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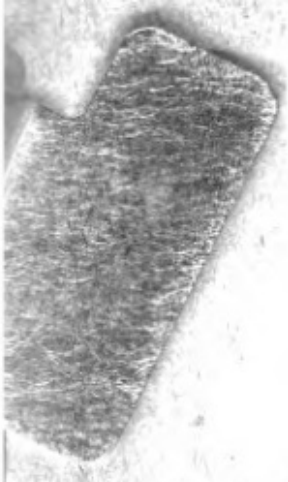

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The Mystery of Hartley House

CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

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THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE

BY

CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

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THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

RAIN had been falling for five days when I first saw Hartley House. The place had so much local distinction that a village not far from the estate was named Hartley, for it.

Even when drenched and dripping in a storm which had lasted for five days in late May, the spot was beautiful and charming; it had antiquity, that rare thing in a new land. Its two thousand acres, handsomely arranged for decorative and agricultural purposes, lay along the river-bank, with an indented and interesting littoral where the river was two miles wide.

I had been an interne in St. Julian's Hospital, and at the close of my last year Dr. Brownell had asked me if my arrangements would make it possible for me to undertake a case which he thought might be profitable and interesting to a young physician. It was that of Mr. Homer Sidney, the owner of Hartley House.

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"I never saw so strong a will to live," said the Doctor when he discussed the circumstances with me. "The old man is indomitable. For that reason he is interesting. He lives because he wills to live, for some tremendous reason of which I know nothing. It is enormous. You may live to see him die; I am afraid I shall not—and he is seventy and I am fifty."

There was debate in my mind whether I should undertake the case. I had no certain prospects. I was exposed to the trying circumstances of a young practitioner. My opportunity was to be Dr. Brownell's assistant, resident upon a case which needed attention he could give only in emergency.

I decided to accept. It may have been professional weakness, but in addition to the financial certainty offered, there was a professional interest aroused. If Dr. Brownell were attracted by a human being's will to live, there certainly was something superhumanly interesting about that human being. I took the position, which was merely to continue as interne in a home hospital of one patient.

The recollection of Hartley as I first saw it remains as an enduring impression. The long downpour of rain had given the place a spiritual accent. One felt as if the soul were saturated.

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It is only occasionally in a normal mind that weather works a spiritual effect. I thought my mind was normal, but I felt the spiritual depression. Yet the landscape was wonderful. I never have seen more of art and nature joined in this country. It was alien—it was alien because it had an obvious background. Time had worked with it; many generations of people had lived in and for it.

I took a buggy at the village livery-stable to ride out. The driver said they would put my trunk in a cart the next day and bring it out. For the evening they had nothing but a buggy and a tired horse.

The way for three miles was through ordinary American small-farm land. Then it changed abruptly. Antiquity began to show. The driver said we were in the Hartley House grounds.

I was so depressed by the rain, by my own uncertainty, by thinking over the decision I had made and seemed about to regret, by the dismal prospects—or at least the uncertain prospects—that I should have been glad for any sustaining human association. At the end of my journey I soon found such association and was thereafter happy in it, but approaching the place I was apprehensive. My driver had been, if not unapproachable, at least stupid and dismal.

It somewhat astonished me when suddenly he

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began to talk. We were then about a half-mile from the House.

"I wish you had come an hour earlier," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm not a coward," said the driver, "—at least, no more than usual, but I don't like to be in here alone, and I've got to go home alone."

In a fashion he expressed what might have been my mood if I had known more of the place. I could sympathise with him. The rain had done this for me.

"What have you to be afraid of?" I asked.

"Nothing in particular," he said. "I don't believe what they say of this place at all, but even if you don't believe in a thing, you'll keep thinking about it. I don't believe in ghosts. I never saw one, and I don't expect to see one. I don't intend to see one if I can help it."

"Is something haunted around here?" I asked. It seemed as if so beautiful a spot ought to have this interest. He stopped his horse.

"I'm going back out of here like a scared pig," he said, "—that is, if the old horse can stand it. But you're going to live here for a while, and I'll stop a minute to show you where they say the ghost walks."

He pointed to where the river had eaten a substantial bit out of the bank, making a pool or tiny

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bay. The road, swerving toward the river here, was within thirty feet of it.

"It isn't natural for a man to kill his brother," said my driver, "and something unnatural comes of it. A man killed his brother there, and something unnatural has come of it. That's why I'll be just as well satisfied to get you to the house and myself back out of here before dark. I'm not superstitious or afraid, but I'd just as soon not be here after dark, because you never know when things come back."

"Get along, then," I said. "They don't interest me. It looks like an ordinary place to me."

"To me too," said my driver. "And I don't want it ever to look extraordinary."

"Who was killed there?" I asked.

"You'll learn the story soon enough," said the driver, "if you're going to stay in this house. You'll learn it better than I can tell you."

At the great coach-entrance of the old house I paid the driver and let him go. He was anxious to be gone. It was growing dark. Then I began ringing the bell.

At the third ringing there was a response, in the form of a servant, a man, butler or door-man, past middle age. He was crusty.

"What do you want?" he asked.

I explained that I was Dr. Michelson and wanted nothing that I was not wanted for. I did not like

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his manner and was not inclined to ignore it or to propitiate him as ordinarily one would. He had, at first sight, an extraordinary power of exasperation. At the time I did not understand my weakness, but afterward I did. The man was abnormal as an irritant.

Thus my appearance at Hartley House was so unfortunate that if the servant's contumacy and my resentment had had another moment, the door would have been slammed in my face and I should have been walking back to Hartley Station. At that hesitant moment in my fortunes, a woman's voice intervened.

"Jed," it said, "who's there?"

The servant opened the door wider, and I saw a lady, a South American, I thought.

"I am Dr. Michelson," I said.

"Yes, Doctor," she replied, "we have been expecting you. I am Mrs. Sidney. Where is your baggage?"

"I have only a hand-bag with me here," I said.

"Come in," she said, "Jed will take it."

He did, but made me see the ill nature of his reception of me and of his duty. He had also, at the direction of Mrs. Sidney, to show me to my quarters.

