrington is a terrible old man. Were Walter such as he is, I should not ask you to marry him."

"You would marry me to the Prince of Darkness himself if it suited your purpose," said her daughter, calmly, from which speech it will be seen that Miss Ward had small respect for her fascinating mother.

The two did not assimilate, as their dispositions were so different. Mrs Ward complained that Dorothy was too religious, and Dorothy found the frivolous world in which her mother moved dull beyond words. It so happened that Dorothy stayed mostly at home or went out with one of her aunts, who was something of her type, while Mrs Ward enjoyed herself at Hurlingham and Monte Carlo. The little woman always managed to keep on the right side, as she had no notion of losing her position in society, or the income which Lord Ransome allowed her; but within limits she was extremely fast. She generally had a number of young men at her heels, and made use of them in betting and in getting boxes for the theaters, for suppers at the Cecil, and gloves, when nothing else was to be had. But she managed all these things so discreetly that no one had a word to say, and the general impression was that she was a dear little woman with a stiff daughter—quite a trial. And if some old frumps did praise up Dorothy and condemn the mother, they were in the minority.

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Things were in this position when the murder of Mrs Jersey took place. Dorothy read about it in the papers, and knowing that George had gone to stop in the house with Train, was extremely anxious to hear particulars. She wrote to his Kensington address asking him to call, but received no reply. Then she saw that he gave evidence at the inquest, and two days later George made his appearance at the Curzon Street house. Mrs Ward, who had been voluble in her expressions regarding Brendon's "love for low company," so she put it, sailed toward him with open hands. She always welcomed Brendon in this bright, girlish, kittenish way, as it was part of her scheme. She thought so serious a man would never relish a frivolous mother-in-law, and hoped to get rid of him in this way. But Brendon was too much in love with Dorothy to mind the vagaries of her fashionable parent.

"My dear Mr Brendon," cried Mrs Ward in her usual gushing manner, "I am so glad to see you. The murder, you know. I saw your name in the papers. How exciting! how romantic! Tell us all about it."

"There is nothing to tell, Mrs Ward," said George, glancing round the room and seeing that Dorothy was absent. "All I know is set forth in the papers."

Mrs Ward arranged herself on the sofa and laughed joyously. "Quite exciting it is," she said. "I wonder who killed the poor woman, and how did you come to be there on the very night she died?"

This last question was asked sharply, and with a keen glance. George was rather taken aback, but not thinking she had any intention in what she said, answered, soberly enough: "I went to see a friend, Mrs Ward. It was unfortunate that I chose that night."

"Well, of course you didn't know," said Mrs

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Ward, artlessly. "But fancy knowing any one living in an out-of-the-way place like that. But you do know such queer people."

George thought he knew none queerer than Mrs Ward herself, but he suppressed this speech as impolite. "My friend is Mr Leonard Train."

"Really! I think I have met him. His father made a fortune out of mustard, or coke, or something horrid. What was he doing there?"

"Looking for characters for a book."

"Oh!" Mrs Ward opened her eyes. "Did he find any?"

"I believe so. But he has left the house now."

"I should think every one would leave it after the murder," said Mrs Ward. "Dorothy will be down soon, but meantime tell me the whole thing from your own clever point of view."

She was so pertinacious that Brendon had reluctantly to yield. He detailed events as they had been reported by the press, but concerning the confidence of Leonard he kept silent. Mrs Ward expressed her disappointment when he finished. "You tell me nothing new."

"I warned you that I would not," replied Brendon, wondering at her petulant speech.

"But surely you can throw some light on the matter?" said Mrs Ward.

Brendon shook his head. "I fear not. I went to bed at eleven and slept soundly until I was awakened by the clamor."

Mrs Ward thought for a moment. "Does Mr Train know anything?"

"Nothing more than I have told you," declared Brendon, uncomfortably. He disliked deviating from the truth even in the smallest particular, but he dare not risk the story of his birth becoming public property. It was strange, he thought, that

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Mrs Ward should take such a profound interest in this case. He had never before heard her talk on such a subject. To add to his perplexity, he saw that, in spite of her rouge, in spite of the shaded windows, she looked haggard. Yet it was impossible that she could be connected with the matter in any way. He ventured a leading question. "Why are you so anxious to know about this case?"

Mrs Ward's reply rather astonished him. "I am not blind," she said quietly, "and I know well enough that you admire my daughter. You are poor, you are unknown, and should Dorothy marry you she would make a very bad match."

"I am aware of that," began George, "but——"

"Wait," cried Mrs Ward, raising her hand, "I have not yet done. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, I made up my mind to place no bar to your union with my daughter, as she seems to like you——"

"She loves me, Mrs Ward."

"Nonsense. Dorothy is too young to know the meaning of the word. I say she likes you, so we can let it stand at that. But in spite of your poverty and obscurity—" Brendon winced, for Mrs Ward's tone was insolent in the extreme—"I am not willing that you should marry Dorothy, unless——" She hesitated.

"Unless?" queried George, looking steadily at her.

"Now we come to the point. Unless your character is above suspicion."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough. Here you go to a low house, and while you are there the mistress of it is murdered."

George rose with some indignation. "Good heavens, Mrs Ward, you don't suspect me!" he cried.

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"Oh, dear, no. But it would be unpleasant for my daughter to have a husband mixed up with such a shady affair."

"I am not mixed up with it, Mrs Ward."

"It's unpleasant," said Mrs Ward, willfully holding to her opinion. "I don't like it. Find out who killed that woman and I say nothing. But until you do find out, and until the assassin is brought to justice, I must ask you to discontinue your visits to Dorothy."

Brendon saw that she was simply making an excuse to rid herself of his presence so as to leave the way clear for Walter Vane. But he was too strong a man to be foiled in this way, and speedily made up his mind how to act. "Shall we leave the matter to Miss Ward?"

"That means you wish to see her," said the mother cleverly. "Oh, well, there is no reason why you should not. But it will be for the last time, remember. Your character must bear inspection."

"I think it does," cried George, rather nettled.

Mrs Ward, who by this time was nearly at the door, turned lightly and replied, in her most kittenish way, "Ah, my dear Mr Brendon, I know more than you think. Lola Velez——"

"Lola Velez." George looked and felt uneasy.

"You change color. Oh, I have heard all about you and that dancer."

"I assure you that my connection with that lady is perfectly innocent."

Mrs Ward scoffed. "Lady!" she said, sneering. "What next? However, I do not wish to hear the particulars. Such creatures are nothing to me. And if you clear yourself of this very shady business in Amelia Square by discovering the true assassin, I shall overlook Lola Velez."

"There is no need to overlook her or me."

"I think there is," said Mrs Ward, frigidly, and

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with a wave of her slim hand. "There is no more to be said, Mr Brendon. You know my decision, and as Dorothy's mother I have some power, I hope. Now I will send her to you, and you can say what you like—in fact, you can communicate to her the state of my feelings. But," added Mrs Ward, shooting a Parthian arrow, "I should not mention Lola Velez if I were you. Good-by, I shall not see you for many a long day, I expect."

"And hope," said Brendon, much mortified.

"And hope," replied Mrs Ward, coolly. "You are the last man in the world I should like for my son-in-law. Marry that dancer," and with a shrill, unpleasant laugh Mrs Ward vanished.

Brendon paced the room, waiting for Dorothy. How Mrs Ward had learned of his connection with Lola Velez he could not understand. Brendon was perfectly innocent, and what he had done for the dancer was dictated by pure kindness. But even if he explained the whole circumstances of his meeting and of his philanthropy to Dorothy, she was a woman, when all was said and done, and might not believe him. On the whole, he decided to take Mrs Ward's advice and hold his tongue on the subject of the dancer. On some future occasion he might be able to explain, and at the present moment he had the satisfaction of knowing that his conscience was clear. He had just arrived at this decision when Dorothy entered the room. The next moment she was in his arms, and the two entered Paradise at once.

"My dearest, I am so glad to see you," said Dorothy in her soft voice as they sat down. "I wrote, but you did not come."

"I was engaged, darling."

Dorothy nodded. "I know, at the inquest which was held on that poor creature."

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"Why do you take an interest in the case, Dorothy?"

"Oh, because you went to stop at the house, and it was so strange that she should have died on that very night."

"So your mother says," said George, uncomfortably. "I really think she believes that I have something to do with the matter."

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Dorothy, serenely; "but mother does not like you very much, George, and——"

"She hates me, you mean."

