The Man Who Was Two

by Fred Merrick White, 1859-1935

Published: 1921
in »The Sydney Morning Herald«

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Chapter I

The Man in Motley.

The Throne Room in the Royal Windsor Hotel was discreetly full of diners—the management never allowed that sacred haven to be packed even in holiday times—and every little table, with its shaded pink lights, held its sheaf of youth and beauty spilling with laughter and dazzling with eyes as bright and alluring as the gems that seemed to float there on a sea of foamy froth cradled in pink and mauve chiffon and diaphanous lace. There was something exceedingly intimate in the

half-shrouded tables, each encrusted with the loveliest things that breathe and palpitate in this transient life of ours, and yet it seemed part of one smooth harmonious whole as if the elect gathered there were, after all, one exclusive family.

It was warm and alluring there that eventful New Year's Eve, with its lights and warmth and laughter, its well-trained waiters, and the scent of roses that clung caressingly to it all. The mere whisper of care or sorrow or tragedy there would have savoured of outrage, and yet those inconsequent diners were no more than ordinary flesh and blood with the heritage of sorrow and suffering that comes to us all. But not to-night, surely not to-night, amidst the wealth of flowers and the ripple of laughter and the sheer joy of being. And it was some half humorous philosophy like this that Roy Gilette was casting inconsequently before his three dinner companions as he sat at Sir Marston Manley's table in the centre of the room.

"Now, to an old traveller like me," he frivolled on, "this is a lasting joy. To a man of the world, Sir Marston, this is a dozen novels rolled into one. How many stories, how many plots for my film dramas that one day shall thrill the world are awaiting me here if only the gifts of Asmodeus were mine?"

Gilette waved his well-manicured hand comprehensively around and smiled into the faces of his companions. That clean-shaven, handsome face of his was distinctly alluring. Sir Marston smiled, too, but it was a smile of envy, that the famous painter successfully disguised behind his white flowing beard and wide-rimmed silver spectacles. Yet he loved to be with youth and bathe in it. And that was why he was entertaining youth and beauty tonight.

"It's good to hear that you are going to do something at last," he said "Even the youngest of us has his responsibilities. But the cinema! Really, my dear Roy."

"And why not?" Gilette demanded. "There's a great future before the pictorial drama when the cowboys cease from troubling and the Chaplins are at rest. And it fills me with grief, my dear old guardian, to see this professional jealousy. A painter who is the friend of kings ought to be beyond such weakness."

"Oh, well," the famous artist laughed, "I ought to be happy in the knowledge that you are doing something useful. But do you really mean it, dear boy? What about the famous comedy that was to make the shade of Sheridan turn uneasily in his grave? And the novel that should cause folk to forget the very name of Dickens."

The girl in the pink chiffon rippled merrily. There were lurking little demons in her eyes that looked like limpid lakes of unfathomable blue in the half-shades of the lights. And even the inconsequent Gilette was fully conscious of the witchery of them, though he knew that they could never be meant wholly for him. But he noted the round firmness of the cheeks and the exquisite colouring, indeed everything that gave Peggy Ferriss her own particular charm. Not that he was in love with this almost flawless little Devonshire beauty—what heart he cherished in that hot adventurous youth of his belonged to the more stately and self-contained beauty of Hetty Bond—the tall, dark girl who sat by Peggy's side.

There was nothing between Roy Gilette and Hetty Bond except the understanding of a perfect silence, no terms of intimate endearment, no exchange of caresses, only an ideal realisation that someday, when the wander lust had

burnt itself out, Gilette would come home and lay his sheaves and sword at Hetty's feet.

Dinner was nearly over now, and the spirit of the night was beginning to be felt on the air, a quickening of the pulses and the relaxation of New Year's Eve. There were little spurts and snaps as some of the many children there were getting busy with the crackers that lay in silver and blue and dazzling gold on the various tables. There were sharp crackles of laughter on all sides. Gilette had pulled one with Peggy, and the Quaker cap out of its gorgeous interior lay on the table. Roy's suggestion that Peggy should wear it had met with no response so far. Sooth to say, she was looking just a little wistfully at the two empty covers that lay undisturbed on the table.