"Jed," I said, in my room, "we have not made the best start for two people who may have to live together for some time."

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I offered him a dollar as a peace-offering.

"Are you going to stay here?" he asked.

"I am supposed to," I said.

"A dollar won't make you welcome," he said and left me looking at the coin in my hand.

I was called to dinner and had it alone in a large dining-room. When I had finished, a maid told me that Mr. Sidney would be glad to see me if it were convenient for me—that he did not need me professionally, but that socially he would be delighted if I could come to him.

He was sitting in a large armchair in a great room with a great fireplace. Later I perceived the fascinating details of the room, but just then Mr. Sidney had all my attention.

Dr. Brownell had told me of the remarkable will to live which I should find. It was instantly apparent. The old man was wonderfully alive. He was abrupt but smilingly and charmingly courteous. We talked for a quarter of an hour, casually. Then he said:

"I know you are tired, Doctor."

"Not at all," I said, interested to see more of him if I might.

"That's your good nature," he said. "And we certainly do not want to wear you out in one day. We only wanted to see you. We shall get better acquainted, and we hope you'll like us and be comfortable and happy here. We have a fashion

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of trying to be happy. We are going to say good night and allow you to settle yourself to new surroundings in privacy. It is the kindest thing we can do. Jed will show you to your room.—Jed, take care of Dr. Michelson. Good night, Doctor."

Mrs. Sidney stood beside Mr. Sidney as he was speaking. I had thought at first seeing her that she had been very beautiful and that now she was very unhappy. Seeing her again, I retained my first impressions.

Jed preceded me through corridors to my door and left me surlily. As he closed the door, I thought I heard another sound than that of the clicking of the latch. I had. It was the throwing of a bolt on the outside: Jed had locked me in. I made sure of this by trying the door. It could not be opened. Here was an astonishing situation for a first night in a place. My impulse was to make a noise and ask for an explanation, but on second thought I did not. My room was on the second floor, and I saw, looking out of the window, that it would not be impossible to make a descent on the outside in an emergency. I decided not to begin my stay with a protest against any habits of the house or occurrences in it. In the night, I was awakened out of a sound sleep with an idea that I had been disturbed by noises, but nothing I could hear sustained it, and I went to sleep again.

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CHAPTER II

I WAS up early, dressed and found that my door had been unbolted. I examined the outside of it for a bolt and had difficulty in finding one, so ingeniously had it been concealed. The knob seemed a part of the decoration of the panel, and the bolt was of thin steel. I found it only by finding the socket into which it could be shot.

Although the fact that I could open the door was evidence that some one had been there early to release me, the house was not yet astir, so far as I could see.

The rain had stopped, and although the woods were dripping, there was a glorious, radiant sunlight. The effect was exhilarating. It worked a spiritual change. Orioles, a thrush, catbirds and tanagers were singing in the near-by woods. Man, said the morning, was made to be happy.

Exulting in pleasant emotions, I let myself out of the main door and rejoiced in the beauty of the place and the moment. Two mastiffs came running toward me from the lawn. They were friendly and seemed to accept me because I appeared from within the house. I took a short walk across the

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lawn toward the woods. The dogs followed me. Then a gardener came with chains and led them away. He asked me if I were the new doctor and said if I had leisure during the day he wished I would come to the cottage beyond the gardens. His infant had a cough.

The house was astir when I reëntered. Jed was the first person I saw, and to my astonishment he was not only civil but pleasant and candid.

"Did you have a fair night, Doctor?" he asked. "Sometimes a first night in a new place is disturbed, and I owe you apologies. We have here occasion at times for locking doors on the outside as well as on the inside, and last night I forgot myself and threw the bolt of your door. I am occasionally in liquor, and last night I had a touch too much."

I smiled at his candour and said something jokingly in comment.

"A servant can't be blamed, Doctor, for that," he said, "if his master leads him into it. We have coffee before breakfast. I'll serve you anywhere. The morning papers are in the library. There's a porch off it with a good view. It's my favourite spot of a morning. I recommend that you have your coffee there."

His friendliness was amusing, but I found his suggestion good, and being fond of coffee, enjoyed it with a half-hour of magnificent view and a

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cigarette. The morning was odorous after the rain.

When I had time that day to look at the house and visit the grounds, I was the more impressed by them. I am, it may be confessed, of a romantic temperament which, I have reason to believe, is disguised by methodical habit.

The house was a charming structural disorder of L's and wings, porches and balconies. It was very old, and one could see where different generations had contributed to its growth. The walls were backgrounds for hollyhocks or support for climbing roses or ivy. It had plenty of sunlight, but dense white-oak woods came close up. They were thickened by viburnum and witch hazel, and except where lanes ran through them, seemed impenetrable.

I held myself in readiness to attend my patient at his convenience, but it was ten o'clock before I was summoned. Mr. Sidney was pleasant and animated.

"We must arrive at a schedule," I suggested. "This is a little too late in the day to satisfy Dr. Brownell's ideas of what my duties are."

"But, my dear Doctor," he said, "I do not wake until nine. I need my sleep. I do not go to sleep until one."

"I should advise early hours," I said.

"Of course you would, but you must remember

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that you are dealing with a man, at the end of his life, trying to make the most of it. I like to remain awake late."

"Then you must," I said. "I shall consider it settled to see you at ten."

"And, I hope, sometimes to sit up with me until one. Do you like chess?"

"I never played."

"Luckily Jed does, just well enough to interest me and have me beat him. Do you like wine?"

"A young doctor does not drink."

"Luckily Jed does. It is a great satisfaction to have some one whom you can beat at chess and whom you can see enjoying wine. Doctor, I have yielded to my friend Brownell's demand for constant attention, but as you can see, there will not be a great deal for a physician to do. I eat well, I sleep well, and so long as my sensations are pleasant, I want to live. They are not always pleasant, but mostly they are so. I'd like to have you as a new friend in the house. I like to be talked to. I like to be read to. Will you relax and be just a friend?"

"With pleasure," I said, "so long as nothing interferes with the physician."

"That's a bargain," he said. "At three o'clock this afternoon you shall read to me."

