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"Can't you take my parole? Can't you leave me alone until they come from England?" FRONTISPIECE. *See page 300.*

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THE CINEMA MURDER

A NOVEL

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

H. WESTON TAYLOR

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
1917

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BOOK I

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CHAPTER I

With a somewhat prolonged grinding of the brakes and an unnecessary amount of fuss in the way of letting off steam, the afternoon train from London came to a standstill in the station at Detton Magna. An elderly porter, putting on his coat as he came, issued, with the dogged aid of one bound by custom to perform a hopeless mission, from the small, red-brick lamp room. The station master, occupying a position of vantage in front of the shed which enclosed the booking office, looked up and down the lifeless row of closed and streaming windows, with an expectancy dulled by daily disappointment, for the passengers who seldom alighted. On this occasion no records were broken. A solitary young man stepped out on to the wet and flinty platform, handed over the half of a third-class return ticket from London, passed through the two open doors and commenced to climb the long ascent which led into the town.

He wore no overcoat, and for protection against the inclement weather he was able only to turn up the collar of his well-worn blue serge coat. The damp of a ceaselessly wet day seemed to have laid its cheerless pall upon the whole exceedingly ugly landscape. The hedges, blackened with smuts from the colliery on the other side of the slope, were dripping also with raindrops. The road, flinty and light

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grey in colour, was greasy with repellent-looking mud — there were puddles even in the asphalt-covered pathway which he trod. On either side of him stretched the shrunken, unpastoral-looking fields of an industrial neighbourhood. The town-village which stretched up the hillside before him presented scarcely a single redeeming feature. The small, grey stone houses, hard and unadorned, were interrupted at intervals by rows of brand-new, red-brick cottages. In the background were the tall chimneys of several factories; on the left, a colliery shaft raised its smoke-blackened finger to the lowering clouds.

After his first glance around at these familiar and unlovely objects, Philip Romilly walked with his head a little thrown back, his eyes lifted as though with intent to the melancholy and watery skies. He was a young man well above medium height, slim, almost inclined to be angular, yet with a good carriage notwithstanding a stoop which seemed more the result of an habitual depression than occasioned by any physical weakness. His features were large, his mouth querulous, a little discontented, his eyes filled with the light of a silent and rebellious bitterness which seemed, somehow, to have found a more or less permanent abode in his face. His clothes, although they were neat, had seen better days. He was ungloved, and he carried under his arm a small parcel, which appeared to contain a book, carefully done up in brown paper.

As he reached the outskirts of the village he slackened his pace. Standing a little way back from the road, from which they were separated by an ugly, gravelled playground, were the familiar school build-

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ings, with the usual inscription carved in stone above the door. He laid his hand upon the wooden gate and paused. From inside he could catch the drone of children's voices. He glanced at his watch. It was barely twenty minutes past four. For a moment he hesitated. Then he strolled on, and, turning at the gate of an adjoining cottage, the nearest to the schools of a little unlovely row, he tried the latch, found it yield to his touch, and stepped inside. He closed the door behind him and turned, with a little weary sigh of content, towards a large easy-chair drawn up in front of the fire. For a single moment he seemed about to throw himself into its depths — his long fingers, indeed, a little blue with the cold, seemed already on their way towards the genial warmth of the flames. Then he stopped short. He stood perfectly still in an attitude of arrested motion, his eyes, wonderingly at first, and then with a strange, unanalysable expression, seeming to embark upon a lengthened, a scrupulous, an almost horrified estimate of his surroundings.

To the ordinary observer there would have been nothing remarkable in the appearance of the little room, save its entirely unexpected air of luxury and refinement. There was a small Chippendale sideboard against the wall, a round, gate-legged table on which stood a blue china bowl filled with pink roses, a couple of luxurious easy-chairs, some old prints upon the wall. On the sideboard was a basket, as yet unpacked, filled with hothouse fruit, and on a low settee by the side of one of the easy-chairs were a little pile of reviews, several volumes of poetry, and a couple of library books. In the

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centre of the mantelpiece was a photograph, the photograph of a man a little older, perhaps, than this newly-arrived visitor, with rounder face, dressed in country tweeds, a flower in his buttonhole, the picture of a prosperous man, yet with a curious, almost disturbing likeness to the pale, over-nervous, loose-framed youth whose eye had been attracted by its presence, and who was gazing at it, spellbound.

"Douglas!" he muttered. "Douglas!"

He flung his hat upon the table and for a moment his hand rested upon his forehead. He was confronted with a mystery which baffled him, a mystery whose sinister possibilities were slowly framing themselves in his mind. While he stood there he was suddenly conscious of the sound of the opening gate, brisk footsteps up the tiled way, the soft swirl of a woman's skirt. The latch was raised, the door opened and closed. The newcomer stood upon the threshold, gazing at him.

"Philip!" she exclaimed. "Why, Philip!"

There was a curious change in the girl's tone, from almost glad welcome to a note of abrupt fear in that last pronouncement of his name. She stood looking at him, the victim, apparently, of so many emotions that there was nothing definite to be drawn either from her tone or expression. She was a young woman of medium height and slim, delicate figure, attractive, with large, discontented mouth, full, clear eyes and a wealth of dark brown hair. She was very simply dressed and yet in a manner which scarcely suggested the school-teacher. To the man who confronted her, his left hand gripping the mantelpiece, his eyes filled with a flaming jealousy, there

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was something entirely new in the hang of her well-cut skirt, the soft colouring of her low-necked blouse, the greater animation of her piquant face with its somewhat dazzling complexion. His hand flashed out towards her as he asked his question.

"What does it mean, Beatrice?"

She showed signs of recovering herself. With a little shrug of the shoulders she turned towards the door which led into an inner room.

"Let me get you some tea, Philip," she begged. "You look so cold and wet."

"Stay here, please," he insisted.

She paused reluctantly. There was a curious lack of anything peremptory in his manner, yet somehow, although she would have given the world to have passed for a few moments into the shelter of the little kitchen beyond, she was impelled to do as he bade her.

"Don't be silly, Philip," she said petulantly. "You know you want some tea, and so do I. Sit down, please, and make yourself comfortable. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"Perhaps it would have been better," he agreed quietly. "However, since I am here, answer my question."

She drew a little breath. After all, although she was lacking in any real strength of character, she was filled with a certain compensatory doggedness. His challenge was there to be faced. There was no way out of it. She would have lied willingly enough but for the sheer futility of falsehood. She commenced the task of bracing herself for the struggle.

"You had better," she said, "frame your question

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a little more exactly. I will then try to answer it."

He was stung by her altered demeanour, embarrassed by an avalanche of words. A hundred questions were burning upon his lips. It was by a great effort of self-control that he remained coherent.

"The last time I visited you," he began, "was three months ago. Your cottage then was furnished as one would expect it to be furnished. You had a deal dresser, a deal table, one rather hard easy-chair and a very old wicker one. You had, if I remember rightly, a strip of linoleum upon the floor, and a single rug. Your flowers were from the hedges and your fruit from the one apple tree in the garden behind. Your clothes — am I mistaken about your clothes or are you dressed more expensively?"

"I am dressed more expensively," she admitted.

"You and I both know the value of these things," he went on, with a little sweep of the hand. "We know the value of them because we were once accustomed to them, because we have both since experienced the passionate craving for them or the things they represent. Chippendale furniture, a Turkey carpet, roses in January, hothouse fruit, Bartolozzi prints, do not march with an income of fifty pounds a year."

"They do not," she assented equably. "All the things which you see here and which you have mentioned, are presents."

His forefinger shot out with a sudden vigour towards the photograph.

"From him?"

"From Douglas," she admitted, "from your cousin."

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He took the photograph into his hand, looked at it for a moment, and dashed it into the grate. The glass of the frame was shivered into a hundred pieces. The girl only shrugged her shoulders. She was holding herself in reserve. As for him, his eyes were hot, there was a dry choking in his throat. He had passed through many weary and depressed days, struggling always against the grinding monotony of life and his surroundings. Now for the first time he felt that there was something worse.

"What does it mean?" he asked once more.

She seemed almost to dilate as she answered him. Her feet were firmly planted upon the ground. There was a new look in her face, a look of decision. She was more or less a coward but she felt no fear. She even leaned a little towards him and looked him in the face.

"It means," she pronounced slowly, "exactly what it seems to mean."

The words conveyed horrible things to him, but he was spechless. He could only wait.

"You and I, Philip," she continued, "have been — well, I suppose we should call it engaged — for three years. During those three years I have earned, by disgusting and wearisome labour, just enough to keep me alive in a world which has had nothing to offer me but ugliness and discomfort and misery. You, as you admitted last time we met, have done no better. You have lived in a garret and gone often hungry to bed. For three years this has been going on. All that time I have waited for you to bring something human, something reasonable, something warm into my life, and you have failed. I have

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passed, in those three years, from twenty-three to twenty-six. In three more I shall be in my thirtieth year — that is to say, the best time of my life will have passed. You see, I have been thinking, and I have had enough."