"Well," responded Miss Ward, candidly, "if you ask me to tell the truth, I think she does. But you know what my mother is. I—no, if I cannot say good of her, let me at least say nothing bad. But I love you, George, you know that."

"My own heart," and Brendon took her in his strong arms, thanking God for the gift of so steadfast a heart. For a few minutes silence reigned, and the lovers looked at one another with fond affection.

Dorothy was tall and slim and dark, with a Spanish face of that delicate, high-bred cast which is seen to perfection among the women of Andalusia. Judging by her large black eyes, and the serious expression of her lips, Dorothy Ward might have had Moorish blood in her veins. Perhaps she had, as one of her father's ancestors, when ambassador to Madrid in the reign of the first James, had brought back with him a Spanish wife. And Dorothy inherited all the Iberian beauty of that lady. She should have been called Inez, or Paquita, for the purely English name of Dorothy suited her badly. That is a milkmaid's name, and Miss Ward was more of the court than of the pasture.

Her dark beauty contrasted well with the fair

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comeliness of George Brendon, and seated side by side on the sofa they looked an extremely handsome couple. Certainly they might have appeared happier, for Dorothy was downcast, and in Brendon's blue eyes there lurked a worried look. He was wondering how he could communicate Mrs Ward's decision to the girl. Dorothy looked at him and smiled.

"A penny for your thoughts, George," she said, taking his hand.

"I'll sell them as bankrupt stock," said Brendon, drawing her closer, and then he took his courage in both hands for the necessary confession. "This may be my last visit, Dorothy," he said.

She looked at him in surprise. "Why do you say that?"

"Your mother——"

"Oh, never mind my mother," broke in the girl, petulantly. "I know she objects to our marriage, so——"

"On the contrary, she told me that she would not object if I could clear myself of complicity in this crime."

"George! Did she accuse you of——"

"Not in so many words," interrupted the lover, "but I saw very plainly what she meant. The fact that I slept in that house on the night Mrs Jersey was murdered is to her mind a proof that I have something to do with the matter."

"But you can prove conclusively that you have not," insisted Dorothy.

"Certainly. Mr Train, with whom I was stopping, can prove that I did not leave my room. The key of the sitting-room door was in his possession, and to get out I should have had to make use of him." George paused and thought for a moment. "But there is one thing——"

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"What is it?" asked Dorothy, seeing that he hesitated.

"I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"Whatever concerns you concerns me," she said, pressing his hand to her heart. "You know that I love you as dearly as you love me, and nothing you tell me shall ever part us."

"Oh, I don't think what I am about to say will have that effect," was Brendon's reply, "but I have a confession to make about my—my birth."

Dorothy looked at him in amazement. "About your birth?" she repeated.

"Yes. You may as well know all, and I know you will not betray me, even to your mother."

"To her least of all," said Dorothy, vehemently. "Tell me quick."

Encouraged by her faith, and by the tender clasp of her hand, George related to her the story of his birth and of his connection with Lord Derrington. Also he detailed how he had gone to seek Mrs Jersey, and how she had been murdered before he could get the truth out of her. "Or even see her," finished George. "And now you know, dearest, why I do not wish you to repeat this story. If your mother knew it she might think—think—well, she certainly would not let you marry me."

"She has made her mind up already so far as that is concerned," said Dorothy, quickly. "It is Mr Vane whom she wishes me to marry."

"My cousin, although he does not know it," said George, quietly; "but I want your advice, Dorothy, and will be guided by it. What shall I do? You see, now that Mrs Jersey is dead there is no chance of getting at the truth."

"Why not advertise?"

"I have tried that for some months in every country paper in the kingdom, but there has been no

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response. My father and mother must have been married in some out-of-the-way village, in some lonely church. The parson and those who know about the marriage may be dead. In fact, it is extremely probable that they are. Mrs Jersey was present as my mother's maid, and she might have been able to tell me where the church is. I only want to find the register of the marriage and get the certificate. Then I shall see Lord Derrington and insist on my rights being recognized. He can't leave either the title or the money away from me."

"Have you seen him at all yet?"

"Not to speak to. But he was pointed out to me. I hear he is an old tyrant."

Dorothy shuddered. "A most terrible old man. He always reminds me of one of those Italian despots. There is nothing he would not do provided that the law could not touch him."

"And I dare say, from your description, the things he desires to do are of the kind that the law would make him answerable for."

"George," said Dorothy, after a pause, "do you think he has anything to do with this murder?"

Brendon turned slightly pale and set his lips firmly. "No, dearest," was his reply, but delivered with some uncertainty. "He does not know—at all events from me—that I am seeking for a restitution of my rights, and therefore would have no reason to rid himself of this woman. Besides, I don't know if he is aware of her existence."

It will be seen that Brendon was ignorant that Lord Derrington was the owner of the Jersey mansion and had allowed Madame an annuity. Had he known this much he might have been able to shape his course better; but, being in the dark, he had to do the best he could with Dorothy's assistance. He had asked for her advice and she gave it.

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"George, I should get back my birthright if I were you."

"But I may be dragged into this murder case."

"No. Mr Train can save you from being accused of that. It is only right that you should take your proper position in society. You know I would marry you as you are, and defy my mother and the world. But you owe it to your dead mother and to yourself to show that you have the right to your father's name."

"In that case I shall do what you advise," cried George, taking heart from her firm tone; "and the first thing I shall do will be to see Mr Ireland.

"Who is he, George?"

"My guardian. He took charge of me after my grandfather Lockwood died, and it was by his advice that I changed my name to baffle the inquiries of Lord Derrington. He will know all about the marriage, and may be able to indicate where my parents went when they eloped. I have never asked him for a detailed statement, but I shall do so now. Once I find a clew, I shall not rest until I prove my legitimacy. For your sake, my dear—for your sake," and he kissed her.

"And for your own," said Dorothy, as they rose. "I shall say nothing to my mother or to any one, George. But tell me all that you do."

"I shall make a regular report," replied Brendon, "but we will probably have to meet elsewhere, as your mother has asked me to discontinue my visits here."

"I shall speak to her," said Dorothy, angrily.

"No. Do not do that. She will only grow angry and make things harder for you, my own heart. Good-by, and God bless you."

They kissed and parted at the door. Brendon was just stepping out into the hall when a thought

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occurred to him. He re-entered and closed the door. "Dorothy," he asked, in a low whisper, "why did you give me the yellow holly on that night?"

She looked surprised. "It was to please you," she said softly; "and to tell you the truth, George, I thought that the holly was a proof that my mother was relenting toward you."

"How do you mean, Dorothy?"

"It was my mother who gave me the holly," she explained. "I came from the Park and told her you were going to stop with Mr Train, and that she could set her mind at rest, as I should not see you for a few days. She seemed pleased, and taking the yellow holly from a vase in her boudoir she gave me a sprig, saying that I could give it to you for consolation."

"Did you tell her that you had fastened it in my coat?"

"Yes. But she only laughed, and said it would please you. Why do you ask me this, George?"

"There is no reason for my asking," he replied, suppressing the truth, "but yellow holly is rare."

"Very rare. I don't know where my mother got the sprig."

After this they parted, and Brendon walked thoughtfully away. Mrs Jersey had been startled by the sight of the holly. Mrs Ward had given the sprig to Dorothy, who had presented it to him. He asked himself if there was a reason for Mrs Ward's action.

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CHAPTER VI

WHAT MR IRELAND KNEW

AFTER his disagreeable experience in the Bloomsbury district, Brendon was not very anxious to go there again, but it was necessary that he should do so if he wanted to see his guardian. From force of habit he still continued to call him so, although Mr Ireland had long since ceased to act in that capacity. George had a sincere respect for him, and frequently paid him a visit. Usually it was one of ceremony or of enjoyment, but on this occasion the young man went in search of knowledge.

Ireland was an eccentric character who collected (of all things) bill-posters. Most collectors turn their attention to stamps, to snuff-boxes, to autographs, and such-like trifles; but Mr Ireland hunted for those gigantic and gaudy pictures which make gay the thoroughfares of the city. When George entered the dull old house, in an equally dull Bloomsbury street, he found the hall decorated with an immense advertisement of Bovril. Proceeding upstairs he was met on the landing by the famous cats who serve to draw attention to Nestlé's Milk, and finally entered a large room on the first floor, where Mr Ireland sat at his desk surrounded by a perfect art-gallery. Here was Fry's Chocolate; there the Magic Carpet of Cook, and the wall opposite to the three windows looking out onto the street was plastered with theatrical advertisements, more or less crude in color and out of drawing. These were not modern,

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but had been acquired by Ireland in the dark ages when street art was in its infancy. The effect of the whole was bizarre and striking, but George was too used to the spectacle to pay much attention to the gallery.