During my spare time I walked about the grounds. A part of the estate, about thirty acres,

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which seemed to be architecturally intimate and related to the house, was completely inclosed by a twelve-foot brick wall surmounted by sharp spikes. It was built beyond the river's edge, and was continued out into the water in a heavily buttressed fashion. Only a good swimmer could have rounded it and come into the place. It looked like a carefully but strangely designed protection.

In the dog-kennels were the mastiffs I had found loose that morning, and a number of Airedales. I said to Jed that it seemed as if precautions had been taken against a perceived danger. He had been affable during the day, but his face clouded instantly.

"The wall was here when Mr. Sidney bought the place, but we are in a way isolated," he said shortly. "It is reasonable to take precautions. It will be a precaution for you not to go roaming the grounds at night. The dogs are not friendly then."

His surliness was easily passed over. I was good-humoured and wished to prove it.

"I have heard of the haunted bay," I said. "What is its story?"

"Every fool in and about the place talks of that," he said. "You'll get too much of the story only too soon. But that isn't why we have the dogs. We don't take any stock in ghosts in this house."

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He was offended and went away. At three o'clock I saw my patient again, and he wanted me to read to him. The room in which he sat was walled with bookshelves.

"Anything in particular?" I asked.

He asked for "The Master of Ballantrae."

"It's not your first time at it," I suggested.

"No," he said, "I have it read once every three or four months."

I read to him for an hour. Then he took a nap.

I had been told that any time I wanted to go to the town I might tell one of the chauffeurs to take me. I needed a thin file for the bolt on my door. It annoyed me. I did not ask that whoever threw it at night should know that it was gone. It suited my purposes better that it should be gone and the person who used it should think it was still there. Therefore, after reading to Mr. Sidney, I went to town for a thin file.

One sees a landscape the first time without perception. On reseeing, perception begins. Real perception is a matter of familiarity and study. The second time over the road to Hartley helped to familiarise me with it, and I could see that with closer acquaintance greater beauty would be disclosed.

The first aspect of beauty may so suggest its remoteness, its spiritual distance from the observer's possession and expectation as to produce

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in a sensitive mind the unrest, the real pain, of a desire for the unattainable. Certainly the beauty of a landscape grows warmer, glows more brightly, as it is taken into the memory by association and experience.

I got my file, and for greater sociability on the return-trip I took the seat beside Charles, the driver. The landscape became jovial and human. The wood-thrush was singing to the twilight, and the wonderful odours of a fresh and human soil rich with the experiences of many generations came kindly to perceptive senses.

As we passed the pool, Charles referred to it.

"What is it?" I asked. "What's the story?"

"A man killed his brother there," said Charles. "He is now in the penitentiary at Alwick for life. His brother's ghost, they say, comes back. I've never seen it, but some people say they have."

"Who were the brothers?" I asked.

"They were the sons of the people who used to own this place—the Dobsons." He did not say anything more of it and I did not question him.

I used the file on my bolt, leaving one end of it in the socket. It could be thrown, but it could not bar the door.

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CHAPTER III

THAT evening I had dinner with Mrs. Sidney and her daughter Isobel. I had been in the house twenty-four hours and did not know there was a daughter until dinner brought the three of us together.

Mrs. Sidney was Spanish. She was a lovely woman, gracious and charming, but I thought there was a great deal of steel hidden in her disposition. She did not seem to ask that life be soft or to expect to find it so. She had a Roman dignity of self-respect which did not, I could be sure, permit moaning. Mrs. Sidney would face life unfluttered and uncomplaining. I could see that instantly, and not only that: she had been meeting a troubled life unfalteringly.

I do not know what gave me the idea that her greatest distress was one of conscience, that she had in some fashion or other offended against her true self and that she had done so for some one else. It would not have taxed any one's perceptions to recognise in Mrs. Sidney a human being living an extraordinary life. The fact was so apparent that it seemed a part of her personality.

It must be remembered that I had come to Hart-

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ley House prepared for abnormalities. There was first, the man with the wonderful will to live which had interested Dr. Brownell. There was, then, the soul-saturating rain which met me. There was the alien beauty of the House, the strange servant Jed, the haunted pool,—insignificant as it was, to a rational being,—the lovely woman who was so apparently a tragic figure. There was the fact of my being locked in my room the first night. There were the forbidding defences of the place—walls, dogs and keepers. I may be excused for taking a fanciful view of my new surroundings.

Then there was Miss Sidney—Isobel. She came into the dining-room an unexpected if not astonishing phenomenon to me, who did not know that there was a daughter in the family.

Mrs. Sidney presented me.

"How do you do?" said Miss Sidney, and she seemed to find it tiresome that a stranger had taken a place at the table. I felt very awkward, and being obnoxiously diffident, I had a bad time of it.

Jed served us, and the dinner was excellent. I saw that the establishment was latitudinarian. Although the ladies had only a glass of sherry each, I was offered a variety of liquors. My habit is abstemious except upon rare occasions, but I was so embarrassed by Miss Sidney's boredom that I took two glasses of champagne, and they made me a more tolerable dinner-companion. It was

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some champagne-stimulated remark on feminism which caused Miss Sidney to stare at me as if I were an animal which, being smooth-skinned, suddenly had grown a coat of fur.

She stared for an instant and then laughed. She was quite frank. She had been bored; she had become interested. I could see that she distressed her mother. Mrs. Sidney, any one could know, held to conventions as the salvation of life; Miss Sidney did not.

I had a comfortable little glow of egotism, having interested this young woman in myself, and having lost all diffidence. Luckily I managed to be less of a bore to the daughter without being more of a scandal to the mother.

Isobel Sidney was a very attractive girl. I guessed her age to be twenty-three. I also guessed that candour and honesty were outstanding points in her disposition. Her youth and her beauty were magnetic, and I must confess that my romanticism was touched instantly. I had seen just enough of Mr. Sidney to understand how this girl could be the daughter of Mrs. Sidney.