He stood quite dumb. The girl's newly-revealed personality seemed to fill the room. He felt crowded out. She was, at that stage, absolutely mistress of the situation. . . . She passed him carelessly by, flung herself into the easy-chair and crossed her legs. As though he were looking at some person in another world, he realized that she was wearing shoes of shapely cut, and silk stockings.

"Our engagement," she went on, "was at first the dearest thing in life to me. It could have been the most wonderful thing in life. I am only an ordinary person with an ordinary character, but I have the capacity to love unselfishly, and I am at heart as faithful and as good as any other woman. But there is my birthright. I have had three years of sordid and utterly miserable life, teaching squalid, dirty, unlovable children things they had much better not know. I have lived here, here in Detton Magna, among the smuts and the mists, where the flowers seem withered and even the meadows are stony, where the people are hard and coarse as their ugly houses, where virtue is ugly, and vice is ugly, and living is ugly, and death is fearsome. And now you see what I have chosen — not in a moment's folly, mind, because I am not foolish; not in a moment's passion, either, because until now the only real feeling I have had in life was for you. But I have chosen, and I hold to my choice."

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"They won't let you stay here," he muttered.

"They needn't," she answered calmly. "There are other ways in which I can at least earn as much as the miserable pittance doled out to me here. I have avoided even considering them before. Shall I tell you why? Because I didn't want to face the temptation they might bring with them. I always knew what would happen if escape became hopeless. It's the ugliness I can't stand — the ugliness of cheap food, cheap clothes, uncomfortable furniture, coarse voices, coarse friends if I would have them. How do you suppose I have lived here these last three years, a teacher in the national schools? Look up and down this long, dreary street, at the names above the shops, at the villas in which the tradespeople live, and ask yourself where my friends were to come from? The clergyman, perhaps? He is over seventy, a widower, and he never comes near the place. Why, I'd have been content to have been patronized if there had been anyone here to do it, who wore the right sort of clothes and said the right sort of thing in the right tone. But the others — well, that's done with."

He remained curiously dumb. His eyes were fixed upon the fragments of the photograph in the grate. In a corner of the room an old-fashioned clock ticked wheezily. A lump of coal fell out on the hearth, which she replaced mechanically with her foot. His silence seemed to irritate and perplex her. She looked away from him, drew her chair a little closer to the fire, and sat with her head resting upon her hands. Her tone had become almost meditative.

"I knew that this would come one day," she went

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on. "Why don't you speak and get it over? Are you waiting to clothe your phrases? Are you afraid of the naked words? I'm not. Let me hear them. Don't be more melodramatic than you can help because, as you know, I am cursed with a sense of humour, but don't stand there saying nothing."

He raised his eyes and looked at her in silence, an alternative which she found it hard to endure. Then, after a moment's shivering recoil into her chair, she sprang to her feet.

"Listen," she cried passionately, "I don't care what you think! I tell you that if you were really a man, if you had a man's heart in your body, you'd have sinned yourself before now — robbed some one, murdered them, torn the things that make life from the fate that refuses to give them. What is it they pay you," she went on contemptuously, "at that miserable art school of yours? Sixty pounds a year! How much do you get to eat and drink out of that? What sort of clothes have you to wear? Are you content? Yet even you have been better off than I. You have always your chance. Your play may be accepted or your stories published. I haven't even had that forlorn hope. But even you, Philip, may wait too long. There are too many laws, nowadays, for life to be lived naturally. If I were a man, a man like you, I'd break them."

Her taunts apparently moved him no more than the inner tragedy which her words had revealed. He did not for one moment give any sign of abandoning the unnatural calm which seemed to have descended upon him. He took up his hat from the table, and thrust the little brown paper parcel which he had

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been carrying, into his pocket. His eyes for a single moment met the challenge of hers, and again she was conscious of some nameless, inexplicable fear.

"Perhaps," he said, as he turned away, "I may do that."

His hand was upon the latch before she realized that he was actually going. She sprang to her feet. Abuse, scorn, upbraidings, even violence — she had been prepared for all of these. There was something about this self-restraint, however, this strange, brooding silence, which terrified her more than anything she could have imagined.

"Philip!" she shrieked. "You're not going? You're not going like this? You haven't said anything!"

He closed the door with firm fingers. Her knees trembled, she was conscious of an unexpected weakness. She abandoned her first intention of following him, and stood before the window, holding tightly to the sash. He had reached the gate now and paused for a moment, looking up the long, windy street. Then he crossed to the other side of the road, stepped over a stile and disappeared, walking without haste, with firm footsteps, along a cindered path which bordered the sluggish-looking canal. He had come and gone, and she knew what fear was!

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CHAPTER II

The railway station at Detton Magna presented, if possible, an even more dreary appearance than earlier in the day, as the time drew near that night for the departure of the last train northwards. Its long strip of flinty platform was utterly deserted. Around the three flickering gas-lamps the drizzling rain fell continuously. The weary porter came yawning out of his lamp room into the booking office, where the station master sat alone, his chair turned away from the open wicket window to the smouldering embers of the smoky fire.

"No passengers to-night, seemingly," the latter remarked to his subordinate.

"Not a sign of one," was the reply. "That young chap who came down from London on a one-day return excursion, hasn't gone back, either. That'll do his ticket in."

The outside door was suddenly opened and closed. The sound of footsteps approaching the ticket window was heard. A long, white hand was thrust through the aperture, a voice was heard from the invisible outside.

"Third to Detton Junction, please."

The station-master took the ticket from a little rack, received the exact sum he demanded, swept it into the till, and resumed his place before the fire. The porter, with the lamp in his hand, lounged out

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into the booking-hall. The prospective passenger, however, was nowhere in sight. He looked back into the office.

"Was that Jim Spender going up to see his barmaid again?" he asked his superior.

The station master yawned drowsily.

"Didn't notice," he answered. "What an old woman you're getting, George! Want to know everybody's business, don't you?"

The porter withdrew, a little huffed. When, a few minutes later, the train drew in, he even avoided ostentatiously a journey to the far end of the platform to open the door for the solitary passenger who was standing there. He passed up the train and slammed the door without even glancing in at the window. Then he stood and watched the red lights disappear.

"Was it Jim?" the station master asked him, on their way out.

"Didn't notice," his subordinate replied, a little curtly. "Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. Good night!"

Philip Romilly sat back in the corner of his empty third-class carriage, peering out of the window, in which he could see only the reflection of the feeble gas-lamp. There was no doubt about it, however — they were moving. The first stage of his journey had commenced. The blessed sense of motion, after so long waiting, at first soothed and then exhilarated him. In a few moments he became restless. He let down the rain-blurred window and leaned out. The cool dampness of the night was immensely refreshing,

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the rain softened his hot cheeks. He sat there, peering away into the shadows, struggling for the sight of definite objects — a tree, a house, the outline of a field — anything to keep the other thoughts away, the thoughts that came sometimes like the aftermath of a grisly, unrealisable nightmare. Then he felt chilly, drew up the window, thrust his hands into his pockets from which he drew out a handsome cigarette case, struck a match, and smoked with vivid appreciation of the quality of the tobacco, examined the crest on the case as he put it away, and finally patted with surreptitious eagerness the flat morocco letter case in his inside pocket.

At the Junction, he made his way into the refreshment room and ordered a long whisky and soda, which he drank in a couple of gulps. Then he hastened to the booking office and took a first-class ticket to Liverpool, and a few minutes later secured a seat in the long, north-bound express which came gliding up to the side of the platform. He spent some time in the lavatory, washing, arranging his hair, straightening his tie, after which he made his way into the elaborate dining-car and found a comfortable corner seat. The luxury of his surroundings soothed his jagged nerves. The car was comfortably warmed, the electric light upon his table was softly shaded. The steward who waited upon him was swift-footed and obsequious, and seemed entirely oblivious of Philip's shabby, half-soaked clothes. He ordered champagne a little vaguely, and the wine ran through his veins with a curious potency. He ate and drank now and then mechanically, now and then with the keenest appetite. Afterwards he smoked a cigar,

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drank coffee, and sipped a liqueur with the appreciation of a connoisseur. A fellow passenger passed him an evening paper, which he glanced through with apparent interest. Before he reached his journey's end he had ordered and drunk another liqueur. He tipped the steward handsomely. It was the first well-cooked meal which he had eaten for many months.

Arrived at Liverpool, he entered a cab and drove to the Adelphi Hotel. He made his way at once to the office. His clothes were dry now and the rest and warmth had given him more confidence.