The room was very bare, so as to give space for the collection. Mr Ireland sat at a mahogany desk in the center, which was placed on a square of carpet. Beside this desk stood a chair, and in one corner of the room was a safe painted green. Other furniture there was none, and what with the huge pictures, the bare floor, and the want of curtains to the windows the effect was comfortless and dreary, but Mr Ireland did not seem to mind in the least.

He was a tall old man with rather long white hair and a clean-shaven, benign face. His unusual height did away with the impression of his excessive stoutness, for he appeared to be as fat as Daniel Lambert. George often wondered at his size, considering that the man ate comparatively little. Mr Ireland was dressed in glossy broadcloth scrupulously brushed, and wore an old-fashioned Gladstone collar. He had mild blue eyes, rather watery, and a large mouth with full red lips. This hint of sensuality was contradicted by the serenity and pallor of his face, and by his life, which was as correct as his dress and as methodical as his hours.

Never was there so methodical a man. He lived by the clock, and with him one day exactly resembled another. He rose at a certain hour and retired precisely when the hand on the clock indicated another. His meals were always regular, and he had stated hours for walking, when he went out, whether it was wet or fine, sunny or foggy. The man was like a machine, and George, when living with him in his early days, had often found these restrictions

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irksome. It was one o'clock when Brendon called, and Mr Ireland had just finished his luncheon. At two precisely he would leave the house for his one hour's constitutional. Brendon was aware of this, and had timed his visit accordingly. Nevertheless, Ireland looked at his watch and mentioned the fact.

"I can only give you an hour, George," he said. "You know my habits."

"An hour will be sufficient," replied Brendon, taking the one chair. "You are not looking very well, sir," he added, noting the fagged air of the old man.

"I have not been sleeping so soundly as usual," rejoined Ireland, producing a box of cigars and passing them. "At my age, and I am now seventy-five, I can't be expected to enjoy my bed so much as a young person. Take a cigar."

"The old brand," said Brendon, selecting one.

"I never vary," replied his guardian, gravely. "Pass that matchbox, George. Have you a light? Good. Now we can talk for the next fifty-five minutes. What is it?"

As time was short, and Mr Ireland would be sure to terminate the interview exactly at the stated hour, George plunged immediately into the business which had brought him hither. "I wish to hear the story of my parents," he said deliberately.

The cigar fell from the fat fingers of Ireland, and he stared in amazement at the young man. "It is rather late in the day for that, is it not?" he asked, picking up the cigar and recovering himself.

"Better late than never," quoted George, puffing a cloud of smoke.

"A proverb is no answer," said Ireland, testily.

"Then, if you wish to know, sir, I am in love."

"That is no answer, either."

"It will lead to a very explicit answer," rejoined

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the young man, coolly. "Love leads to marriage, and in my case marriage cannot take place unless I know that I am legitimate."

"Of course you are. I have always maintained that you are."

"What proof have you?" asked George, eagerly.

Ireland hesitated and wiped his mouth in quite an unnecessary manner with a red silk handkerchief. "Your father always declared that Miss Lockwood was his lawful wife, and treated her with every respect."

"Did my father ever tell you where the marriage was celebrated?"

"No; I never asked, nor did your grandfather Lockwood. It was not till after your mother's death that Lord Derrington denied the marriage. Then Mr Vane was in Italy and never troubled about the matter."

"He should have done so, for my sake," said George, indignantly.

"Certainly, and I urged him to do so," said Mr Ireland, heavily. "I was in Italy at the time, and you were only an infant in arms."

"Who was my nurse then?"

"Jane Fraser—the Scotch nurse who afterward brought you to your grandfather Lockwood when Mr Vane was murdered."

"Do you remember the other nurse—the first one I had?"

Mr Ireland grew indignant, and puffed angrily at his cigar. "I do, indeed," he said wrathfully, "a vulgar, forward hussy. She was not bad-looking, either, and set up for being a lady." Here he began to laugh. "Would you believe it, George, my boy, she was in love with your father, and showed it so plainly that he was obliged to get rid of her?"

"What was her name?"

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"Eliza Stokes. And she was handsome in a bouncing way."

"What became of her?"

"I can't tell you," said Ireland, with sudden reserve.

"Did you see her after she was dismissed?"

Ireland turned his cigar slowly and did not look at George when he replied. "Yes, I did. When and where it does not matter."

"But it does matter—to me!" cried Brendon, anxiously. "It is to know about her that I came here to see you to-day."

"I thought you came about your birth," said Ireland, sharply.

"That among other things."

The old man looked down again and appeared to be in deep thought. He was turning over in his own mind how much or how little he should tell George. And the young man looked at him anxiously. Much depended upon the speech of Mr Ireland. At last the silence was broken, and by a most unexpected remark. "I loved your mother," said Ireland.

"I never knew that," said Brendon, softly, for he saw that the man was moved at the recollection of some early romance.

"I never spoke of it before," was the reply, and Ireland laid down his cigar to speak the more freely. "Yes, I loved Rosina Lockwood with all my heart and soul. I was not bad-looking in those days, George, and I had a good income, but she preferred that scamp," and he struck his hand heavily on the table, with glowing eyes.

"You are talking of my father, sir," said Brendon, stiffly.

"I ask your pardon. But if you wish me to tell the story of that most unfortunate affair you can-

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not hope that I shall keep my temper. I was very badly treated by—well—" with a glance at George, Ireland nodded—"let the dead rest in peace."

"I think it will be as well," said Brendon, coldly.

Ireland again struck the table. His pallid skin became a deep crimson, and his eyes flashed. George rose in alarm, for the old man struggled to speak with such an obvious effort that he thought an apoplectic fit would end the conversation. He hastily poured out a glass of water and begged Ireland to loosen his neckcloth. But the man shook his head, and going to one of the windows opened it. For a few moments he inhaled the air, and returned to his seat more composed. "I beg your pardon, George," he gasped, when he recovered his voice, "but if you wish me to tell you anything you must not speak to me like that. I have a bad temper."

"I never knew that," said Brendon, in a soothing tone. "You were always kind to me."

"I have a superlatively bad temper," repeated Ireland, "but you were her child. How could I be angry with her child? Wait! Wait, I shall tell you all I can. Give me a few moments."

He was so moved with emotion, and with the recollection of the past, that he buried his head in his arms, which were resting on the table. Brendon, respecting this feeling, walked to the end of the room and stared at a picture which represented a star of the ballet. But he did not see the saucy face, the twirling skirts. He was thinking how strange it was that Ireland should never have confessed this love before. Certainly he had never displayed such emotion. A change had come over the man, whereby he more plainly revealed his feelings than he was wont to do. George put this down to old age, and to less self-control consequent on the same. Shortly he heard Ireland calling to him, and

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returned to his seat to find the old man smoking quietly and rather ashamed of his outbreak. "But you shall see no more of that," he said.

"I am sorry to be obliged to ask you for a story of the past," said Brendon, apologetically, "but it means so much to me."

"I'll tell you all I can," said Ireland, taking no notice of the apology, but looking at the ash on his cigar. He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts, and then began abruptly. "I first met your mother at her father's house in Amelia Square, where I went to take lessons in singing. Lockwood was famous for his method in those days, and his fame was increased by the appearance of your mother, Rosina, at many concerts. She was a most beautiful creature, and was as much admired for her beauty as for her voice. Ah! what a voice. It was like the trill of a lark, flexible and silvery, and with an immense range. She was quite the rage for a season, and was called the English Jenny Lind. Many offers were made to her for the operatic stage. I dare say she would have accepted in the end had she not met with Percy Vane, and he——" Ireland's hand clenched.

"My father," said George, willfully disregarding this sign of temper, "how did he meet her?"

"He saw her at a concert and fell in love with her. Then he came to take singing-lessons, with the voice of a frog. Bah! it was a mere blind. It was Rosina Lockwood he was after. I saw it—oh, yes! The eyes of love are keen, and, although Rosina would not waste a look on me, I watched her every action. Many a night have I paced Amelia Square watching her window. When she sang I was entranced, when she smiled——" Here the old man shook his head and made an effort to recover himself.

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Brendon saw that the recital was painful to him, and but that he was so anxious to get at the proofs of his birth would have asked him to desist. But there was too much at stake for such consideration to be shown. "Go on," he said softly, and Ireland resumed.