By the time dinner was over we had found a pleasant agreement in ideas and taste. I was in an ecstasy, full of the sensation which comes to a diffident man, unaccustomed to women, when he dares to think for the first time that he has been interesting to a young and beautiful girl. It is

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one of the Elysian emotions. We grow old and bald, and women are adventures dismissed from our lives. We know we do not interest them. We do not think of interesting them. We become pantalooned lay-figures too scared of scandal or too confirmed in propriety to break out of the narrowed way. There is an age which comes to a man, a condition in which he finds himself, to which he submits if he have any morals, and when it comes and when he submits, the gates are closed upon fanciful, romantic adventures. If he has been fortunate, he is content. He sits at the west window, and his prospect is the sunset. He no longer asks the great question of youth: "Could I make that girl like me?"

To me, after that first dinner with Mrs. Sidney and her daughter, the ecstasy was a romantic folly. Isobel had captured me, my sense, my rationality, my judgment, my mind, fancy and emotions. Beauty and youth alone are enough to do this for an imaginative young man, and when attractive aspects of character are back of beauty and youth, and when the young man looks forward to a probability of that conquering circumstance, propinquity, he may be excused if his feet lightly touch the floor. I was captured and knew it after that first dinner—knew it, and both loved and dreaded it. I was about to make a fool of myself and be at once a happy and a miserable fool.

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In the exalted state of egoistic emotions which I have outlined, I went to Mr. Sidney's room after dinner and sat with him for two hours. I began to appreciate how charmingly his life was decorated. A really rare subtlety of art was used to bring a warm colour into this indomitable but feeble man's winter of life. I did not fully appreciate until later what thought and care lay behind the unstudied comforts and sensations Hartley House offered.

Mr. Sidney was white-haired and very gracious. His manner was a warm cordiality. It was not precise. It was robust, but it was benignant. Later I saw how his presence pervaded the place.

We had a cheerful talk. What he said suggested to me that my world could not have been more than a hundred years old at the most, and that his included the period of inorganic evolution in which the period of organic evolution is but a pin-prick. Youth is startled by such conceptions of life, but I had an interesting evening.

Before I said good night, Jed came in with two bottles of wine. He stood and looked at me unpleasantly. I arose to go, and Mr. Sidney said:

"I think we shall like each other. At least, I hope you will be comfortable, even happy. And don't be distressed about the wine. I don't drink it any more. Jed drinks it, and I enjoy seeing him do it."

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CHAPTER IV

A WHIPPOORWILL was reiterant in the woods at night, and its call came from dark recesses odorous and mysteriously veiled. Having said good night to Mr. Sidney, I had gone to my room with a book from the library. The night was fresh, sweet-smelling and cool. I had read for several hours when I heard the cut bolt in my door thrown against the piece of metal which had been left in the socket.

There was no transom above the door, and evidently the threshold kept light from appearing beneath it. I had been reading, as I said, for three hours at least, and whoever tried to bolt me in had good reason to think I was asleep. The person could have made certain by going out on the lawn and looking up at my windows, but evidently was sure I was sleeping.

I knew who the person was. It was Jed. Knowing I was not locked in, I was undisturbed and continued reading.

Shortly afterward I heard a woman's voice in expostulation far down the hall. It arose abruptly to a sharp cry, and I had to lay aside my book and expose the fact that my door was not locked, a

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thing I had not wanted to do until the secret of its being locked could be discovered by revealing that it was not.

I hurried out and down the hall. Jed had a woman by the wrist. Both of them saw me coming. She released herself from his relaxing grip by a quick jerk and ran. He stood until I came up.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"What makes you think anything is the matter?" he asked.

"Don't take me for a fool," I said. "That was Mrs. Sidney who screamed. You were holding her. It seems to me it needs an explanation."

"Who are you that you need an explanation?" said Jed.

"You are drunk again."

"I know I am. If that's satisfactory to my employer, why should it bother you?"

"I doubt that it is satisfactory to your employer that you should be making his wife scream at midnight. Look here: you're a servant in this house. What have you to say for yourself? I'm going to have an explanation of this."

Jed had been surly and angry, but now he grinned.

"All right," he said, "but if you want to be decent about it, ask Mrs. Sidney first whether she wants your help and your asking. That's my ad-

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vice, young fellow. And while we're asking, how did you get out of your room? You're not supposed to be out. We don't want people in this house running around the halls at this time of night."

"I opened the door and came out. Why shouldn't I come out! I heard a scream and came."

He looked at me as if he were doubting himself. I think he was uncertain whether he had thrown the bolt or not. I think he decided that he had not, although I was afraid that I had disclosed my independence prematurely. If I were being locked in for a purpose, it was unfortunate for me to reveal the true situation until by revealing it I could defeat the purpose. It transpired later that I was right in thinking Jed doubted himself and concluded that he had not locked me in, but for the time I was worried.

When I went back to my room, I was restless, as one naturally would be, a stranger in so strange a house. It was impossible to sleep and difficult to read. I sat by the window and alternately dozed and read until day broke and the wood-thrush began to sing. Then, quieted, I went to bed and had two hours' sleep.

I thought it wise to speak to Mrs. Sidney about the incident of the night. She had seen me; she knew I had talked to Jed; she might or might not

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know that I recognised her. I might add to her perplexities by speaking to her, but I might obtain an insight into matters which would enable me to act discreetly and usefully. If I remained ignorant of motives prevailing in the house, I might at any time blunder into a serious mistake. It seemed best to speak to Mrs. Sidney. She had the explanation, and although I felt reluctant to risk increasing her troubles and adding to her pain, there was nothing to be gained, so far as I could see, in not facing the facts. I knew enough to realise that Jed occupied some position of strength and that he was abusing his power and, new and strange as I was to the place and its people, I thought I must do what I could.

Mrs. Sidney, I could see when I spoke to her, had been greatly disturbed, but she was Roman.