"You have a room engaged for me, I think," he said, "Mr. Douglas Romilly. I sent some luggage on."

The man merely glanced at him and handed him a ticket.

"Number sixty-seven, sir, on the second floor," he announced.

A porter conducted him up-stairs into a large, well-furnished bedroom. A fire was blazing in the grate; a dressing-case, a steamer trunk and a hatbox were set out at the foot of the bedstead.

"The heavier luggage, labelled for the hold, sir," the man told him, "is down-stairs, and will go direct to the steamer to-morrow morning. That was according to your instructions, I believe."

"Quite right," Philip assented. "What time does the boat sail?"

"Three o'clock, sir."

Philip frowned. This was his first disappointment. He had fancied himself on board early in the day. The prospect of a long morning's inaction seemed already to terrify him.

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"Not till the afternoon," he muttered.

"Matter of tide, sir," the man explained. "You can go on board any time after eleven o'clock in the morning, though. Very much obliged to you, sir."

The porter withdrew, entirely satisfied with his tip. Philip Romilly locked the door after him carefully. Then he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and, after several attempts, opened both the steamer trunk and the dressing-case. He surveyed their carefully packed contents with a certain grim and fantastic amusement, handled the silver brushes, shook out a purple brocaded dressing-gown, laid out a suit of clothes for the morrow, even selected a shirt and put the links in it. Finally he wandered into the adjoining bathroom, took a hot bath, packed away at the bottom of the steamer trunk the clothes which he had been wearing, went to bed — and slept.

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CHAPTER III

The sun was shining into his bedroom when Philip Romilly was awakened the next morning by a discreet tapping at the door. He sat up in bed and shouted "Come in." He had no occasion to hesitate for a moment. He knew perfectly well where he was, he remembered exactly everything that had happened. The knocking at the door was disquieting but he faced it without a tremor. The floor waiter appeared and bowed deferentially.

"There is a gentleman on the telephone wishes to speak to you, sir," he announced. "I have connected him with the instrument by your side."

"To speak with me?" Philip repeated. "Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Douglas Romilly he asked for. He said that his name was Mr. Gayes, I believe."

The man left the room and Philip took up the receiver. For a moment he sat and thought. The situation was perplexing, in a sense ominous, yet it had to be faced. He held the instrument to his ear.

"Hullo? Who's that?" he enquired.

"That Mr. Romilly?" was the reply, in a man's pleasant voice. "Mr. Douglas Romilly?"

"Yes!"

"Good! I'm Gayes — Mr. Gayes of Gayes

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Brothers. My people wrote me last night from Leicester that you would be here this morning. You are crossing, aren't you, on the *Elletania?* "

Philip remained monosyllabic.

"Yes," he admitted cautiously.

"Can't you come round and see us this morning?" Mr. Gayes invited. "And look here, Mr. Romilly, in any case I want you to lunch with me at the club. My car shall come round and fetch you at any time you say."

"Sorry," Philip replied. "I am very busy this morning, and I am engaged for lunch."

"Oh, come, that's too bad," the other protested, "I really want to have a chat with you on business matters, Mr. Romilly. Will you spare me half an hour if I come round?"

"Tell me exactly what it is you want?" Philip insisted.

"Oh! just the usual thing," was the cheerful answer. "We hear you are off to America on a buying tour. Our last advices don't indicate a very easy market over there. I am not at all sure that we couldn't do better for you here, and give you better terms."

Philip began to feel more sure of himself. The situation, after all, he realized, was not exactly alarming.

"Very kind of you," he said. "My arrangements are all made now, though, and I can't interfere with them."

"Well, I'm going to bother you with a few quotations, anyway. See here, I'll just run round to see you. My car is waiting at the door

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now. I won't keep you more than a few minutes."

"Don't come before twelve," Philip begged. "I shall be busy until then."

"At twelve o'clock precisely, then," was the reply. "I shall hope to induce you to change your mind about luncheon. It's quite a long time since we had you at the club. Good-by!"

Philip set down the telephone. He was still in his pajamas and the morning was cold, but he suddenly felt a great drop of perspiration on his forehead. It was the sort of thing, this, which he had expected — had been prepared for, in fact — but it was none the less, in its way, gruesome. There was a further knock at the door, and the waiter reappeared.

"Can I bring you any breakfast, sir?" he enquired.

"What time is it?"

"Half-past nine, sir."

"Bring me some coffee and rolls and butter," Philip ordered.

He sprang out of bed, bathed, dressed, and ate his breakfast. Then he lit a cigarette, repacked his dressing-case, and descended into the hall. He made his way to the hall porter's enquiry office.

"I am going to pay some calls in the city," he announced — "Mr. Romilly is my name — and I may not be able to get back here before my boat sails. I am going on the *Elletania*. Can I have my luggage sent there direct?"

"By all means, sir."

"Every article is properly labelled," Philip continued. "Those in my bedroom — number sixty-

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seven — are for the cabin, and those you have in your charge are for the hold."

"That will be quite all right, sir," the man assured him pocketing his liberal tip. "I will see to the matter myself."

Philip paid his bill at the office and breathed a little more freely as he left the hotel. Passing a large, plate-glass window he stopped suddenly and stared at his own reflection. There was something unfamiliar in the hang of his well-cut clothes and fashionable Homburg hat. It was like the shadow of some one else passing — some one to whom those clothes belonged. Then he remembered, remembered with a cold shiver which blanched his cheeks and brought a little agonised murmur to his lips. The moment passed, however, crushed down, stifled as he had sworn that he would stifle all such memories. He turned in at a barber's shop, had his hair cut, and yielded to the solicitations of a fluffy-haired young lady who was dying to go to America if only somebody would take her, and who was sure that he ought to have a manicure before his voyage. Afterwards he entered a call office and rang up the hotel on the telephone.

"Mr. Romilly speaking," he announced. "Will you kindly tell Mr. Gayes, if he calls to see me, that I have been detained in the city, and shall not be back."

The man took down the message. Philip strolled out once more into the streets, wandering aimlessly about for an hour or more. By this time it was nearly one o'clock, and, selecting a restaurant, he entered and ordered luncheon. Once more it came over

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him, as he looked around the place, that he had, after all, only a very imperfect hold upon his own identity. It seemed impossible that he, Philip Romilly, should be there, ordering precisely what appealed to him most, without thought or care of the cost. He ate and drank slowly and with discrimination, and when he left the place he felt stronger. He sought out a first-class tobacconist's, bought some cigarettes, and enquired his way to the dock. At a few minutes after two, he passed up the gangway and boarded the great steamer. One of the little army of linen-coated stewards enquired the number of his room and conducted him below.

"Anything I can do for you, sir, before your luggage comes on?" the man asked civilly.

Philip shook his head and wandered up on deck again, where there were already a fair number of passengers in evidence. He leaned over the side, watching the constant stream of porters bearing supplies, and the steerage passengers passing into the forepart of the ship. With every moment his impatience grew. He looked at his watch sometimes half a dozen times in ten minutes, changed his position continually, started violently whenever he heard an unexpected footstep behind him. Finally he broke a promise he had made to himself. He bought newspapers, took them into a sheltered corner, and tore them open. Column by column he searched them through feverishly, running his finger down one side and up the next. It seemed impossible to find nowhere the heading he dreaded to see, to realize that they were entirely empty of any exciting incident. He satisfied himself at last, however. The

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disappearance of a half-starved art teacher had not yet blazoned out to a sympathetic world. It was so much to the good. . . . There was a touch upon his shoulder, and he felt a chill of horror. When he turned around, it was the steward who had conducted him below, holding out a telegram.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Telegram just arrived for you."

He passed on almost at once, in search of some one else. Philip stood for several moments perfectly still. He looked at the inscription — *Douglas Romilly* — set his teeth and tore open the envelope:

Understood you were returning to factory before leaving. Am posting a few final particulars to Waldorf Hotel, New York. Staff joins me in wishing you bon voyage.

Philip felt his heart cease its pounding, felt an immense sense of relief. It was a wonderful thing, this message. It cleared up one point on which he had been anxious and unsettled. It was taken for granted at the Works, then, that he had come straight to Liverpool. He walked up and down the deck on the side remote from the dock, driving this into his mind.

Everything was wonderfully simplified. If only he could get across, once reach New York! Meanwhile, he looked at his watch again and discovered that it wanted but ten minutes to three. He made his way back down to his stateroom, which was already filled with his luggage. He shook out an ulster from a bundle of wraps, and selected a tweed cap. Already there was a faint touch of the sea in the river breeze, and he was impatient for the immeasurable open

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spaces, the salt wind, the rise and fall of the great ship. Then, as he stood on the threshold of his cabin, he heard voices.

"Down in number 110, eh?"

"Yes, sir," he heard his steward's voice reply. "Mr. Romilly has just gone down. You've only a minute, sir, before the last call for passengers."