"Oh, he'll come presently," Gilette laughed. "My dear Peggy, it you will bestow those engaging young charms on a cold-blooded man of science, you must put up with the consequences. But there really is no excuse for Pennington not turning up. I hope that those two have not been quarreling again."

This was the first allusion to the fact that the supper-party was not complete. It should have been made up with Walter Pennington, a barrister of some repute, and Raymond Mallison, Peggy's fiance, a man who was regarded as one of the coming celebrities in the scientific world that revolved round the afflicted in the way of blindness and deafness and the loss of speech. These two men had been fast friends at one time, but a misunderstanding had forced them apart, and this little dinner was intended to bring them together again. Mallison was ever a little uncertain, but there was no excuse for the defection of Pennington. So the meal had commenced without them: and now Peggy was beginning to get a little uneasy and annoyed.

"Oh, Raymond will be here in time for the Christmas tree and the dance," she said lightly. "Do go on telling us all about this new venture of yours, Mr. Gilette. Are you actually going to run a cinema company? Somewhere here in England?"

"See what Eton and Christ Church have done for him," Sir Marston smiled grimly, "What his poor mother would have said if she were alive I tremble to think. She, poor dear, could never make up her mind between the Woolsack and Canterbury. Personally, I could never visualise Roy in the role of an Archbishop."

"Oh, well," Gilette said. "One must not be too hard on the morbid fancies of a fond parent. It was one of my mother's delusions that I was capable of anything in that line."

As he sat there with the light shining on his dark, handsome face, with its keen humorous and intellectual lines, even the most cynical might have pardoned a fond parent's dreams. The man seemed to exude strength and power, bravery and courage were deeply stamped on him, and he possessed in a marked degree a bland audacity and assurance that was almost childlike in its semblance of unconsciousness. Indeed that charming impudence of his was almost a household word amongst his friends. As he was fond of quoting, the world was his oyster, and he had the weapons to open it. Youth and strength and fortune—what could any darling of the Gods ask for more?

"What can a man do?" he asked as he waved a comprehensive hand towards the brilliantly lighted room. "I can't get my plays produced unless I take a theatre of my own and that way madness lies. No publisher will look at my novels. Those

wily old Turks Say 'bosh' to my works, as some profound philosopher remarked on a certain historic occasion. So I am trying the pictures. My own crowd, called 'The Long Trail Players,' with a studio at Sheen and a big company are at present waiting for fine weather down in Devonshire. By the way, they are not far from Merston, Sir Marston."

"How splendid." Peggy cried. "Why, that's close to my home. Do you know that Raymond Mallison was brought up there too? And Sir Marston's summer studio is close by. I feel that I am going to have a most interesting summer. What a background Merston will make with all those glorious rocks and cliffs. Is it some great historical novel that you are adapting, Mr. Gilette."

"Well, no," Gilette said. "A modern story of crime and temptation. 'A poor thing but mine own,' as the immortal bard said. I got on to it when I spent all those months in the Argentine last year. And such a villain! A man with the polished manners of an archdeacon and the face of a Byron. I call it the 'Story of a Crime.' The crime isn't finished yet, but I hope to be in at the death. There's a lot in it about lip-reading that ought to interest Mallison. He's a dab at that sort of thing, and that's why I am so anxious to meet your young man. Not but what I am pretty good at the game myself."

"Oh, Roy is wonderful," Peggy exclaimed. "He says that with a proper school of lipreading and Braille, blind people and deaf mutes will in the future be as well—"

"Really?" Hetty Bond exclaimed. "It sounds like a fairy tale to me. I should like to see it done."

"Then you shall," Gilette said in his most audacious manner. "I got on to my big story entirely through it. Now watch those two people at the table opposite. With all this noise and clatter it is impossible to hear a word they say. Watch the woman's lips, one moment. Yes, that's right. She is saying that the din is making her head ache and wants to go on to a music hall for an hour and then come back for the dance. One moment and I will tell you where she wants to go. See, the man is speaking now. He calls the waiter. A box of Pathe's gloves, Hetty, to a ripe banana that he will tell the man to get him two stalls for the Palace."