"It was nothing serious or important, Doctor," she said. "I'll not say that it was pleasant or that I liked it, but it had no significance. Jed is a faithful and invaluable servant. He has a vice for which he is not responsible. He was a perfectly sober man when he came to us, and if he isn't now, it is our own fault. My husband corrupted him without intending to do so. My husband, when he was well and strong, loved to drink wine. He drank it in great quantities and without any disturbance of his sobriety or good nature. It mellowed and at the time intensified life for him. He

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cannot use it now, on account of his health, but he enjoys seeing the use of it, and Jed has been made the victim of Mr. Sidney's vicarious enjoyment. Jed is not always considerate of his position when he is not sober, but he never is dangerous, not even when, like last night, he is exceedingly annoying."

I admired the lady's resolution and fortitude, but I did not think she was telling the truth—not all of it.

"That was the first time anything of the kind ever occurred," she said. "I am sorry it disturbed you. I met Jed in the hall. He was not sober, and he had a preposterous request to make. When he has spent such an evening with Mr. Sidney, he resents being a servant in the family. He wants to be accepted as a member of the family."

"I have had something to do with that," I suggested.

"No doubt it has inflamed his egotism to have you enter the family. The situation with him is difficult. His pride was hurting him last night. He had lost all sense of proportion. He was like a child. He remonstrated with me: he was too important as Mr. Sidney's crony to be merely our servant! It was only a drunken mood, but he forgot himself and grasped me by the wrist. I had been trying to control him and restore his common sense. Then I became indignant, and you heard

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my voice. I am afraid it was shrill, but I was not alarmed. I was merely indignant."

"You speak of Jed, Mrs. Sidney," I said, "as if he were merely an annoying alcoholic, tolerated when he is annoying, because of his general usefulness; but that does not explain why he tries to lock me in my room while he is sober and before these disturbances begin. That shows design and intent to have a free hand when he makes the disturbance. I do not like being locked in my room."

"It is outrageous," said the lady nervously. "I did not know that it was done. I shall see that it is not repeated."

"I am not so sure you can," I said, "and I wish you would not try. I have protected myself against it, and I'd rather Jed did not give me any more thought than he thinks is necessary now."

"I am sure, Doctor," said Mrs. Sidney, "that you will understand Jed and the situation better when you have been here longer. It may be annoying to you now, but we all here live for the pleasure and comfort of Mr. Sidney, who is worthy of all we can do for him. He did everything he could for us while he was active, and if thoughts would benefit us, he would be working for us now."

Mrs. Sidney was determined to protect the secret of the situation, and I had no right to cross-examine her. The next time I went to town I bought myself a forty-five-calibre pistol.

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CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH I was prepared for recurrent disturbances, there were none. Within a week I had found my way into a pleasant routine. Jed seemed to be conscious that he had overstepped his bounds. He was not apparently contrite, but he was cautious. I asked Mrs. Sidney why Mr. Sidney's authority should not be used as a check upon the man's behaviour.

"That is the last thing that could be thought of," she said.

Jed held himself in check, and a week was without incident. Then Miss Sidney went away to make a visit. Her absence was a spiritual disaster. Ecstatic and morose youth! The beauty of Hartley House became a hollow and dark melancholy, making sad sounds. Vibrant life had gone from it. Its perfume was lost.

I cannot now tell quite what it was that made Hartley House, a place so comfortable and genial, at the same time a place so threatened. The threat could not be ignored: it was there. The story of the ghost at the haunted pool could have nothing to do with it. The threat had tangible aspects. Mrs. Sidney's worry, unspoken but graven in her

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resolutely Roman face, was one evidence. The extraordinary behaviour of Jed was another. The atmosphere of the place was one of mystery.

During the pleasant, peaceful, odorous summer months, when our life was one of undisturbed routine, I never escaped the sense of dread. I hoped the intangible would take shape; surely something intangible that would be embodied, hung over the house.

I may not be able to make this certainty appear so vividly to you as it did to me. It permeated; it was in the atmosphere; it hung over the woods; it filled the house. It came with the odours of blossoms; it was expressed in the summer winds; it was threatened in the lightning which flashed over the river. I could not reconcile this effect to such a cause as that feeble ghost-story of the pool. I could not dread that ghost or feel its presence. It was a benevolent ghost needed for decoration.

Every place with an obvious indication of many years of habitation, with great lilacs and old pines, with numerous hollyhocks and deep moss, ought to have a ghost-story. Shall all the human beings who must have lived in such a place have passed away leaving no spiritual vestige of their lives? Let one, at least, loving or hating the place, reinhabit it, benevolently or malevolently.

I felt that Hartley House was old enough to yield a tribute to human permanency, and that to

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do so it must have a ghost, some spirit interested enough to come back and occasionally be tangible in some one's imagination. The story of the pool had been merely a tale, but as the place grew in romantic interest, the need of such a story grew. I wanted it to go with the ivy and the evergreens. How did the pool get its reputation? Was it only the conventional consequence of the fratricidal crime committed at a lonely spot? Was it built of nothing more than gossip? Had it no other consistency than old women's talk and children's fears?

I asked the people of the house, the servants, and found that for them it was largely a superstition. They all had been brought from the city, and only a few, such as Jed, a gardener, the housekeeper and the cook had been long enough in the house really to be associated with it.

Jed was the only one that willingly would be in the vicinity of the pool at night. The others might laugh at the suggestion of terror, but they would not willingly test their superiority to superstition. If they had been really frightened, they could not have been kept in service. They were not. The place was large, comfortably inhabited and genial. There was a touch of dread at one spot. They avoided the spot, and it was negligible so long as they did avoid it.

In the small town of Hartley there was more of

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the legend than there was at Hartley House. To the people who lived at a distance and came in contact with the place only on occasions, it had an alien, exotic air. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney had come from South America, from Montevideo, where they had lived many years. The circumstances of their selection and purchase of the place were normal, but the villagers spiced a great deal of gossip with notions of the alienism, wealth, aloofness and odd habits, concerning which gossip ran from our servants to the Hartley householders.

A latitudinarian, Lucullian family, such as the Sidney family, would be strangely interpreted in a little village. Therefore, in the village, the legend of a ghost at Hartley House was more real than it was on the place. The house was a much more genial human fact than the village. Consequently it was not, so far as I could discover, a valid reason for a ghost-story.