"That's all right," the voice which had spoken to him over the telephone that morning replied. "I'd just like to shake hands with him and wish him bon voyage."

Philip's teeth came together in a little fury of anger. It was maddening, this, to be trapped when only a few minutes remained between him and safety! His brain worked swiftly. He took his chance of finding the next stateroom empty, as it happened to be, and stepped quickly inside. He kept his back to the door until the footsteps had passed. He heard the knock at his stateroom, stepped back into the corridor, and passed along a little gangway to the other side of the ship. He hurried up the stairs and into the smoking-room. The bugle was sounding now, and hoarse voices were shouting:

"Every one for the shore! Last call for the shore!"

"Give me a brandy and soda," he begged the steward, who was just opening the bar.

The man glanced at the clock and obeyed. Philip swallowed half of it at a gulp, then sat down with the tumbler in his hand. All of a sudden something disappeared from in front of one of the portholes. His heart gave a little jump. They were moving! He sprang up and hurried to the doorway. Slowly but

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unmistakably they were gliding away from the dock. Already a lengthening line of people were waving their handkerchiefs and shouting farewells. Around them in the river little tugs were screaming, and the ropes from the dock had been thrown loose. Philip stepped to the rail, his heart growing lighter at every moment. His ubiquitous steward, laden with hand luggage, paused for a moment.

"I sent a gentleman down to your stateroom just before the steamer started, sir," he announced, "gentleman of the name of Gayes, who wanted to say good-by to you."

"Bad luck!" Philip answered. "I must have just missed him."

The steward turned around and pointed to the quay.

"There he is, sir — elderly gentleman in a grey suit, and a bunch of violets in his buttonhole. He's looking straight at you."

Philip raised his cap and waved it with enthusiasm. After a moment's hesitation, the other man did the same. The steward collected his belongings and shuffled off.

"He picked you out, sir, all right," he remarked as he disappeared in the companionway.

Philip turned away with a little final wave of the hand.

"Glad I didn't miss him altogether," he observed cheerfully. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Gayes! Good-by, England!"

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CHAPTER IV

Mr. Raymond Greene, very soon after the bugle had sounded for dinner that evening, took his place at the head of one of the small tables in the saloon and wished every one good evening. It was perfectly apparent that he meant to enjoy the trip, that he was prepared to like his fellow passengers and that he wished them to know it. Even the somewhat melancholy-looking steward, who had been waiting for his arrival, cheered up at the sight of his beaming face, and the other four occupants of the table returned his salutation according to their lights.

"Two vacant places, I am sorry to see," Mr. Greene observed. "One of them I can answer for, though. The young lady who is to sit on my right will be down directly — Miss Elizabeth Dalstan, the great actress, you know. She is by way of being under my charge. Very charming and talented young lady she is. Let us see who our other absentee is."

He stretched across and glanced at the name upon the card.

"Mr. Douglas Romilly," he read out. "Quite a good name — English, without a doubt. I have crossed with you before, haven't I, sir?" he went on affably, turning to his nearest neighbour on the left.

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A burly, many-chinned American signified his assent.

"Why, I should say so," he admitted, "and I'd like a five-dollar bill, Mr. Greene, for every film I've seen of yours in the United States."

Mr. Greene beamed with satisfaction.

"Well, I am glad to hear you've come across my stuff," he declared. "I've made some name for myself on the films and I am proud of it. Raymond Greene it is, at your service."

"Joseph P. Hyam's mine," the large American announced, watching the disappearance of his soup plate with an air of regret. "I'm in the clothing business. If my wife were here, she'd say you wouldn't think it to look at me. Never was faddy about myself, though," he added, with a glance at Mr. Greene's very correct dinner attire.

"You ought to remember me, Mr. Greene," one of the two men remarked from the right-hand side of the table. "I've played golf with you at Baltusrol more than once."

Mr. Greene glanced surreptitiously at the card and smiled.

"Why, it's James P. Busby, of course!" he exclaimed. "Your father's the Busby Iron Works, isn't he?"

The young man nodded.

"And this is Mr. Caroll, one of our engineers," he said, indicating a rather rough-looking personage by his side.

"Delighted to meet you both," Mr. Greene assured them. "Say, I remember your golf, Mr. Busby! You're some driver, eh? And those long

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putts of yours — you never took three on any green that I can remember!"

"Been playing in England?" the young man asked.

Mr. Raymond Greene shook his head.

"When I am on business," he explained, "I don't carry my sticks about with me, and I tell you this last fortnight has been a giddy whirl for me. I was in Berlin Wednesday night, and I did business in Vienna last Monday. Ah! here comes Miss Dalstan."

He rose ceremoniously to his feet. A young lady who was still wearing her travelling clothes smiled at him delightfully and sank into the chair by his side. During the little stir caused by her arrival, no one paid any attention to the man who had slipped into the other vacant place opposite. Mr. Greene, however, when he had finished making known his companion's wants to the steward, welcomed Philip Romilly genially.

"Now we're a full table," he declared. "That's what I like. I only hope we'll keep it up all the voyage. Mind, there'll be a forfeit for the first one that misses a meal. Mr. Romilly, isn't it?" he went on, glancing at his left-hand neighbour's card once more. "My name's Raymond Greene. I am an old traveller and there's nothing I enjoy more, outside my business, than these little ocean trips, especially when they come after a pretty strenuous time on shore. Crossed many times, sir?"

"Never before," Philip answered.

"First trip, eh?" Mr. Greene remarked, mildly interested. "Well, well, you've some surprises in

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store for you, then. Let me make you acquainted with your opposite neighbour, Miss Elizabeth Dalstan. I dare say, even if you haven't been in the States, you know some of our principal actresses by name."

Philip raised his head and caught a glimpse of a rather pale face, a mass of deep brown hair, a pleasant smile from a very shapely mouth, and the rather intense regard of a pair of wonderfully soft eyes, whose colour at that moment he was not able to determine.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Dalstan on the stage," he observed.

"Capital!" Mr. Raymond Greene exclaimed. "We haven't met before, have we, Mr. Romilly? Something kind of familiar in your face. You are not by way of being in the Profession, are you?"

Romilly shook his head.

"I am a manufacturer," he acknowledged.

"That so?" his neighbour remarked, a trifle surprised. "Queer! I had a fancy that we'd met, and quite lately, too. I am in the cinema business. You may have heard of me — Raymond Greene?"

"I have seen some of your films," Philip told him. "Very excellent productions, if you will allow me to say so."

"That's pleasant hearing at any time," Mr. Greene admitted, with a gratified smile. "Well, I can see that we are going to be quite a friendly party. That's Mr. Busby on your right, Mr. Romilly — some golfer, I can tell you! — and his friend Mr. Caroll alongside. The lady next you —"

"My name is Miss Pinsent," the elderly lady in-

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dicated declared pleasantly, replying to Mr. Greene's interrogative glance. "It is my first trip to America, too. I am going out to see a nephew who has settled in Chicago."

"Capital!" Mr. Raymond Greene repeated. "Now we are all more or less a family party. What did you say your line of business was, Mr. Romilly?"

"I don't remember mentioning it," Philip observed, "but I am a manufacturer of boots and shoes."

Elizabeth Dalstan looked across at him a little curiously. One might have surmised that she was in some way disappointed.

"Coming over to learn a thing or two from us, eh?" Mr. Greene went on. "You use all our machinery, don't you? Well, there's Paul Lawton on board, from Brockton. I should think he has one of the biggest plants in Massachusetts. I must make you acquainted with him."

Philip frowned slightly.

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Greene," he acknowledged, "but do you know I would very much rather not talk business with any one while I am on the steamer? I am a little overworked and I need the rest."

Elizabeth Dalstan looked at her vis-à-vis with some renewal of her former interest. She saw a young man who was, without doubt, good-looking, although he certainly had an over-tired and somewhat depressed appearance. His cheeks were colourless, and there were little dark lines under his eyes as though he suffered from sleeplessness. He was cleanshaven and he had the sensitive mouth of an artist.

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His forehead was high and exceptionally good. His air of breeding was unmistakable.

"You do look a little fagged," Mr. Raymond Greene observed sympathetically. "Well, these are strenuous days in business. We all have to stretch out as far as we can go, and keep stretched out, or else some one else will get ahead of us. Business been good with you this fall, Mr. Romilly?"

"Very fair, thank you," Philip answered a little vaguely. "Tell me, Miss Dalstan," he went on, leaning slightly towards her, and with a note of curiosity in his tone, "I want to know your candid opinion of the last act of the play I saw you in — 'Henderson's Second Wife'? I made up my mind that if ever I had the privilege of meeting you, I would ask you that question."

"I know exactly why," she declared, with a quick little nod of appreciation. "Listen."