To Miss Bond's astonishment it was exactly as Gilette had said. She caught the word 'Palace' as it fell from the waiter's lips, she saw him hurry away to the telephone and come back again with the lady's wraps, and watched her and her companion as they strolled away.

"Alone I did it," Gilette cried. "There's for you now, as they say in Wales. Magic while you wait. That sort of thing ought to teach the spiritualist mugs a lesson, but of course it won't. And when Mallison does come and after he is introduced to me—Good God! Talk of spirits—here's one. I wouldn't have him see me for a million. Excuse me, Sir Marston."

With that Gilette coolly but promptly lifted the big silver-rimmed glasses from the astonished painter's face and fitted them over his own eyes. Then he proceeded to snatch up the tissue paper Quaker cap from the table and hide his sleek dark head in it. As he did so a diner strolled down the gangway between the tables. He was not in evening dress, but was clad in a thick dark overcoat and carried a soft hat in his gloved hand. His clothes fitted his spare, elegant figure to perfection, his fine face exuded benevolence and high intelligence, his smile was broad and kindly. A fine silver beard swept his chest, and his shining white hair

set off a presence that would have commanded attention in any company. He passed into the vestibule and out of sight.

"What a fine, attractive man," Peggy cried, "Mr. Gilette, anyone would imagine that you were afraid of him."

"Well, I was in a mortal funk lest he should see me," Gilette confessed. "I—I—didn't know that he was in England."

There was just a shade of grey under Gilette's healthy tan as he spoke. The gay debonair manner and easy audacity had been wiped out as if with a sponge. Sir Marston noticed it as he held out an impatient hand for the ravished spectacles.

"Why, what is the matter!" he asked. "Any one would think that you had seen a ghost. Upon my word, you don't flatter the fighting blood of your ancestors just at present. But perhaps this benevolent-looking stranger has something to do with the immortal film-story."

Gilette seemed to shake himself free from some unseen horror with an effort. Then he was his old audacious self again.

"Never mind that," he said. "We famous authors don't believe in giving away the mystery in the early chapters. If that man had spotted me—but that would have been another story. Would you do me a great favour, Sir Marston? The height of cheek to ask, of course, but it is almost a desperate matter. Would you mind following that man out and ascertain where he goes to? I would not trouble you, but—"

"Sir Galahad to the rescue," the great painter laughed. "The spirit of adventure is not dead in me yet. Perhaps I also may have the felicity of appearing on your deathless film."

"Well, upon my word, it is more than likely," Gilette chuckled. "But time is fleeting. If you really don't mind—"

Sir Marston vanished with an agility that did more than credit to his years. Gilette dropped back in his chair with an air of undisguised relief. By this time the big room was quite full—coloured lamps began to twinkle and sparkle amidst the floral decorations, the ripple of happy childish laughter made music on the air. From all round the room came the whip-like crack of exploding bon-bons. Gilette could see the flush on the fair faces of his companions as the spirit of the hour wove its lure about them. Peggy seemed a little perturbed as she glanced at the still unoccupied places.

"'He cometh not, she said,'" Gilette quoted gaily. "Oh, these men of science. Wilt thou tread a measure with me, fair lady, for by my halidame the fiddlers are inviting us to the floor. I don't in the least know what a halidame is, but you are welcome to half mine. Waiter, a halidame on the half shell."

Gilette frivolled on for some minutes, and then in the doorway saw Sir Marston beckoning to him. There was a certain agitation about the great man that set Gilette fluttering. With a muttered excuse he followed the older man into the lounge.

"What is wrong?" he asked a little anxiously. "Has he gone?"

"To catch the American boat at Liverpool," Sir Marston explained. "Staying in the hotel and giving the name of Marne. But never mind that, Roy. Something dreadful has happened. I met your friend Rivers in the hall. He was looking for you. Listen. Pennington has been found in his chambers foully murdered."

“Murdered!” Gilette gasped. “Oh, impossible! When?”