"Percy Vane was a handsome man, and rich. I warned Lockwood that he was in love with Rosina, but the old man would not heed. He was flattered by the attention Rosina received. All through that season Vane was in attendance on Rosina. At the end of it he eloped with her—yes. He met her outside St James's Hall and they eloped."

"Where did they go to?" asked Brendon, eagerly.

"That I cannot say. Rosina wrote three weeks afterward from Paris, signing herself Vane, and stating that she was the wife of Percy."

"Was my grandfather angry?"

"Yes and no. He was angry that he should have lost her, for she was of use to him as an advertisement of his method of singing, and also she earned a great deal of money. The house in Amelia Square was large and required a good deal to keep it up. Besides, Anthony Lockwood was extravagant. That was why you were left so badly off."

Brendon shrugged his shoulders. "It was good of my grandfather to leave me anything," he said, "but in what way was my—Mr Lockwood, pleased? You hinted that he was not quite angry."

"Well," said Ireland, slowly twirling the cigar in his fingers, "you see he was flattered that his daughter should have married into the aristocracy."

"Then there was no question of the marriage, then?"

"No. Lord Derrington said nothing till your mother was dead, and even then he said very little. It was when Vane was murdered at San Remo that

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he first decisively asserted that no marriage had taken place. He did so because Lockwood insisted that Derrington should acknowledge you as the heir. He refused to do so, and said that his second son was the heir."

"That is Walter Vane's father?"

"Exactly. And now the father is dead, Walter Vane stands in your shoes. I wish you could prove the marriage, my boy," said Ireland, shaking his head, "but it will be a difficult task."

"I don't care how difficult it is," replied Brendon, resolutely. "I am determined to learn the truth."

"Who is the lady?" asked Ireland.

"Miss Dorothy Ward. You don't know anything of her."

Ireland shook his head. "I left the adoration of the aristocracy to Lockwood," he said, with something like a sneer, "but that's neither here nor there, my boy. To make a long story short, I met your mother in Paris, and shortly afterward she died, giving birth to you. Eliza Stokes was with her when she died, and you were given into the charge of that woman. Your mother was buried in Père la Chaise. Vane put up a stone to her—oh! he behaved very well, I don't deny that," added Ireland, but with a dark face; "he was really fond of her. And I suppose there was a marriage."

"Did my mother ever say anything about it?"

"Never. You asked me that before. It was an accepted fact. After the death of Rosina her husband went to Italy. I was there, too, and it was at Milan that the episode occurred which led to the dismissal of Eliza Stokes."

"What was that?"

"Why, there was a young English waiter, quite a boy he was, who fell in love with Eliza when she was taking charge of you at the Hôtel de Ville. She

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refused to marry him and hinted that she loved your father. Vane heard of this and taxed her with impertinence. The end of it was that Eliza said too much and was dismissed. And Jane Fraser was sent from England by Vane's mother to nurse you. That looks as though Lady Derrington believed in the marriage."

"It does," admitted Brendon, hopefully. "She would not have sent a nurse had anything been wrong. On the other hand, if she had been quite certain about the marriage she might have offered to take charge of me."

"She did, I believe, but your father was so fond of you—for your mother's sake—that he could scarcely bear you out of his sight. However, Eliza went, and Jane came, and then your father went to San Remo. You were then two years of age."

"Did not my father return to England during all that time?"

"No. When he left England with your mother he never returned. She died in Paris, and, with you in charge of a nurse, Vane wandered about the Continent. I was twice in Italy and saw him—the second time it was at San Remo."

"If you disliked my father so much, why did you seek him out?"

"To see you, George. You were her child, and I loved Rosina so dearly." Ireland stopped, gulped down his emotion, and proceeded more calmly: "Yes, I was at San Remo when your father was murdered."

"You never told me that before," said Brendon.

"I never told you anything before," replied Ireland, dryly. "And I should not tell you now, but that my health is getting so bad that I may not live long. I have an incurable disease, which will sooner or later carry me off—no, I don't want sym-

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pathy. Let me finish the story and then we need not refer to it again. I had intended to leave a written statement behind me for you, George, but this is better, as you can ask me questions about what you do not understand."

"I understand all so far," said George, thoughtfully. "But about this murder, Mr Ireland? Who killed my father?"

"That was never discovered. He went to a masked ball and was seen leaving the room in the company of a blue domino. His body was found on the stones of the beach early next morning. He had been stabbed to the heart."

"With a stiletto?" asked Brendon, recollecting the manner of Mrs Jersey's death.

"Yes. Hence it was supposed that he had been stabbed by some jealous Italian, who had followed him and the lady. But the truth was never known. I think myself that Vane was murdered on the parade and that his body was thrown over onto the beach. The man who killed him must then have taken away the lady."

"Who was the lady—the blue domino?"

"No one ever learned. She was cloaked and masked. Your father was a gay man, George, and it was rumored that he was in love with the wife of a certain officer. It might be that the husband—but of course I cannot say. The blue domino may not have been the woman in question. The whole thing is a mystery. Your father's body was taken to England, and as Lord Derrington refused to acknowledge the marriage, Lockwood took charge of you."

"I remember, and Jane Fraser was my nurse for many years. She was at San Remo when the murder took place?"

"Yes, and so was Eliza Stokes."

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"What was she doing there?"

"Well, this waiter—by the way, his name was George also, although you were called after Lockwood's father—well, George Rates, seeing that Eliza was dismissed, got her a situation at a hotel in San Remo. He came there also during the season, and I believe the two married. But Eliza Stokes never came near your father."

"What became of her afterward?"

Ireland hesitated. "I can't say," he said.

"But I can," observed George, coolly. "She was murdered the other day at the Amelia Square house as Mrs Jersey."

"I heard of that crime. But how do you identify Eliza Stokes with Mrs Jersey?"

"My old nurse, Jane Fraser, told me. When I began these inquiries I looked up Jane, who now lives in a little Essex village. She told me all she could, which was not much. But she stated that when here one day, on a visit to you, she had met Eliza Stokes and in spite of her age and gray hairs she had recognized her. Eliza told her that she was called Mrs Jersey and had taken a boarding-house in Amelia Square. I then determined to speak to Mrs Jersey, whom I thought might have been present at the marriage, or at all events might know where it had been celebrated."

"It is probable she did," said Ireland, "as she was with your mother as maid when the elopement took place. Did you see Mrs Jersey, or Eliza Stokes as I still regard her?"

"I saw her, but she was murdered before I could manage to speak to her on the subject. Did you know——"

"I know that Eliza Stokes had changed her name to Mrs Jersey and was in Amelia Square," said Ireland, "but I only learned this the other day."

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"Who told you?"

"A woman called Miss Bull," said Ireland.

"Miss Bull," repeated George. "I remember, that was the boarder who foretold a violent death to Mrs Jersey. But you read about that in the papers."

Ireland nodded. "I did," he said; "and I also saw that you were in the house when Mrs Jersey was murdered. You were a witness."

"I can tell you about that. I——"

"There is no need to tell me. I have not the time." Ireland looked at his watch. "In ten minutes I leave for my walk."

George remonstrated. "But this is so important."

"Not so important as my health. I can give you only the ten minutes, George. This Miss Bull called to ask me about the lease of the house to Mrs Jersey. I knew nothing about that. When Lockwood died I sold the house to Lord Derrington——"

"What—to my grandfather?"

"Yes. But had I known he was the purchaser I should not have let him had it. He bought it through an agent. Since then I heard nothing more about the house. I did not even know it was a boarding-establishment until it appeared as such in the papers the other day. I wondered what you were doing at the inquest——"

"I can explain."

Ireland held up his hand. "I need no explanation. I know that Mrs Jersey was really Eliza Stokes. I gathered that from the description given by Miss Bull in the course of our conversation. My suspicions were aroused by the fact that Lord Derrington had leased the Amelia Square house to Mrs Jersey."

"Why did he do that?" George spoke more to himself than to Ireland.

"Well," said the old man rising, "it is my belief

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that Lord Derrington knows there was a marriage, and assisted Mrs Jersey so that she should hold her tongue. Now there is no more time. I must go out," and Ireland walked to the door.

George followed, knowing it was vain to attempt to turn him from his purpose, as the old man was most obstinate. "One moment," he said, on the doorstep; "this blue domino connected with my father's murder—was she never traced?"

"No. There was no means of tracing her. Except that she wore a piece of holly she carried no distinguishing mark."