They talked together for some time, earnestly. Mr. Greene addressed his conversation to his neighbours lower down the table. It was not until the arrival of dessert that Philip and his vis-à-vis abandoned their discussion.

"Tell me, have you written yourself, Mr. Romilly?" Elizabeth Dalstan asked him with interest.

"I have made an attempt at it," he confessed.

"Most difficult thing in the whole world to write a play," Mr. Raymond Greene intervened, seeing an opportunity to join once more in the conversation. "Most difficult thing in the world, I should say. Now with pictures it's entirely different. The slightest little happening in everyday life may give you the

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start, and then, there you are — the whole thing unravels itself. Now let me give you an example," he went on, helping himself to a little more whisky and soda. "Only yesterday afternoon, on our way up to Liverpool, the train got pulled up somewhere in Derbyshire, and I sat looking out of the window. It was a dreary neighbourhood, a miserable afternoon, and we happened to be crossing a rather high viaduct. Down below were some meadows and a canal, and by the side of the canal, a path. At a certain point — I should think about half a mile from where the train was standing — this path went underneath a rude bridge, built of bricks and covered over with turf. Well, as I sat there I could see two men, both approaching the bridge along the path from opposite directions. One was tall, dressed in light tweeds, a good-looking fellow — looked like one of your country squires except that he was a little on the thin side. The other was a sombre-looking person, dressed in dark clothes, about your height and build, I should say, Mr. Romilly. Well, they both disappeared under that bridge at the same moment, and I don't know why, but I leaned forward to see them come out. The train was there for quite another two minutes, perhaps more. There wasn't another soul anywhere in sight, and it was raining as it only can rain in England."

Mr. Raymond Greene paused. Every one at the table had been listening intently. He glanced around at their rapt faces with satisfaction. He was conscious of the artist's dramatic touch. Once more it had not failed him. He had excited interest. In Philip Romilly's eyes there was something even more

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than interest. It seemed almost as though he were trying to project his thoughts back and conjure up for himself the very scene which was being described to him. The young man was certainly in a very delicate state of health, Mr. Greene decided.

"You are keeping us in suspense, sir," the elderly lady complained, leaning forward in her place. "Please go on. What happened when they came out?"

"That," Mr. Raymond Greene said impressively, "is the point of the story. The train remained standing there, as I have said, for several minutes — as many minutes, in fact, as it would have taken them seconds to have traversed that tunnel. Notwithstanding that, they neither of them appeared again. I sat there, believe me, with my eyes fastened upon that path, and when the train started I leaned out of the window until we had rounded the curve and we were out of sight, but I never saw either of those two men again. Now there's the beginning of a film story for you! What do you want more than that? There's dramatic interest, surprise, an original situation."

"After all, I suppose the explanation was quite a simple one," Mr. Busby remarked. "They were probably acquaintances, and they stayed to have a chat."

Mr. Raymond Greene shook his head doubtfully.

"All I can say to that is that it was a queer place to choose for a little friendly conversation," he pronounced. "They were both tall men — about the same height, I should say — and it would have been impossible for them to have even stood upright."

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"You mentioned the fact, did you not," the lady who called herself Miss Pinsent observed, "that it was raining heavily at the time? Perhaps they stayed under the bridge to shelter."

"That's something I never thought of," Mr. Greene admitted, "perhaps for the reason that they both of them seemed quite indifferent to the rain. The young man in the dark clothes hadn't even an umbrella. I must admit that I allowed my thoughts to travel in another direction. Professional instinct, you see. It was a fairly broad canal, and the water was nearly up to the towing-path. I'd lay a wager it was twelve or fifteen feet deep. Supposing those two men had met on that narrow path and quarrelled! Supposing —"

"Don't!"

Mr. Raymond Greene stopped short. He gazed in amazement at Elizabeth Dalstan, who had suddenly clutched his hand. There was something in her face which puzzled as well as startled him. She had been looking at her opposite neighbour but she turned back towards the narrator of this thrilling story as the monosyllable broke from her lips.

"Please stop," she begged. "You are too dramatic, Mr. Greene. You really frighten me."

"Frighten you?" he repeated. "My dear Miss Dalstan!"

"I suppose it is very absurd of me," she went on, smiling appealingly at him, "but your words were altogether too graphic. I can't bear to think of what might have taken place underneath that tunnel! You must remember that I saw it, too. Don't go on. Don't talk about it any more. I am going up-

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stairs for my cigarette. Are you coming to get my chair for me, Mr. Greene, or must I rely upon the deck steward?"

Mr. Raymond Greene was a very gallant man, and he did not hesitate for a moment. He sprang to his feet and escorted the young lady from the saloon. He glanced back, as he left the table, to nod his adieux to the little company whom he had taken under his charge. Philip Romilly was gazing steadfastly out of the porthole.

"Kind of delicate young fellow, that," he remarked. "Nice face, too. Can't help thinking that I've met or seen some one like him lately."

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CHAPTER V

Philip Romilly found himself alone at last with the things which he had craved — darkness, solitude, the rushing of the salt wind, the sense of open spaces. On the other, the sheltered side of the steamer, long lines of passengers were stretched in wicker chairs, smoking and drinking their coffee, but where he was no one came save an occasional promenader. Yet even here was a disappointment. He had come for peace, for a brief escape from the thrall of memories which during the last few hours had become charged with undreamed-of horrors — and there was to be no peace. In the shadowy darkness which rested upon the white-churned sea flying past him, he saw again, with horrible distinctness, the face, the figure of the man who for those few brief minutes he had hated with a desperate and passionate hatred. He saw the broken photograph, the glass splintered into a thousand pieces. He saw the man himself, choking, sinking down beneath the black waters; heard the stifled cry from his palsied lips, saw the slow dawning agony of death in his distorted features. Some one was playing a mandolin down in the second class. He heard the feet of a dancer upon the deck, the little murmur of applause. Well, after all, this was life. It was a rebuke of fate to his own illogical and useless vapourings. Men died every second whilst women

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danced, and no one who knew life had any care save for the measure of their own days. Some freakish thought pleaded stridently his own justification. His mind travelled back down the gloomy avenues of his past, along those last aching years of grinding and undeserved poverty. He remembered his upbringing, his widowed mother, a woman used to every luxury, struggling to make both ends meet in a suburban street, in a hired cottage filled with hired furniture. He remembered his schooldays, devoid of pocket money, unable to join in the sports of others, slaving with melancholy perseverance for a scholarship to lighten his mother's burden. Always there was the same ghastly, crushing penuriousness, the struggle to make a living before his schooldays were well over, the unbought books he had fingered at the bookstalls and let drop again, the coarse clothes he had been compelled to wear, the scanty food he had eaten, the narrow, driving ways of poverty, culminating in his mother's death and his own fear — he, at the age of nineteen years — lest the money for her funeral should not be forthcoming. If there were any hell, surely he had lived in it! This other, whose flames mocked him now, could be no worse. Sin! Crime! He remembered the words of the girl who during these latter years had represented to him what there might have been of light in life. He remembered, and it seemed to him that he could meet that ghostly image which had risen from the black waters, without shrinking, almost contemptuously. Fate had mocked him long enough. It was time, indeed, that he helped himself.

He swung away from the solitude to the other side

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of the steamer, paused in a sheltered spot while he lit a cigarette, and paced up and down the more frequented ways. A soft voice from an invisible mass of furs and rugs, called to him.

"Mr. Romilly, please come and talk to me. My rug has slipped — thank you so much. Take this chair next mine for a few minutes, won't you? Mr. Greene has rushed off to the smoking room. I think he has just been told that there is a rival cinema producer on board, and he is trying to run him to ground."

Philip settled himself without hesitation in the vacant place.

"One is forced to envy Mr. Raymond Greene," he sighed. "To have work in life which one loves as he does his is the rarest form of happiness."

"What about your own?" she asked him. "But you are a manufacturer, are you not? Somehow or other, that surprises me."

"And me," he acknowledged frankly. "I mean that I wonder I have persevered at it so long."

"But you are a very young man!"

"Young or old," he answered, "I am one of those who have made a false start in life. I am on my way to new things. Do you think, Miss Dalstan, that your country is a good place for one to visit who seeks new things?"

She turned in her chair a little more towards him. Against the background of empty spaces, the pale softness of her face seemed to gain a new attractiveness.

"Well, that depends," she said reflectively, "upon what these new things might be which you desire.

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For an ambitious business man America is a great country."

"But supposing one had finished with business?" he persisted. "Supposing one wanted to develop tastes and a gift for another method of life?"

"Then I should say that New York is the one place in the world," she told him. "You are speaking of yourself?"

"Yes!"

"You have ambitions, I am sure," she continued. "Tell me, are they literary?"