I have mentioned that my first morning at Hartley House a gardener asked me to see one of his children, which had a bad cough. The man had a good deal of sickness in his family in the next few months, and I was of considerable service. One child had measles, another an alarming attack of croup, and a third, his oldest son, broke an arm in falling out of a tree.

The gardener's name was Williamson. He had been on the place almost from the time of Mr.

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Sidney's purchase of it. He was attached to it, proud of his work and fond of it and its results. He had a neat little cottage beyond the gardens. His wife was very pleasant and thought too much of my services. Williamson himself was a fine man, and I am interested in gardening. Consequently, having to visit the family every day or every other day, I formed a habit of talking with him.

When, by chance, I spoke of the ghost-story to Williamson, with no more purpose than I ever had had in these inquiries, I noticed that he was a bit embarrassed.

"I am not a superstitious man, Doctor," he said.

"Neither am I," I said. "I think we miss something by not being."

"I take no stock in the stories about the pool," he said. "I'd just as lief pass it at midnight as midday—almost."

"Be honest, Williamson," I suggested laughingly.

"Almost, I said," he replied. "But I did see something at the pool."

He was a straightforward, unimaginative sort of man. I was sure he was not about to indulge in romance.

"I know something of these stories," he said. "I have not gossiped mine about—I was coming

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from town late—after midnight. It was the second year of our being here. It was in the fall or late summer—I do not remember. As I came along the road by the pool, I saw the figure of a man standing by the edge of the river. It was light enough for me to see that the figure was leaning on a stick or cane. I stopped and was going to call out, but for some reason—I don't know just why—I didn't. The figure did not move. I began to feel creepy and went on as gently as I could. Fifty feet farther, I heard a rustling in the brush and I thought I saw a face. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I did. I know I heard a rustling. When I got out in the open, I ran the rest of the way home on the turf."

"There was nothing very alarming about that," I suggested. My romance needed more substance. "You saw a man and heard a noise."

"There was nothing in seeing a man and hearing a noise," said Williamson. "It was the effect."

"That was due to the hour and the place."

"No, I'm not superstitious. I was not thinking of the place. The man on the bank was different from a man. I could not see why. I didn't think he was a man. It was not because I was scared—at first. I became scared as I looked at him. He did not move. He did not seem to be alive. When

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I felt shivers starting up and down my back, I knew I was scared. Then when I heard the rustling, I went home as quickly and quietly as I could."

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CHAPTER VI

JED certainly was the most significant disagreeable fact in the house, and his influence the most significant malignancy. He had been sobered by the discovery of his attack upon Mrs. Sidney, but as he began to recover from his discomfiture, and as the sense of caution began to lessen, he again asserted, or suggested, control, particularly when he was drunk. He never allowed Mr. Sidney to know this. In their strange association at Horatian wine-feasts, Jed was tactful, respectful, considerate and jovial.

To Mrs. Sidney he was at times courteous and thoughtful, at other times disrespectful or even brutal. Sometimes he seemed to frighten himself. When I saw that he was again beginning to show disrespect for her, I was for putting an end to it. Mrs. Sidney was horrified when I said that Jed could be brought to terms. She held up her hands.

"No, no," she said. "Not in any event! Never, please, speak to Mr. Sidney. Please never think of it. Jed is invaluable to Mr. Sidney. He is not so discourteous to me as you might think. He is gruff, and drinking does not make him better,

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but it is Mr. Sidney's whim that he should drink. It would be unjust—don't you see it would be unjust?—to make a point against him of behaviour that Mr. Sidney causes. Please never mention it."

She was very much in earnest and was not satisfied until she had my promise that I never would speak to Mr. Sidney of Jed until I had her consent. She then showed relief, and I felt more distressed. Jed had some hold on this resolute lady that I should have liked to break.

Jed's attitude towards me was a thing to drive distracted a person who cared what it was. I did not. He could be interesting, and then I was interested in him. He could be stupid, and I avoided him. He could be surly, and I ignored him. He could be quarrelsome, and I fought him back.

It seldom was a matter of sobriety or insobriety with him. He was best natured to me at times when he was most intoxicated. He was surliest at times when he was perfectly sober. At other times he quite reversed this. One never knew from his physical condition what his disposition might be at the time.

He served at dinner when Mrs. Sidney, Isobel and I, more ceremoniously than we cared to, dined. Certain domestic ceremonies pleased Mr. Sidney and he liked to know that in some respects the baronial character of his place was being main-

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tained as he would have maintained it if he had been active.

He thought form was valuable in passionate, careless human existence, and that it softened terrors, conquered animalism and dignified life. No doubt he was right, but the ceremonies sometimes were more than three people would have chosen for their own comfort. Jed when a servant —he seemed to recognise occasions when he was and occasions when he was not—was beyond reproach, but I knew the satisfaction he had behind the proprieties in which he could mask his face. He limited our conversation. He made Mrs. Sidney unhappy. He had Isobel bored, and he had me either manifestly unhappy or hiddenly furious. He was pleased to distress us by being our perfect servant. It was sheer malevolence.

When he was in good nature, he frequently sought me out for talks, and when he was in good nature, I encouraged him. I did not want to open up any secrets the house might have, merely to learn what they were, but I knew Mrs. Sidney needed help, and I thought I might give it if I knew how. I also thought that Jed some evening when pleasantly and good-naturedly drunk and garrulous might say more than he intended. There were many opportunities, but he never did.

One night—this was in September—I was walking about the place with the mastiffs at my side.

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I stood a while at the edge of the woods looking at the house. In its shadowy bulk it seemed fit container of mystery. Only a few windows were illuminated. It was the river side of the house that was bright at night.

I walked slowly across the lawn toward the side where Mrs. Sidney's rooms were. A small balcony opened off her sitting-room. I could hear her talking to some one on this balcony. The person she was talking to, as I heard in another moment, was Jed. I was then almost under the balcony.

"I am a resolute man," Jed was saying. "I'll have my own way. I'll have what I want. I'll make you glad to come to terms. I'm a reasonable man too. Now, admit that I've been considerate."

I started to get out of hearing as quietly and rapidly as I could, but I heard Mrs. Sidney, her voice vibrant with indignation, say:

"I ought to have you whipped."