"Holly!" cried George, astounded. "Yellow holly?"

"Yes. I don't know how you come to mention it, but the holly worn by the blue domino with whom your father went away had yellow berries."

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CHAPTER VII

THE RED MAN

AS Brendon was in the neighborhood of Amelia Square he paid a visit to the boarding-house. Having learned from Ireland that Miss Bull had informed him how Lord Derrington was connected with the late Mrs Jersey, George thought it just as well that she should be questioned. Certainly Miss Bull, who appeared to be a dour and secretive sort of person, might not speak. On the other hand, if he could induce her to be frank he might learn from her—presuming she knew—the reason why Lord Derrington had leased the Amelia Square house to Mrs Jersey. It was a forlorn hope, but Brendon was so eager to learn the truth that he clutched even at this straw. Therefore, on leaving Ireland, he turned his steps in the direction of the boarding-house. Much as he disliked entering it again, it was necessary that he should do so.

On his way Brendon meditated on Ireland's remarks about the holly. He remembered the agitation of Mrs Jersey when she saw the sprig in his coat. She had been at San Remo when his father was stabbed, and Ireland had mentioned that the woman with whom the deceased man had left the ballroom wore a sprig of yellow holly. Had the berries been red, George might not have thought so much of the matter; but yellow holly is comparatively rare, and evidently Mrs Jersey's alarm had

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been caused by her recollection of the murder. The sight of the holly had revived her memory.

"I wonder if she had anything to do with the murder," mused George as he turned into Amelia Square. "Could she have been the woman in the blue domino? Certainly she was a servant and my father would have had nothing to do with her. But at the ball she would wear a domino and be closely masked. But even so, by what means could she have induced my father to leave the room with her? I don't suppose she murdered him herself, for she had no reason to do so, unless it was jealousy, which for a woman in her position was absurd. Bah! I am making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Eliza Stokes probably never went to the ball and had nothing to do with the blue domino or with the matter of the crime. From what Ireland says, however, a piece of yellow holly was mentioned in connection with the murder, and Mrs Jersey, then Eliza Stokes, probably heard of it. That was why she shivered and turned pale when she saw the sprig in my coat."

Having thus decided the question, though not in a very satisfactory way, George rang the bell and was admitted into the house by Jarvey. The boy welcomed him with a grin, as George had given him half-a-crown when he left the mansion after the inquest. "Miss Bull, sir, yes, sir," said Jarvey, "step this way," and he introduced Mr Brendon into the sitting-room in which the murder had taken place. It was empty, but Jarvey departed immediately to fetch Miss Bull.

George knew the room well. It had been used by his grandfather as a breakfast-room, and many a meal had he enjoyed at that very table. As the furniture had been sold to Lord Derrington, together with the house, the table was the very article

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of furniture at which Mrs Jersey had been stabbed when seated. Brendon looked from the table to the door, and wondered if the assassin had entered stealthily, with a bared weapon, and had stabbed the wretched woman before she had time to turn her head. But on second thoughts he was inclined to think that the assassin had been in friendly conversation with Mrs Jersey before inflicting the fatal stroke. Even in the short distance between table and door Mrs Jersey would have had time to spring to her feet and give the alarm. "No," thought George, as he seated himself, "what I said to Train is correct. The assassin engaged Mrs Jersey in friendly conversation, and then watched for an opportunity to strike from behind."

He would have continued trying to puzzle out the circumstances of the crime but that Miss Bull entered, accompanied by Margery. The little old maid looked whiter and more haggard than ever, but her eyes gleamed brightly, and she seemed to be in perfect health. Margery, now being the nominal head of the house, appeared more important, but she kept her eyes on Miss Bull's face, and in all things took her orders from this superior being. Miss Bull was a despot, although kindly enough, and Margery was her slave.

"How are you, Mr Brendon?" said Miss Bull, smiling in her prim way, but without offering her hand. "I did not expect to see you again."

"Why not?" asked George, quickly.

Miss Bull shrugged her thin shoulders and fastened her beady eyes on his face. "Many of the boarders left on account of Madame's murder, so I thought you had done the same."

"I was only a visitor, Miss Bull. Had I been a boarder I should not have left. The murder did not scare me."

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"No," replied Miss Bull, indifferently, "I don't suppose it did. I only talked for the sake of talking."

Brendon knew this was untrue, as Miss Bull was not a woman to waste words. Besides, the old maid's eyes were fixed with a certain amount of curiosity on his face, and he could not conceive why this was so. He was rather embarrassed how to begin the conversation, especially as Margery was present. Something of this showed itself in his manner, for Miss Bull drew Margery's hand within her own and nodded affably. "Miss Watson is the head of the house," she said. "Do you come to see her or me, Mr Brendon?"

"I come to see you," said George, hoping she would send the inconvenient third away. But she did nothing of the sort.

"In that case Margery can stop as my friend, Mr Brendon. Anything you say before her will go no further. She keeps my secrets."

"Always! always!" cried Margery, her eyes on the old maid. "I would rather die than reveal your secrets, Miss Bull."

"Rather tragic, my dear, rather tragic," replied the elder, patting the hand she held. "I have really no secrets worth revealing. A lonely old woman, Mr Brendon, solaced by the friendship and devotion of this lonely girl."

Margery, who had flushed at the rebuke, stopped and kissed the old maid's hand. Miss Bull patted her head and turned cheerfully to her visitor. "Yes, Mr Brendon?" she said in an interrogative manner. Again George felt awkward, but judged it best to plunge into the middle of the matter and get it over as soon as possible. "You called to see a certain Mr Ireland," he said, "about the lease of this house. I have to come to ask you why you did so."

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Miss Bull stopped patting Margery's hand and her lips tightened. "I don't see what business that is of yours," she said tartly.

"On the face of it, Miss Bull, I admit that the question sounds impertinent. But I am anxious to learn something about Mrs Jersey's early life, and since you know something——"

"I know nothing," interrupted Miss Bull, quickly, "absolutely nothing. I came here as a boarder many years ago, and, as is my custom, I kept myself to myself. Madame and I did not get on well together. She was not a lady."

"Do you know what she was?" asked Brendon, shrewdly.

"I have already said that I know nothing," replied Miss Bull, coldly.

Evidently it was impossible to learn anything from so secretive a woman. Nevertheless, George tried another tack. "Do you know if Mrs Jersey left any writings behind her?"

He asked this because it struck him that Mrs Jersey might have been tempted to write out her relations with the Vane family. It was apparent that Lord Derrington had given her a lease of the house to silence her about the possible marriage, so for the sake of her niece Mrs Jersey might have left some confession which would secure its renewal. And that the lease had been renewed was evident from the fact that the boarding-house was still being carried on in the old way, and by the niece.

Miss Bull did not reply to this question herself. "That is not my business," she said; "Miss Watson took possession of her aunt's papers."

"They were in a green box," said Margery, artlessly.

"What did they consist of?" asked Brendon.

"You need not answer that question, Margery,"

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said Miss Bull, quickly, and from that moment, Margery preserved a lumpish silence. George rose in despair.

"You will not help me," he said, taking up his hat.

"So far as I can see there is no reason why we should help you," was Miss Bull's reply, and she rose in her turn.

Brendon saw nothing for it but to go, yet he hesitated to abandon the chance of learning something from Miss Bull. He stared at her pinched, white face and wondered if it would be any good appealing to that love of romance which is inherent in the heart of every woman. Old and withered as Miss Bull was, she might soften under the influence of a love-tale. Brendon disliked telling his business to strangers, especially anything regarding Dorothy, whom he looked upon as a sacred vestal not to be lightly mentioned. However, so much was at stake that he determined to speak openly, on the bare chance of Miss Bull yielding. But he could not speak in the presence of the girl Margery. She was such a sullen animal that to mention his love in her presence would be like casting pearls before swine. He therefore turned to Miss Bull, who stood with folded hands, eyeing him frigidly. "If I could see you alone," said Brendon.

Miss Bull cast a shrewd glance at him, rapidly made up her mind and told Margery to go. The girl looked at him tigerishly, as she was evidently jealous, and sulkily withdrew. When the door was closed Brendon resumed his seat, but Miss Bull remained standing. This was not a good sign; but George was now committed to a certain course and had to follow it.

"Miss Bull," he said deliberately, "what I am about to tell you, being my own private business, I must ask you to keep to yourself."

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"I don't want to hear it," said Miss Bull. "I never care for other people's secrets."