"I would like to call them so," he admitted. "I have written a play and three stories, so bad that no one would produce the play or publish the stories."

"You have brought them with you?"

He shook his head.

"No! They are where I shall never see them again."

"Never see them again?" she repeated, puzzled.

"I mean that I have left them at home. I have left them there, perhaps, to a certain extent deliberately," he went on. "You see, the idea is still with me. I think that I shall rewrite them when I have settled down in America. I fancy that I shall find myself in an atmosphere more conducive to the sort of work I want to do. I would rather not be handicapped by the ghosts of my old failures."

"One's ghosts are hard sometimes to escape from," she whispered.

He clutched nervously at the end of his rug. She looked up and down along the row of chairs. There were one or two slumbering forms, but most were empty. There were no promenaders in sight.

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"You know," she asked, her voice still very low, "why I left the saloon a little abruptly this evening?"

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because," she went on, "I could see the effect which Mr. Raymond Greene's story had upon you; because I, also, was in that train, and I have better eyesight than Mr. Greene. You were one of the two men who were walking along the towpath."

"Well?" he muttered.

"You have nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing!"

She waited for a moment.

"At least you have not attempted to persuade me that you lingered underneath that bridge to escape from the rain," she remarked.

"If I cannot tell you the truth," he promised, "I am not going to tell you a lie, but apart from that I admit nothing. I do not even admit that it was I whom you saw."

She laid her hand upon his. The touch of her fingers was wonderful, cool and soft and somehow reassuring. He felt a sense of relaxation, felt the strain of living suddenly grow less.

"You know," she said, "all my friends tell me that I am a restful person. You are living at high pressure, are you not? Try and forget it. Fate makes queer uses of all of us sometimes. She sends her noblest sons down into the shadows and pitchforks her outcasts into the high places of life. Those do best who learn to control themselves, to live and think for the best."

"Go on talking to me," he begged. "Is it your

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voice, I wonder, that is so soothing, or just what you say?"

She smiled reassuringly.

"You are glad because you have found a friend," she told him, "and a friend who, even if she does not understand, does not wish to understand. Do you see?"

"I wish I felt that I deserved it," he groaned.

She laughed almost gaily.

"What a sorting up there would be of our places in life," she declared, "if we all had just what we deserved! . . . Now give me your arm. I want to walk a little. While we walk, if you like, I will try to tell you what I can about New York. It may interest you."

They walked up and down the deck, and by degrees their conversation drifted into a discussion of such recent plays as were familiar to both of them. At the far end of the ship she clung to him once or twice as the wind came booming over the freshening waves. She weighed and measured his criticisms of the plays they spoke of, and in the main approved of them. When at last she stopped outside the companionway and bade him good night, the deck was almost deserted. They were near one of the electric lights, and he saw her face more distinctly than he had seen it at all, realised more adequately its wonderful charm. The large, firm mouth, womanly and tender though it was, was almost the mouth of a protector. She smiled at him as one might smile at a boy.

"You are to sleep well," she said firmly. "Those are my orders. Good night!"

She gave him her hand — a woman's soft and deli-

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cate fingers, yet clasping his with an almost virile strength and friendliness. She left him with just that feeling about her — that she was expansive, in her heart, her sympathies, even her brain and peculiar gifts of apprehension. She left him, too, with a curious sense of restfulness, as though suddenly he had become metamorphosed into the woman and had found a sorely-needed guardian. He abandoned without a second thought his intention of going to the smoking-room and sitting up late. The thought of his empty stateroom, a horror to him a few hours ago, seemed suddenly almost alluring, and he made his way there cheerfully. He felt the sleep already upon his eyes.

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CHAPTER VI

All the physical exhilaration of his unlived youth seemed to be dancing in Philip Romilly's veins when he awoke the next morning to find an open porthole, the blue sea tossing away to infinity, and his steward's cheerful face at his bedside.

"Bathroom steward says if you are ready, sir, he can arrange for your bath now," the man announced.

Philip sprang out of bed and reached for his Bond Street dressing-gown.

"I'll bring you a cup of tea when you get back, sir," the steward continued. "The bathrooms are exactly opposite."

The sting of the salt water seemed to complete his new-found light-heartedness. Philip dressed and shaved, whistling softly all the time to himself. He even found a queer sort of interest in examining his stock of ties and other garments. The memory of Elizabeth Dalstan's words was still in his brain. They had become the text of his life. This, he told himself, was his birthday. He even accepted without a tremor a letter and telegram which the steward brought him.

"These were in the rack for you, sir," he said. "I meant to bring them down last night but we had a busy start off."

Philip took them up on deck to read. He tore

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open the telegram first and permitted himself a little start when he saw the signature. It was sent off from Detton Magna,—

"Why did you not come as promised? What am I to do? BEATRICE."

The envelope of the letter he opened with a little more compunction. It was written on the printed notepaper of the Douglas Romilly Shoe Company, and was of no great length,—

Dear Mr. Romilly,

I understood that you would return to the factory this evening for a few minutes, before taking the train to Liverpool. There were one or two matters upon which I should like some further information, but as time is short I am writing to you at the Waldorf Hotel at New York.

I see that the acceptances due next 4th are unusually heavy, but I think I understood you to say that you had spoken to Mr. Henshaw at the bank concerning these, and in any case I presume there would be no difficulty.

Wishing you every success on the other side, and a safe return,

I am,

Your obedient servant,

J. L. POTTS.

"There is not the slightest doubt," Philip said to himself, as he tore both communications into pieces and watched them flutter away downwards, "that I am on my way to New York. If only one knew what had become of that poor, half-starved art master!"

He went down to breakfast and afterwards strolled

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aimlessly about the deck. His sense of enjoyment was so extraordinarily keen that he found it hard to settle down to any of the usual light occupations of idle travellers. He was content to stand by the rail and gaze across the sea, a new wonder to him; or to lie about in his steamer chair and listen, with half-closed eyes, to the hissing of the spray and the faint music of the wind. His mind turned by chance to one of those stories of which he had spoken. A sudden new vigour of thought seemed to rend it inside out almost in those first few seconds. He thought of the garret in which it had been written, the wretched surroundings, the odoriferous food, the thick crockery, the smoke-palled vista of roofs and chimneys. The genius of a Stevenson would have become dwarfed in such surroundings. A phrase, a happy idea, suddenly caught his fancy. He itched for a pencil and paper. Then he looked up to find the one thing wanting. Elizabeth Dalstan, followed by a maid carrying rugs and cushions, had paused, smiling, by his side.

"You have slept and you are better," she said pleasantly. "Now for the next few minutes you must please devote yourself to making me comfortable. Put everything down, Phoebe. Mr. Romilly will look after me."

For a moment he paused before proceeding to his task.

"I want to look at you," he confessed. "Remember I have only seen you under the electric lights of the saloon, or in that queer, violet gloom of last night. Why, you have quite light hair, and I thought it was dark!"

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She laughed good-humouredly and turned slowly around.

"Here I am," she announced, "a much bephotographed person. Almost plain, some journalists have dared to call me, but for my expression. On flowing lines, as you see, because I always wear such loose clothes, and yet, believe me, slim. As a matter of fact," she went on pensively, "I am rather proud of my figure. A little journalist who had annoyed me, and to whom I was rude, once called it ample. No one has ever ventured to say more. The critics who love me, and they most of them love me because I am so exceptionally polite to them, and tell them exactly what to say about every new play, allude to my physique as Grecian."

"But your eyes!" he exclaimed. "Last night I thought they were grey. This morning — why, surely they are brown?"

"You see, that is all according to the light," she confided. "If any one does try to write a description of me, they generally evade the point by calling them browny-grey. A young man who was in love with me," she sighed, "but that was long ago, used to say that they reminded him of fallen leaves in a place where the sunlight sometimes is and sometimes isn't. And now, if you please, I want to be made exceedingly comfortable. I want you to find the deck steward and see that I have some beef tea as quickly as possible. I want my box of cigarettes on one side and my vanity case on the other, and I should like to listen to the plot of your play."

He obeyed her behests with scrupulous care, leaned back in his chair and brought into the foreground

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of his mind the figures of those men and women who had told his story, finding them, to his dismay, unexpectedly crude and unlifelike. And the story itself. Was unhappiness so necessary, after all? They suddenly seemed to crumble away into insignificance, these men and women of his creation. In their place he could almost fancy a race of larger beings, a more extensive canvas, a more splendid, a riper and richer vocabulary.

"Nothing that I have ever done," he sighed, "is worth talking to you about. But if you are going to be my friend —"

"Well?"

"If you are going to be my friend," he went on, with almost inspired conviction, "I shall write something different."

"One can rebuild," she murmured. "One can sometimes use the old pieces. Life and chess are both like that."

"Would you help me, I wonder?" he asked impulsively.