"That is silly, unreasonable passion," said Jed.

"I shall not hesitate to kill you," said Mrs. Sidney.

Then I went out of earshot. The fact that Jed could threaten Mrs. Sidney in this fashion was inexplicable. It could not be explained by his serviceability to Mr. Sidney, great as that was. I walked about for a while, distressed and depressed; then I patted the heads of the mastiffs, went indoors and to my room.

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An hour later I opened my door in response to a light rap. Mrs. Sidney was there.

"May I come in a moment?" she asked. "Thank you. I have a request to make which you cannot help but think is extraordinary—preposterous."

I placed a chair for her. She thanked me but remained standing. I thought she must be in an agony of mind, but she smiled.

"I hope it is to ask me to take Jed in hand," I said.

"No; it is to ask you to permit me to announce the engagement of my daughter Isobel to you. Don't be alarmed. It shall not make any difference in your life. It is a desperate expedient I am using out of a difficulty."

I felt as if I were in a spiritual fog.

"Is that the only way I can help you out?" I asked.

"The only one," she said. "I have thought of everything."

"Has it to do with Jed again?" I asked.

"With things I cannot possibly explain. Is there any one who would be distressed by such an announcement?".

"Not a soul," I said, "—except Miss Sidney."

"I would not cause pain," said Mrs. Sidney. "Are you sure there is no one?"

"Mrs. Sidney," I said, "you are the only lady

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who ever has given me a thought since I knew my mother. I am merely wondering what Miss Sidney will think of me in such a rôle. Will she understand why I take it? I am not hesitating. I hope I do not seem to be, but I know—I suspect—that your decision is sudden."

"Isobel's affection for us is greater than her demand for independence," said Mrs. Sidney. "If she knows that I asked you to consent to this announcement, she will think of you as a proved friend."

I had suggested all the precautions that were reasonable. "You certainly may make any use of me you want to," I said. She thanked me and said good night.

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CHAPTER VII

ISOBEL'S view of our engagement was purely comic. She may have had a second of spiritual revolt, but comedy and consideration for her mother asserted themselves. Mrs. Sidney, when she told Isobel of the engagement, had me present. The mother was really embarrassed, almost fluttered, but she was determined. Isobel was greatly amused.

It may be imagined that I was not heroic. I might better have been a wax figure taken from a display-window; I felt like one, a thing with a wax smile and no animation. I shall never be Olympian, but I trust that never again shall I be so shrivelled and insignificant.

Isobel corrected herself in a moment. She was beautifully considerate of her mother.

"It is merely precautionary," said Mrs. Sidney uneasily. "It is quite impossible to explain. You will have to accept my judgment, Isobel. Dr. John,"—an odd halfway-house toward intimacy she reached and stopped at,—"Dr. John has been kind enough to do as I asked him. I need and want the support of my children in what I am doing."

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I felt a touch of emotion at that. Unconsciously, intent upon her main point, she had included me at the fireside and had spoken of her "children."

"Anything you do or have done is all right, Mother," said Isobel, recovering from her sense of humour. "Dr.—John—will not be unhappy—I am sure—will you, Doctor? And I—Mother—I'll get an advantage of you in this—see if I don't."

"You mustn't try to, Isobel," said Mrs. Sidney anxiously. "I am doing the best I can."

Later in the evening I saw Isobel, finding her alone in the library, where she was reading. I went in to get a book before going to bed. She was by a lamp near the fireplace, and she looked very beautiful.

"I want to talk to you," she said when she saw me. "Do you know the explanation of this?"

"No," I said.

"You are not quite honest," she said. "If you do not know, you at least suspect."

"What do I suspect?" I asked.

"A man engaged to a girl he never asked to marry him might suspect that something was out of the ordinary," she suggested.

"Of course, something is extraordinary," I said. "Do you know what it is?"

"No, I don't," she said. "Why don't you sit down?"

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With a soft witchery of femininity she pervaded and glorified the room, but she was peremptory. I was not sullen, but I felt defiant.

"Because I don't want to sit down," I said.

Isobel smiled indulgently at me.

"Oh, sit down, Dr. John," she said, "I want to talk to you. We are engaged, you know, and engaged people ought to have a talk after the event, if not before."

"You understand how this happened," I suggested.

"I do," she said. "My mother is frightened. Jed has been trying to marry me."

"What can give him the privilege of such insolence!" I exclaimed.

"I imagine he is enamoured," she said serenely. "It may seem impossible to you."

"You do yourself an injustice. You make light of a matter that is distracting to your mother."

"Not at all," said Isobel. "I am perfectly capable of getting along, but my mother does not know it. I am engaged to you. Is not that considerate of her?"

"Has this man approached you directly?" I asked.

"He has been gallant, amorous, suggestive, tender, soulful, aggressive, pleading, threatening, subservient and—I think that is all—but only in manner."

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"I don't understand it," I said helplessly.

"Neither do I," she said. "And I know just enough to know that I shall not understand it. I do not like to find a *Romeo* among the servants, but I have learned to accept some strange conditions here—among them you."

"Don't disturb yourself about me," I said.

A good deal of my hurt pride must have found expression in that remark.

"I am unjust," she said. "I know that you are doing what my mother wants done and that you are not considering yourself. I shall be reasonable. I want to make my mother's life as pleasant as it can be made. I cannot understand everything that she needs of me, but I know that you have done everything that you could do for her. I do not want to seem inconsiderate."

"I want to do a great deal more than I seem to be able to do," I said. "The trouble is that I do not know how to do enough."

"Neither do I, Doctor," said Isobel, "and it would only make things worse if I tried to find out more."

"I'd like to protect you and your mother," I said.

"We are indebted," said Isobel, with a chill and unkind restraint. Then she smiled and said:

"Good night, Doctor. If I am inconsiderate at any time, put it down to a naturally bad temper."

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CHAPTER VIII

JED had taken a small shotgun and had said that he was going after rabbits, which were unusually numerous and threatened to be damaging to the young brush about the place. It was an October afternoon with a warm sun. An hour or two after Jed had gone, I went out for a walk, going down by the pool.