"This is not a secret, Miss Bull. It is merely that I am engaged to be married."

"Indeed, and what interest can that have for me, Mr Brendon?"

"This much. You are a woman and must feel interested to a certain extent in a love romance. I am aware that I am appealing to you in a way which you may regard as foolish, but I am so anxious for certain information, and, from what Mr Ireland said, you alone can give it. To put the thing in a nutshell—I am in love, and you can forward my marriage if you will."

Miss Bull heard him in silence, but as he talked a faint crimson flushed her face and a softer light shone in her hard eyes. She put her hand to her heart, as though she felt a cruel pain, and sank into a chair. Alarmed by her pallor, which had now returned, George would have called for assistance, but she stopped him. "I shall be all right shortly," she muttered in faint tones. "Marriage, love, what have I to do with such things?" She paused, and then continued, her voice gathering strength as she proceeded, "Who is the bride, Mr Brendon?"

"She is not a bride yet; she never may be," replied the young man, gloomily, "for if she does not become my wife she will accept no one else. I can trust her implicitly. Her name is Dorothy Ward."

Miss Bull rose with an ejaculation and her face grew red. "Is her mother the Honorable Mrs Ward who married Lord Ransome's son?"

"Yes. Do you know her?" asked George, surprised at her emotion.

"I have heard of her," replied Miss Bull, resuming her seat with feigned indifference, but with barely

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concealed agitation. "Dorothy Ward. A handsome girl. I have seen her in the Park."

"She is as good as she is beautiful," cried Brendon, enthusiastically.

"I'll take your word for that," said Miss Bull in a softer tone. "Mr Brendon, I will help you. Don't ask me why. Perhaps it is on account of your romance; perhaps because—because—" her hand clenched itself and she fought down an outburst—"no matter. I will do what I can to forward the marriage. What do you wish to know?"

"About Mrs Jersey."

"In relation to Lord Derrington?"

"Yes. He was the landlord of this house, I believe."

"He was and is. It was leased to Mrs Jersey, furniture and all, by the year."

"By the year," said Brendon, surprised. "Why not a seven-years' lease in the ordinary way?"

"I cannot say. I am only telling you what Mrs Jersey's lawyer told me. Lord Derrington bought this house from Mr Ireland with the furniture as it stood, and as it stood he gave it to Mrs Jersey. She turned it into a boarding-house some fifteen years ago. I don't think she added or took away any furniture. It is in the same condition as when it left Mr Ireland's hands. And he, I believe, sold it on account of the last owner."

"He did," admitted George. "The last owner was Mr Anthony Lockwood; he was——" George had it in his mind to state that Lockwood was his father. But the time was not yet ripe for such a disclosure, and he said nothing at the moment. "He was a singing-master," he finished rather lamely. "Mr Ireland told me all about him."

"That is all correct, so far as I know, Mr Brendon. I dare say you wish to know why I saw Mr

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Ireland. I did so on behalf of Margery Watson, as I wanted the girl to continue the boarding-house. I like the poor creature, and when her aunt died she was left very badly off."

"Didn't Mrs Jersey leave any money?"

"No. She lived principally on an annuity from Lord Derrington."

"Ah!" said Brendon, his suspicions becoming more and more confirmed, "so he allowed her an annuity. Why?"

"I can't tell you that. But with the death of Mrs Jersey the annuity naturally ceased. I asked Mr Ireland about the lease, and then sought out Lord Derrington. I represented to him the position of Margery Watson, and he was good enough to renew the lease in her name, on my security."

"Still by the year?" asked George.

"Still by the year. So now the poor girl can live."

"You are a good woman, Miss Bull, to help her in this way."

"I am not good," cried Miss Bull, vehemently. "God knows I have enough sins to repent of. Don't call me good, Mr Brendon. I am only a desolate old woman who has had a hard life. I should have been married and settled, but—but"—— She shook her head and the tears came into her hard eyes. "God help me, I have had sorrows, and will have them till I die."

"That shows you have a good heart," said George, alluding not to her sorrows, but to her actions toward Margery. "Well, Miss Bull—" he rose—"you have told me what I want to know. I hope to make use of it. In return for your confidence I should tell you——"

"Tell me nothing," cried the old maid, quickly. "I don't wish to hear your secrets. The less said the soonest mended. When Miss Ward becomes Mrs

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Brendon," she added with a dry smile, "you can send me a piece of wedding cake."

"She will not become Mrs Brendon," said George, shaking his head. "I will be frank with you, Miss Bull. My name is not Brendon."

She rose from her seat and looked at him steadily, perusing every line in his face. "I thought I had seen some one like you before. I see now—now—don't tell me your name is—is—but it's impossible."

"My real name is George Vane. I am Lord Derrington's grandson."

The little woman looked at him wildly for a moment and then quietly slipped to the ground. She had fainted in real earnest, and George rang the bell for assistance. Margery, who had evidently been lurking outside, rushed in. When she saw her friend extended pale and lifeless on the carpet she turned on George with a furious face.

"What have you been doing to the poor darling?" she demanded, "you—you." She raised her hand to strike, but Brendon caught her by the wrist.

"I have been doing nothing," he declared, quelling the rage of the she-bear by the power of his glance. "Miss Bull fainted unexpectedly. Thank goodness here is some one."

It was one of the servants, but Margery waved her off. "No one but me—no one but me!" she cried, and took the slender form of her friend up in her arms. "Wait here," she added to George. "I'll be down soon."

When she left the room George looked at the servant, who was a quiet, respectable old woman. "Is that girl mad?" he asked.

"She's queer, poor soul, sir," replied the woman, "and entirely devoted to Miss Bull. And well she may be, for it is Miss Bull who manages the house. The girl is a natural, sir."

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"She looks like it," replied George, sitting down. "You can go. I shall wait here until Miss Bull recovers."

"Yes, sir," replied the woman, and departed. But as she closed the door George heard her muttering something to herself about the danger of Margery's claws scratching him.

Brendon did not feel very comfortable on this point himself. He saw that Margery was a kind of untamed animal who had been brought into subjection by Miss Bull. No other person could manage her, and should she return, still in a passion, Brendon feared lest she should use physical violence. Still he held his ground, as he was anxious to learn how the old maid was feeling, and still more anxious to find out, if possible, why she had fainted on hearing his name. "I wonder if Mrs Jersey told her anything," muttered George as he looked out of the window; "but that's impossible. Mrs Jersey would keep her own secret so as to terrorize over Derrington. Besides, Miss Bull declared that she recognized my face. I wonder if she knew my father, and if she can throw any light on the murder. It is strange that she should be connected with the matter and live in the same house as Mrs Jersey. Upon my word," said George, in disgust, "it seems as though there were a gang of shady people here connected with my affairs. And she was moved by the mention of Dorothy's name. I wonder what that meant?"

But whatever it did mean he did not learn that day. Margery returned and stated that Miss Bull was better, but was too faint to resume the conversation. She begged Mr Brendon to call another day. Margery gave this message in quite a friendly way, and nodded smilingly to the astonished George. "You are better disposed toward me," he said, taking up his hat.

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"Miss Bull told me to be kind to you," she declared, still smiling; and then, with a burst of good nature, "I will be kind. Do you want to know about the papers?"

"If you choose to tell me," said George, artfully, but rejoicing at the opportunity this offered of learning something.

"Yes, I do choose," said Margery. "She asked me to be kind to you."

"Well, then, tell me," replied George, humoring her.

"There was a lease in the green box, and many bills," said Margery, "a few photographs, and that was all. I couldn't see the story."

"What story, Miss Watson?"

Margery nodded with a cunning smile, and answered, in a whisper, as though her aunt was still alive and within hearing. "She told me it was a story she was writing. Oh, such a long story! Sheets and sheets of a story—foolscap sheets. She kept them in a long blue envelope and would not let me see them."

George reflected that evidently Mrs Jersey had been writing out an account of her early life, and Margery's next words put the matter beyond a doubt. "My aunt said that she would let me have the story to read after she died. But I could not find it in the green box."

"Perhaps you did not look thoroughly," suggested George.

"Yes, I did, and I looked in all other places. But I could not find it. The story was Italian," went on Margery, staring at him, "for when my aunt wasn't looking I peeped. San Remo is in Italy, isn't it?"

"'I believe so," replied George, more and more convinced that Mrs Jersey had left a confession behind her. "Did you tell Miss Bull?"

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Margery nodded. "She said I wasn't to say a word about it. But she will not be angry at my telling you. She likes you, and says you are like some one she once knew and loved."