She looked away from him, out across the steamer rail. She seemed to be measuring with her eyes the roll of the ship as it rose and fell in the trough of the sea.

"You are a strange person," she said. "Tell me, are you in the habit of becoming suddenly dependent upon people?"

"Not I," he assured her. "If I were to tell you how my last ten years have been spent, you would not believe me. You couldn't. If I were to speak of a tearing, unutterable loneliness, if I were to speak of poverty — not the poverty you know anything about,

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but the poverty of bare walls, of coarse food and little enough of it, of everything cheap and miserable and soiled and second-hand — nothing fresh, nothing real —"

He stopped abruptly.

"But I forgot," he muttered. "I can't explain."

"Is one to understand," she asked, a little puzzled, "that you have had difficulties in your business?"

"I have never been in business," he answered quickly. "My name is Romilly, but I am not Romilly the manufacturer. For the last eight years I have lived in a garret in London, teaching false art in a third-rate school some of the time, doing penny-a-line journalistic work when I got the chance; clerk for a month or two in a brewer's office and sacked for incapacity — those are a few of the real threads in my life."

"At the present moment, then," she observed, "you are an impostor."

"Exactly," he admitted, "and I should probably have been repenting it by now but for your words last night."

She smiled at him and the sun shone once more. It wasn't an ordinary smile at all. It was just as though she were letting him into the light of her understanding, as though some one from the world, entrance into which he had craved, had stooped down to understand and was telling him that all was well. He drew his chair a little closer to hers.

"We are all more or less impostors," she said. "Does any one, I wonder, go about the world telling everybody what they really are, how they really live?

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Dear me, how unpleasant and uncomfortable it would be! You are so wise, my new friend. You know the value of impulses. You tell me the truth, and I am your friend. I do not need facts, because facts count for little. I judge by what lies behind, and I understand. Do not weary me with explanations. I like what you have told me. Only, of course, your work must have suffered from surroundings like that. Will it be better for you now?"

"I shall land in New York," he told her, "with at least a thousand pounds. That is about as much as I have spent in ten years. There is the possibility of other money. Concerning that — well, I can't make up my mind. The thousand pounds, of course, is stolen."

"So I gathered," she remarked. "Do you continue, may I ask, to be Douglas Romilly, the manufacturer?"

He shook his head a little vaguely.

"I haven't thought," he confessed. "But of course I don't. I have risked everything for the chance of a new life. I shall start it in a new way and under a new name."

He was suddenly conscious of her pity, of a moistness in her eyes as she looked at him.

"I think," she said, "that you must have been very miserable. Above all things, now, whatever you may have done for your liberty, don't be faint-hearted. If you are in trouble or danger you must come to me. You promise?"

"If I may," he assented fervently.

"Now I must hear the play as it stood in your thoughts when you wrote it," she insisted. "I have

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a fancy that it will sound a little gloomy. Am I right?"

He laughed.

"Of course you are! How could I write in any other way except through the darkened spectacles? However, there's a way out — of altering it, I mean. I feel flashes of it already. Listen."

The story expanded with relation. He no longer felt confined to its established lines. Every now and then he paused to tell her that this or that was new, and she nodded appreciatively. They walked for a time, watched the seagulls, and bade their farewell to the Irish coast.

"You will have to re-write that play for me," she said, a little abruptly, as she paused before the companionway. "I am going down to my room for a few minutes before lunch now. Afterwards I shall bring up a pencil and paper. We will make some notes together."

Philip walked on to the smoking room. He could scarcely believe that the planks he trod were of solid wood. Raymond Greene met him at the entrance and slapped him on the back:

"Just in time for a cocktail before lunch!" he exclaimed. "I was looking everywhere for a pal. Two Martinis, dry as you like, Jim," he added, turning round to the smoking room steward. "Sure you won't join us, Lawton?"

"Daren't!" was the laconic answer from the man whom he had addressed.

"By-the-bye," Mr. Raymond Greene went on, "let me make you two acquainted. This is Mr. Douglas Romilly, an English boot manufacturer — Mr. Paul

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Lawton of Brockton. Mr. Lawton owns one of the largest boot and shoe plants in the States," the introducer went on. "You two ought to find something to talk about."

Philip held out his hand without a single moment's hesitation. He was filled with a new confidence.

"I should be delighted to talk with Mr. Lawton on any subject in the world," he declared, "except our respective businesses."

"I am very glad to meet you, sir," the other replied, shaking hands heartily. "I don't follow that last stipulation of yours, though."

"It simply means that I am taking seven days' holiday," Philip explained gaily, "seven days during which I have passed my word to myself to neither talk business nor think business. Your very good health, Mr. Raymond Greene," he went on, drinking his cocktail with relish. "If we meet on the other side, Mr. Lawton, we'll compare notes as much as you like."

"That's all right, sir," the other agreed. "I don't know as you're not right. We Americans do hang round our businesses, and that's a fact. Still, there's a little matter of lasts I should like to have a word or two with you about some time."

"A little matter of what?" Philip asked vaguely.

"Lasts," the other repeated. "That's where your people and ours look different ways chiefly, that and a little matter of manipulation of our machinery."

"Just so," Philip assented, swallowing the rest of his cocktail. "What about luncheon? There's nothing in the world to give you an appetite like this sea air."

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"I'm with you," Mr. Raymond Greene chimed in. "You two can have your trade talk later on."

He took his young friend's arm, and they descended the stairs together.

"What the mischief is a last?" he inquired.

"I haven't the least idea," Philip replied carelessly. "Something to do with boots and shoes, isn't it?"

His questioner stared at him for a moment and then laughed.

"Say, you're a young man of your word!" he remarked appreciatively.

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CHAPTER VII

Philip Romilly was accosted, late that afternoon, by two young women whose presence on board he had noticed with a certain amount of disapproval. They were obviously of the chorus-girl type, a fact which they seemed to lack the ambition to conceal. After several would-be ingratiating giggles, they finally pulled up in front of him whilst he was promenading the deck.

"You are Mr. Romilly, aren't you?" one of them asked. "Bob Millet told us you were going to be on this steamer. You know Bob, don't you?"

Philip for a moment was taken aback.

"Bob Millet," he repeated thoughtfully.

"Of course! Good old Bob! I don't mind confessing," the young woman went on, "that though we were all out one night together — Trocadero, Empire, and Murray's afterwards — I should never have recognised you. Seems to me you've got thinner and more serious-looking."

"I am afraid my own memory is also at fault," Philip remarked, a little stiffly.

"I am Violet Fox," the young woman who had accosted him continued. "This my friend, Hilda Mason. She's a dear girl but a little shy, aren't you, Hilda?"

"That's just because I told her that we ought to wait until you remembered us," the slighter young

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woman, with the very obvious peroxidised hair, protested."

"Didn't seem to be any use waiting for that," her friend retorted briskly. "Hilda and I are dying for a cocktail, Mr. Romilly."

He led them with an unwillingness of which they seemed frankly unaware, towards the lounge. They drank two cocktails and found themselves unfortunately devoid of cigarettes, a misfortune which it became his privilege to remedy. They were very friendly young ladies, if a little slangy, invited him around to their staterooms, and offered to show him the runs around New York. Philip escaped after about an hour and made his way to where Elizabeth was reclining in her deck chair.

"That fellow Romilly," he declared irritably, "the other one, I mean, seems to have had the vilest tastes. If I am to be landed with any more of his ridiculous indiscretions, I think I shall have to go overboard. There was an enterprising gentleman named Gayes in Liverpool, who nearly drove me crazy, then there's this Mr. Lawton who wants to talk about lasts, and finally it seems that I dined at the Trocadero and spent the evening at the Empire and Murray's with the two very obvious-looking young ladies who accosted me just now. I am beginning to believe that Douglas' life was not above suspicion."

She smiled at him tolerantly. An unopened book lay by her side. She seemed to have been spending the last quarter of an hour in thought.

"I am rather relieved to hear," she confessed, "that those two young people are a heritage from the other Mr. Romilly. No, don't sit down," she

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went on. "I want you to do something for me. Go into the library, and on the left-hand side as you enter you will see all the wireless news. Read the bottom item and then come back to me."

He turned slowly away. All his new-found buoyancy of spirits had suddenly left him. He cursed the imagination which lifted his feet from the white decks and dragged his eyes from the sparkling blue sea to the rain-soaked, smut-blackened fields riven by that long thread of bleak, turgid water. The horrors of a murderous passion beat upon his brain. He saw himself hastening, grim and blind, on his devil-sped mission. Then the haze faded from before his eyes. Somehow or other he accomplished his errand. He was in the library, standing in front of those many sheets of typewritten messages, passing them all over, heedless of what their message might be, until he came to the last and most insignificant. Four lines, almost overlapped by another sheet —

STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF A LONDON ART TEACHER

Suicide Feared

Acting upon instructions received, the police are investigating a somewhat curious case of disappearance. Philip Romilly, a teacher of art in a London school, visited Detton Magna on Friday afternoon and apparently started for a walk along the canal bank, towards dusk. Nothing has since been heard of him or his movements, and arrangements have been made to drag the canal at a certain point.