Usually in a walk I went by the paths, and habit had more or less formalised my procedure. To avoid wasting a thought or making a choice, I went nearly every time by the same way to the same place and back again. Habit relieves one of decision in small matters and thus simplifies life. Occasionally, for some simple reason, one modifies habit, and as I walked along this time I did. I think it was some late golden-rod on a slope that took me off the path and into the thickets.

I was in the brush for fifteen minutes, and it happened that while I was there I saw from a little prominence the figure of Jed on ahead with his shotgun. He was some distance away, but I could see that he was going stealthily from tree to tree in an odd fashion for one hunting for rabbits. It

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was as if he were stalking something rather than trying to kick rabbits up out of the brush.

I went on toward the pool, but not by the path, staying in the brush to look for fringed gentians. Once again I saw Jed ahead of me. I came out on the path and went on to the river-bank, where I sat down.

The pool's edge was studded with granite rocks worn smooth. Above the high-water mark, a variety of ferns grew. The current of the river, flowing by a point of sheer rock which protected the pool at the north, sent eddies whirling in toward the recessed bank. A piece of wood thrown in might drift into the sluggish water close to the bank, or it might go circling swiftly into the main current again.

Whenever I saw a piece of drift in the pool and watched its movements, I thought of the body of the slain brother. It had been whirled out into the current and had been carried downstream. On the bank had been found a few torn bits of clothing—the sleeve of a coat, a collar spotted with blood, a necktie and a piece of a white shirt. There also had been found a heavy walking-stick, bloodied and with hair in the blood.

The story of the pool was always most fascinating, with its suggested pictures, as one sat at the river's edge, watching the river life and action, the colours on the broad stream and in the hills beyond

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it. A mile below, a ferry breasted the current; sloops with brick came into the great bay from around the far point to the north; dirty fishing-boats went up and down; passenger steamers passed by. It was a rich, fascinating picture.

This day I had not been sitting on the bank five minutes when I was startled by a shot from the near-by thickets, and a bullet hit within two feet of where I was sitting, knocking off the bark of a tree. The report was not that of a small shotgun such as Jed had carried. It was the report of a rifle or pistol.

The chipped bark showed that a bullet, not shot, had hit the tree, and I was unpleasantly conscious of what had happened. Jed had shot at me, probably with a large-calibre revolver. He could not have had a rifle, unless he had one hidden in the brush. I had seen what he carried, not only as he left the house but as he was dodging through the thickets.

It likely was a pistol or a revolver, and that was why he had missed me. I was stupefied for an instant, and I did not jump or start. I was motionless, not even looking around, but I was thinking rapidly. A subconscious protective idea formed almost instantly, and when the next moment another shot came from behind me, I fell forward on my face, rolled a couple of feet to a

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bush, turned my face in the direction from which the shot came, got out my pistol and lay still.

After a minute or two which seemed a very long time, Jed's face came in view in the brush. He looked malevolent but seemed undetermined and cautious. I think he was uncertain whether to leave my body where it lay and have it discovered, or throw it into the river and have my disappearance unexplained. His decision was given him by the noise of a farm-wagon approaching on the road, and he disappeared. I was ready to shoot him if he came near me.

I was young and had youth's confidence, but nevertheless this event would have sent me away from Hartley if it had not been for Isobel and Mrs. Sidney. They needed even my small help and I had to remain. I had to remain but I had also to protect myself. Another time Jed might not miss. On the way back to the house I thought out a plan which I believed would work. I inquired for Jed and was told that he was with Mr. Sidney. I found him there drinking, and my entrance gave him a shock which he plainly indicated. His fright made him so ugly that he was comic.

Mr. Sidney never liked to have his vicarious drinking interrupted, but he always was good-natured.

"Well, Doctor," he said, "what now? Is Jed drinking too much for my health?"

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At that moment no possible amount of liquor would have been too much for Jed. The wretch must have thought I was a ghost.

"Jed may drink himself to death, for all me," I said. "That probably is the best end he can come to. I think he is gallows-meat, but I want to talk to him when you can spare him."

"We can't spare Jed to have him hanged," said Mr. Sidney. "He's too useful. Who else could drink my wine of an evening? Go along with the Doctor, Jed, and see what he wants. It's probably a matter of pills or powders for me."

Jed was recovering from his shock, but he still showed the effects of it.

"No hurry," I said. "I'd rather wait a half-hour. I'll be in my room."

I went there and wrote two letters. Both were to one point. They related circumstantially what had happened that afternoon. One I addressed to a lawyer I knew, and the other to Dr. Brownell. Jed knocked at the door as I finished them. He was still unnerved.

"I have something I want you to read," I said, and gave him the letters. He read them and moistened his lips.

"You don't need to talk, Jed," I said. "I'll do all the talking that's necessary. I am not going away. I am going to stay right here, and you'd better be very careful of my health. These

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letters go out to-night. The men who get them will keep their mouths shut so long as I am alive. If anything should happen to me, whether you had anything to do with it or not, you'd have a difficult time with a jury."

"It was a mistake," he said. "I would not do you any harm. I shot at a rabbit."

"Twice with a pistol when you had a shotgun," I said. "You did! I was the rabbit."

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CHAPTER IX

JED came to me the next day in one of his candid moods.

"I did shoot at you yesterday," he said.

"I know you did," I replied.

"And you're wondering why and you're wondering if I intend to do it again."

"I don't wonder at anything you do," I said. "And you know that if you do it again, the evidence is prepared against you. I think I am perfectly safe. I know you are a coward."

"No, I'm not a coward," he said, as if he were stating a fact and not making a boast. "I never do anything without a purpose, and when I have a purpose, I do it no matter what the consequences may be. The reason I wanted to shoot you was because you were engaged to Isobel. I intend to marry Isobel. Now I know that you are not going to marry Isobel. You are just the foolish fence that her mother thought she could build up around Isobel and keep me from trying to marry her. Isobel doesn't want you. She is laughing at you. So we might as well be friends again."

"You preposterous old fool!" I said. "You

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