Brendon did not pursue the conversation. He was afraid lest Margery might say too much and Miss Bull might be angry. And it was necessary that he should keep on good terms with Miss Bull. Evidently she had known his father; she may even have loved him. But George had heard so much that day that his brain was quite bewildered, and he wanted to be alone to think the matter out. Only one last request he made of Margery. "Will you show me the photographs which were in the green box?" he asked persuasively.

"I can't," she replied, drawing down her lip like a child; "Miss Bull has them. But she'll show them to you," brightening, "for she likes you. I like you too. You are so handsome."

With a laugh and a blush at this naïve compliment George left the house, promising to call again. With his head filled with many thoughts consequent on his two interviews, he emerged from Amelia Square and walked down to Oxford Street. A shout aroused him from his day-dreams as he reached the corner. He saw a tall, red-headed man crossing the road, and a cab was bearing down on him. The man stood paralyzed in the center, and it was apparent that the horse would soon be on him. George, almost without thinking, dashed into the street, and, seizing the animal, reined it back on its haunches with a powerful hand. There was a shout of admiration from the throng on the footpath, a few oaths from the driver of the hansom, and the next minute the red-headed man was thanking his preserver on the pavement and shaking his hand violently.

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"Don't you think I'll forget it, sir," he said with rather an American accent. "You have saved Bawdsey, and Bawdsey can help you at a pinch."

Brendon was too bewildered by this extraordinary address to take it all in. Besides, the admiring crowd pressed around. Seeing this, Bawdsey took him by the arm and ran him round the corner into a quiet street. George recovered and looked at the man he had saved.

He was a tall man with a thin face, though his body was rather stout. His hair was red, his eyes were blue, and he had an alert manner about him which made Brendon wonder how such a sharp person ever came to place himself in the position of being run over. But Bawdsey gave him no time to think. "What is your name?" he asked.

"George Brendon."

Bawdsey stepped back, and a look of genuine surprise overspread his freckled face. And he was apparently more astonished than he showed, as Brendon guessed by the trembling of his hands. "I have lived over fifty years in the world," said Bawdsey, "and this is the queerest thing I ever dropped across. And I drop across many queer things, stranger."

"Well, Mr Bawdsey, if that is your name," said George, good-humoredly, "it is a good thing I have saved your life. But you seem as though you could——"

"I can—I can," interrupted Bawdsey, anticipating the remark. "But have you ever heard of that disease—fear of open spaces?"

"No," replied Brendon, "what is it?"

"I shan't give you the medical name," said Bawdsey, "as you would not understand. But it is a dread to cross any open space. At times it takes me unexpectedly, and I get a sort of paralysis of the

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will and cannot move. That was why I stopped in the middle of the road. I should have been killed but for you."

"Perhaps I had better see you home, then," said Brendon.

"No. I shall take a cab. It is only now and then that the thing takes me. It can't be cured and maybe it will get worse. At present it does not prevent me attending to my work. Come home with me and I'll tell you more. I live in No. 43 Amelia Square."

"What, in that house?" cried George, for this was the number of the Jersey mansion.

"Yes. What do you know of it?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, yes, you do; but you won't trust me. However, I'll see you again, and I'll trust you. Take care of Lola Velez. She means you harm."

The next moment he was gone, and George was staring after him.

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CHAPTER VIII

A BACCHANTE

LOLA VELEZ was the rage for a season. She sprang into fame in a single night, and thenceforth held an undisputed position as the favorite of the London public. She was not exceptionally handsome, nor was her dancing distinguished by any special grace; but about her there was something weird and original, which appealed to her audience. Such an extraordinary dancer had never been seen on the stage. She capered like one in a frenzy, with mad leaps and bounds, and throughout her orgiastic performance behaved as one possessed. It was not so much the poetry of motion as the madness of movement. George Brendon had been instrumental in introducing her to the public, and she owed her position as much to his kindness as to her own genius.

It was a snowy winter's night when Brendon found her. He had just entered Pembroke Square, where he had lodgings, when he heard a moan. Turning aside into the shadow of a wall he found a woman lying there, exhausted with cold and hunger. Always anxious to do good, he brought the poor creature to his rooms. Under the influence of food and wine and warmth she revived sufficiently to tell her story.

Her name, she stated, was Lola Velez. She was Spanish by birth, but had lived many years in Italy. Trained as a dancer, she had appeared at several of the best theaters with more or less success; but

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owing to her violent temper she had lost all chance of gaining a permanent position. But that Lola was rendered weak by privations she would not have told George the exact truth; but she confessed to her temper, to a certain episode connected with the stabbing of a woman of whom she was jealous, and to the many quarrels which had resulted in her being thrown out of employment. Finding Italy too hot to hold her, she had danced her way to Paris through various small towns, but here, as elsewhere, her temper proved her ruin. Then she had crossed the Channel, only to find that the market was overstocked with dancers. Unable to obtain employment, and having very little money, the unfortunate woman had fallen lower and lower, until she was reduced to begging in the streets. Finally she was turned out of her poor lodgings and had expended her last sixpence on food. It was shortly after this that Brendon found her.

He acted the part of a good Samaritan. Giving her a sovereign, he sent her away, restored in a measure to her right mind. The next day he saw the proprietor of a music-hall, with whom he was acquainted, and procured her an engagement in a ballet. It was a Dresden china piece, and the violent dancing of Lola was by no means suited to the Watteau costumes and stately dances of the powder and patches type. But the manager—a shrewd Jew called Kowlaski—saw in his new recruit the possibilities of success. He staged a ballet adapted from "The Bacchanals" of Euripides, and Lola danced the part of Agave, the mother of Pentheus, who is rendered insane by Bacchus.

Her success was immediate. She enacted the part with a reckless abandon and a wild frenzy which thrilled the house. For the moment Lola was not herself, but the wild Theban Queen raging in the

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orgies of the Wine-god. All London came to see the frantic revels over which Lola presided, and night after night the little music-hall was filled to overflowing. Lola made good use of her fame. She insisted that her salary should be raised, took modest lodgings in Bloomsbury, and, for a time, saved her money as a provision against old age and poverty. On the stage she was a dancing demon, but at home no one could have been more modest. There was not a breath of scandal against her, in spite of Mrs Ward's hint to Brendon.

This change in the formerly reckless woman was caused by love and gratitude to George. He had saved her from starvation, from death, he had procured her the engagement which had led to her success and present ease, and, figuratively speaking, she cast herself and all she had at his feet. Brendon found this excessive gratitude rather trying. Even then he was in love with Dorothy, whom he had met twice or thrice, and he was not disposed to accept the wild passion which Lola so freely offered to him. He tried to make her see reason, to look upon him as a friend and not as a lover, but in her insane way she resolutely refused to regard him as other than the man she intended to marry. In spite of her tempers and her wild career Lola had never erred, and so far Brendon could well have made her his wife. But he did not love her, and hardly relished the idea of taking this wild creature to his heart and home.

Lola could not understand this coldness. She was accustomed to see men at her feet and to spurn them. Now that she was willing to surrender her liberty and to give her love, it exasperated her to think that the one man she had chosen would have none of her. As yet she knew nothing of Brendon's love for Dorothy, but with the instinct of a jealous

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woman guessed that some such passion engrossed the mind of the man she desired to marry. Again and again she deluged George with questions, which he always refused to answer, so she could learn nothing. Wearied of her persistency, Brendon stopped away, and for a few weeks Lola did not see him. She followed him to his rooms, but found him absent. Then she saw his name in the papers connected with the Amelia Square tragedy, and wrote to him. He accepted her invitation and came to supper, less because of her desire than because he wished to speak to her about Bawdsey. The name of Lola Velez on the lips of the red man had startled Brendon almost as much as the fact that Bawdsey appeared to be acquainted with him. George could not recall meeting the man, and as he was not yet sufficiently famous for his name to be on the lips of the public, he wondered how it came about that Bawdsey knew of his existence. Anxious to know who the man was, he sent a note, marked private, to Miss Bull, and received a reply stating that Mr Bawdsey was a new boarder, and, so far as she knew, a gentleman who lived on his income. But this did not satisfy Brendon, as it did not account for Bawdsey's knowledge. There remained Lola to question, and to Lola George went a night or two after the rescue of the red man. George made up his mind, and a strong mind it was, that he would not leave Lola until he knew positively how her name came to be mentioned by Bawdsey.