The letters seemed to grow larger to him as he stood and read. He remained in front of the message

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for an inordinately long time. Again his imagination was at work. He saw the whole ghastly business, the police on the canal banks, watching the slow progress of the men with their drags bringing to the surface all the miserable refuse of the turgid waters, the dripping black mud, perhaps at last . . .

He was back again on the deck, walking quite steadily yet seeing little. He made his way to the smoking room, asked almost indifferently for a brandy and soda, and drained it to the last drop. Then he walked up the deck to where Elizabeth was seated, and dropped into a chair by her side.

"So I am missing," he remarked, almost in his ordinary tone. "I really had no idea that I was a person of such importance. Fancy reading of my own disappearance within a few days of its taking place, in the middle of the Atlantic!"

"There was probably some one there who gave information," she suggested.

"There was the young lady whom I went to visit," he assented. "She probably watched me cross the road and turn in at that gate and take the path by the canal side. Yes, she may even have gone to the station to see whether I took the only other train back to London, and found that I did not. She knew, too, that I could only have had a few shillings in my pocket, and that my living depended upon being in London for my school the next morning. Yes, the whole thing was reasonable."

"And they are going to drag the canal," Elizabeth said thoughtfully.

"A difficult business," he assured her. "It is one of the most ghastly, ill-constructed, filthiest strips of

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water you ever looked upon. It has been the garbage depository of the villages through which it makes its beastly way, for generations. I don't envy the men who have to handle the drags."

"You do not believe, then, that they will find anything — interesting?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That type of man," he continued, "must have a morbid mind. There will be dead animals without a doubt, worn-out boots, filthy and decomposed articles of clothing —"

"Don't!" she interrupted. "You know what I mean. Do leave off painting your ghastly pictures. You know quite well what I mean. Philip Romilly is here by my side. What can they hope to find there in his place?"

His evil moments for that afternoon were over. He answered her almost carelessly.

"Not what they are looking for. Have you brought the paper and pencil you spoke of? I have an idea — I am getting fresh ideas every moment now that I picture you as my heroine. It is queer, isn't it, how naturally you fall into the rôle?"

She drew a little nearer to him. He was conscious of a mysterious and unfamiliar perfume, perhaps from the violets half hidden in her furs, or was it something in her hair? It reminded him a little of the world the keys into which he had gripped — the world of joyousness, of light-hearted pleasures, the sunlit world into which he had only looked through other men's eyes.

"Perhaps you knew that I was somewhere across the threshold," she suggested. "Did you drag your

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Mona wholly from your brain, or has she her prototype somewhere in your world?"

He shook his head.

"Therein lies the weakness of all that I have ever written," he declared. "There have been so few in my world from whom I could garner even the gleanings of a personality. They are all, my men and women, artificially made, not born. Twenty-three shillings a week has kept me well outside the locked doors."

"Yet, you know, in many ways," she reflected, "Mona is like me."

"Like you because she was a helper of men," he assented swiftly, "a woman of large sympathies, appealing to me, I suppose, because in my solitude, thoughts of my own weakness taunted me, weakness because I couldn't break out, I mean. Perhaps for that reason the thought of a strong woman fascinated me, a woman large in thoughts and ways, a woman to whom purposes and tendencies counted most. I dreamed of a woman sweetly omnipotent, strong without a shadow of masculinity. That is where my Mona was to be different from all other created figures."

"Chance," she declared, "is a wonderful thing. Chance has pitchforked you here, absolutely to my side, I, the one woman who could understand what you mean, who could give your Mona life. Don't think I am vain," she went on. "I can assure you that my head isn't the least turned because I have been successful. I simply know. Listen. I have few engagements in New York. I should not be going back at all but to see my mother, who is too

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delicate to travel, and who is miserable when I am away for long. Take this pencil and paper. Let us leave off dreaming for a little time and give ourselves up to technicalities. I want to draft a new first act and a new last one, not so very different from your version and yet with changes which I want to explain as we go on. Bring your chair a little nearer — so. Now take down these notes."

They worked until the first gong for dinner rang. She sat up in her chair with a happy little laugh.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I never knew time to pass so quickly. There isn't any pleasure in the world like this," she added, a little impulsively, "the pleasure of letting your thoughts run out to meet some one else's, some one who understands. Take care of every line we have written, my friend."

"We might go on after dinner," he suggested eagerly.

She shook her head.

"I'd rather not," she admitted. "My brain is too full. I have a hundred fancies dancing about. I even find myself, as we sit here, rehearsing my gestures, tuning myself to a new outlook. Oh! you most disturbing person — intellectually of course, I mean," she added, laughing into his face. "Take off my rugs and help me up. No, we'll leave them there. Perhaps, after dinner, we might walk for a little time."

"But the whole thing is tingling in my brain," he protested. "Couldn't we go into the library? We could find a corner by ourselves."

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She turned and looked at him, standing up now, the wind blowing her skirts, her eyes glowing, her lips a little parted. Then for the first time he understood her beauty, understood the peculiar qualities of it, the dissensions of the Press as to her appearance, the supreme charm of a woman possessed of a sweet and passionate temperament, turning her face towards the long-wished-for sun. Even the greater things caught hold of him in that moment, and he felt dimly what was coming.

"Do you really wish to work?" she asked.

He looked away from her.

"No!" he answered, a little thickly. "We will talk, if you will."

They neither of them moved. The atmosphere had suddenly become charged with a force indescribable, almost numbing. In the far distance they saw the level line of lights from a passing steamer. Mr. Raymond Greene, with his hands in his ulster pockets, suddenly spotted them and did for them what they seemed to have lost the power to do.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "I've been looking for you two everywhere. I don't want to hurt that smoking room steward's feelings. He's not bad at his job. But," he added confidentially, dropping his voice and taking them both by the arm, "I have made a cocktail down in my stateroom — it's there in the shaker waiting for us, something I can't talk about. I've given Lawton one, and he's following me about like a dog. Come right this way, both of you. Steady across the gangway — she's pitching a little. Why, you look kind of scared, Mr. Romilly. Been to sleep, either of you?"

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Philip's laugh was almost too long to be natural. Elizabeth, as though by accident, had dropped her veil. Mr. Raymond Greene, bubbling over with good nature and anticipation, led them towards the stairs.

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CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Raymond Greene could scarcely wait until Philip had taken his place at the dinner table that evening, to make known his latest discovery.

"Say, Mr. Romilly," he exclaimed, leaning a little forward, "do you happen to have seen the wireless messages to-day?—those tissue sheets that are stuck up in the library?"

Philip set down the menu, in which he had been taking an unusual interest.

"Yes, I looked through them this afternoon," he acknowledged.

"There's a little one at the bottom, looks as though it had been shoved in at the last moment. I don't know whether you noticed it. It announced the mysterious disappearance of a young man of the same name as your own — an art teacher from London, I think he was. I wondered whether it might have been any relation?"

"I read the message," Philip admitted. "It certainly looks as though it might have referred to my cousin."

Mr. Raymond Greene became almost impressive in his interested earnestness.

"Talk about coincidences!" he continued. "Do you remember last night talking about subjects for cinema plays? I told you of a little incident I

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happened to have noticed on the way from London to Liverpool, about the two men somewhere in Derbyshire whom I had seen approaching a tunnel over a canal — they neither of them came out, you know, all the time that the train was standing there."

Philip helped himself a little absently to whisky and soda from the bottle in front of him.

"I remember your professional interest in the situation," he confessed.

"I felt at the time," Mr. Raymond Greene went on eagerly, "that there was something queer about the affair. Listen! I have been putting two and two together, and it seems to me that one of those men might very well have been this missing Mr. Romilly."

Philip shook his head pensively.

"I don't think so," he ventured.

"What's that? You don't think so?" the cinema magnate exclaimed. "Why not, Mr. Romilly? It's exactly the district — at Detton Magna, the message said, in Derbyshire — and it was a canal, too, one of the filthiest I ever saw. Can't you realise the dramatic interest of the situation now that you are confronted with this case of disappearance? I have been asking myself ever since I strolled up into the library before dinner and read this notice — '*What about the other man?*'"

Philip had commenced a leisurely consumption of his first course, and answered without undue haste.

"Well," he said, "if this young man Romilly is my cousin, it would be the second or third time already that he has disappeared. He is an ill-balanced, neurotic sort of creature. At times he accepts help — even solicits it — from his more pros-

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