At eleven o'clock Lola was anxiously awaiting his arrival, and when he entered her little sitting-room she flew to kiss his hand, her usual extravagant form of greeting. George, like all Englishmen, hated scenes, and these Lola was always making. In vain had he tried to break her of these melodramatic tendencies. Her hot Southern blood would

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not cool, and she overwhelmed him with protestations of more than friendship. Of these he took no notice, and as it takes two to make love as well as to make a quarrel, Lola was yet far from gaining her heart's desire. This was a formal offer of marriage.

Having just returned from the music-hall, Lola wore a loose tea-gown of scarlet trimmed with glittering jet. It was a bizarre garment, but the vivid color suited her dark face and Southern looks. She was rather tall, very slender, and she moved with the dangerous grace of a pantheress. Her face was oval, sallow and thin, with ever-changing expressions. She was never two minutes the same, but her prevailing mood was one of fierce intensity. The smoldering fire in her great black eyes blazed into passionate love as she swept forward to greet her visitor.

"My deliverer, my adored!" she cried in moderately good English, and kissed his hand with burning lips.

George snatched it away. "Don't, Lola. You know I hate that sort of thing!" And so saying he threw down his coat and hat on the sofa at the far end of the room.

Lola shrugged her shoulders and coiled up a tress of her black hair which had come loose. Putting it in its place, she glanced into the mirror over the fireplace to see that her comb was at the right angle. She wore a diamond comb in the Spanish fashion. So fond was she of jewels that George sometimes fancied she must have Jewish blood in her veins. All her savings went in jewels—diamonds for choice. "They are pretty," Lola would say when Brendon remonstrated with her, "and when I am poor they can be changed into money. Oh, yes, why not?"

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"Ah, but you are a cold blood, you English man," she said in allusion to Brendon's action. "But what would you—it is the fogs and cold snows. Come, my friend, to the table—to the table."

She clapped her hands, and seizing George by the arm forced him into a seat. The supper looked very tempting. Lola had an eye for the beautiful, and arranged the table herself. A tall silver lamp with a pink shade shed a roseate light on the white cloth, the glittering crystal, and the quaint silver spoons and forks. Lola had picked up these things at odd times and displayed very good taste in her selection. In the center of the table was an oval silver dish filled with pink roses. "What extravagance!" said George.

"Ah, bah! I got them from San Remo—from a friend of mine," said Lola, removing a dish-cover; "they cost me not one sou. George, my dear friend, the Chianti is in the flask there, and this macaroni? Eh?" George passed his plate. The viands were cooked in the Italian fashion, and there was a foreign air about the supper which was grateful after a long course of English cooking. What with the foreign dishes, the pink-shaded lamp, and the candles likewise in pink shades on mantelpiece and sideboard, George felt as though he were in a Soho restaurant. The night was cold, he was hungry, and the supper, with its surroundings, was novel. He therefore made a good meal. Lola watched him eat with satisfaction.

"Ah, you like my housekeepers," she said, meaning housekeeping; "it is to your mind. Yes? Eh, my friend, I could feed you as fat as pigs if you would but allow me."

"I don't want to be fat," retorted George, reaching for the Chianti. "Give me a cigarette, Lola."

She produced her own case, and not only supplied

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him with one, but insisted on placing it between his lips and on lighting it. George wriggled uncomfortably, but it was no use objecting to Lola's ways. She would indulge her whims at any price. And he did not wish to leave until he had accomplished his mission.

"There, little friend," cried Lola, when he was seated comfortably by the fire and she was puffing also at a cigarette, "now we must talk. Why have you not been? Oh! you wicked young boy!"

"I have been engaged," replied George, secretly admiring the careless grace with which she was half lying, half sitting in the armchair opposite. She showed a dainty foot encased in a red stocking and a red shoe. Lola was all in crimson from head to foot, save for the jet and her dark face and hair. She looked like some sorceress bent upon unholy conjurations.

"Engaged!" she repeated with a flash of her wonderful eyes. "That is words for 'I don't want to come.'"

George laughed, shook his head, and changed the subject. Her remark about having a friend in San Remo ran in his mind. "Have you ever been there?" he asked, naming the town.

"Ah, bah! have I been anywhere? All Italy I know—all—all."

"You know it better than Spain. Yet you are Spanish."

"I am whatever you desire, my George. Yes, I am of Spain—of Cadiz, where my parents sold oil to their ruin. They came to Italy, to Milan, and made money to live from wine. I was trained to the dance—they died, and I, my friend——"

"You told me all this before," interrupted Brendon, ruthlessly. "I ask if you have ever been to San Remo?"

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"Why, yes, assuredly, and why not?" She looked at him with narrowing eyes as she put the question, blinking like a cat.

"There is no reason, only I was thinking——" He paused.

"Eh, you think—of what?"

"Oh, something which does not concern you, Lola."

"All that is of you is to me," she responded. "I love you."

"Lola, be reasonable."

"Pschutt! I mock myself of your reason," she cried, snapping her fingers and speaking in quite a French way. "I leave reasons to your chilly English ladies. I—eh, but you know I am of the South. To you—to you, my adored preserver, do I give myself."

George grew angry. "If you talk like this, Lola, I shall go away."

"Ah, then good-night to you. Let it be adieu and never come back."

"Not at all. Be a reasonable woman and sit down. Give me some more wine and a cigarette. I want to ask you a question."

Lola poured out the wine and tossed him a cigarette, but she refused to sit down or to compose herself. In a flaming temper she whirled about the room, talking all the time. "Ah, yes, but it is so always! I am a fool to love you, cold one—pig of an Englishman."

"That's grateful," said George, quietly, and she was at his feet.

"Ah, but no! I am a bad womans. I am entirely all wicked. You are an angel of the good God. Dearest—my own——" She stretched adoring hands, and her eyes glittered like stars.

George reasoned with her. "Lola, do you wish me to be pleased with you?"

"Assuredly, and why not?"

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"Then sit down in your chair like a Christian and talk sensibly."

She sat down, or rather flung herself into the chair with a whirl of scarlet draperies. "Decidedly I am a Christian. I go to mass, I confess—yes, I confess to the priest how I love you."

"Do you really love me, Lola? I was told that you wished me harm."

She started from her chair with a passionate gesture.

"Who says it is liars of the worst. Tell me who speak, that I may tear and scratch."

"No! no! I don't want a scandal."

"For her sakes, oh, yes!" She subsided sulkily. "I am nothings."

"For whose sake?" asked Brendon, rather alarmed, for he did not wish this tigress to know about Dorothy.

"The other woman's. Oh, yes, there is some one else. I know. You are mine all, and would be but for the other womans. Imbecile that I am to think of you who kick me hard—hard. And I can learn nothing—nothing. If I did—if I knew, I——" She stopped and breathed hard.

"I wonder you don't have me watched," said George, thoroughly angry at her unreasonable attitude. Lola tossed her head, and her expression changed to one of alarm. Brendon saw the change and guessed its meaning. "You did have me watched."

"And what if I did?" she demanded defiantly. "You are mine."

"I am not yours," he retorted angrily. "I have given you no cause to think that I would marry you."

Lola burst into tears. "You took me from the stones and snows," she wept with extravagant

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grief. "Why did I not die? You fed me with foods and made me shine in this London; you win my heart, and then—then—pschutt!" she snapped her fingers, "you toss it aside."

"Why did you have me watched?" asked George, sternly.

"I want to know of the other woman," she replied sullenly.

"There is no——" He broke off. "It has nothing to do with you."

Lola sprang to her feet with fierce eyes. "Then there is another—another—oh, you cruel! Name of names, but I shall find her. I shall tell her——"

"You shall tell her nothing—you shall not see her."

"But I will. Eh, yes. You do not know me." This with a stamp.

"I know you cannot behave decently, Lola. If you have me watched again, if you dare to—to—bah!" George stamped in his turn. "I have had enough of this. Behave, or I go and will not return."

She flung herself at his feet with a wail. "Ah, but no," she sobbed, "I do love you so dearly—I will die if you love me not."

George drew himself roughly away, and taking her by the hands placed her in a chair, where she hid her face and sobbed. "Who was it you got to watch me—you hired to watch me?" George advisedly used the word "hired" as he thought she might have engaged one of her friends to do the dirty work, instead of engaging a professional. Yet he knew she was quite capable of going to a private inquiry office.

"I shall not tell you," said Lola, sitting up with a hard expression on her mouth and in her eyes.

"Did you pay him much?" asked Brendon, dexterously.

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