“About an hour ago. And that is not the worst, Raymond Mallison has been arrested as the actual culprit.”

“Mallison!” Gilette whispered hoarsely. “Good God, Sir Marston, who is going to break this vile thing to Peggy Ferriss?”

Chapter II

The Valet‘s Story.

The two men regarded each other with strained anxious eyes. Sir Marston was as if suddenly ten years had been added to his life. He was white and haggard behind his glasses, whilst Gilette, standing there, seemed to be unconscious of the paper cap that he was still wearing.

“For heaven’s sake, take that thing off,” the artist groaned. “It looks so horribly cold-blooded, well, callous.”

Almost mechanically Gilette lifted his hand to his head. He crushed the gaudy tissue and flung it at his feet. A small Eton boy of his acquaintance grinned amiably, obviously waiting for the nod of recognition from such an athletic god as Gilette. But the little man in the white waistcoat might have been so much thin air so far as the object of his admiration was concerned.

The brilliantly-lighted rooms were filling up fast now and in the distance a band was playing some alluring dance music. From where he stood Gilette could see the two girls still seated at the table watching the gay throng and smiling as a child in shimmering hair and silken stockings threw herself with a cry of delight on Hetty Bond. It seemed almost impossible to couple all this abandon of happiness and gaiety with a sordid crime.

“Tell me all about it.” Gilette asked, “When did it happen and where? What did Rivers say? I can’t believe it. I have always heard people speak so well of Mallison. I was looking forward to meeting him to-night if only for Miss Ferriss’ sake.”

“I have known Mallison ever since he was a child,” Sir Marston went on in the same absent, tired voice. “His father died before he was born—a man in the army he was, and made a runaway match with his wife. They were poor enough because Mrs. Malllison’s father cast her off when she married and would never see her again. A sort of foreigner he was—half Spaniard, who made a great fortune cattle ranching in the Argentine. Proud as Lucifer, I’m told. They say that there was nobody good enough to associate with Marne.”

Gilette stiffened as if a spark of fire had scorched him.

“What name did you say?” he asked thickly. “Marne! Why, that is the name of the man you followed for me just now. Sir Marston, my big story turns on a man called Marne who lives in the Argentine. I mean the super-film I told you about. This is amazing. My story—but go on. Tell me all about Mallison. His father died, yes?”

"When he was a child," Sir Marston proceeded. "Leaving his widow very poor. All this took place a year or two before I took that studio of mine in Merston. I mean the old house where I do my painting all the summer. You've been there often enough."

Gilette nodded. Well enough he knew that smiling paradise where Sir Marston painted and golfed and recuperated all through the long golden summers. There was no more romantic or beautiful spot in the British Isles. Occasionally Gilette picnicked there in Manley's absence yet, strangely enough, he had never met the unhappy Mallison or the girl he was engaged to until the last fortnight, when Peggy had come to town from Herston to spend a few days with her old school friend, Hetty Bond.

"Well," Sir Marston muttered. "Miss Mallison and her boy—that is the poor chap we are speaking of—lived at Merston on a small income allowed by her father so long as she did not bother him and so long as she stayed in the heart of the country. Until the time of her death she never saw her father, and he refused to do anything for his grandson directly he was old enough to get his own living. Probably, old Marne is dead and buried by this time."

"I'm sure he isn't," Gilette exclaimed. "But that side of the story we shall come to all in good time. But what about the tragedy in Rutland Inn? Did it happen in Rutland Inn? Was Rivers looking for me when you saw him here just now?"

"So I gathered," Sir Marston said. "He says that you were one of the very last to see Walter Pennington this afternoon and when he heard what had happened, he came here at once, because you had told him that you were dining here with a party to-night."

"Did Rivers say anything more?"

"Very little. From what I can gather, Pennington got back to his quarters in Rutland Inn about seven o'clock and proceeded to his bedroom over his professional chambers at once. He told his man that he was dining out and that he needed nothing. A little while after the telephone bell rang and Fisher, that is Pennington's man, answered it. The message was for himself, to the effect that his brother wanted to see him for a moment and would he, Fisher, step round to the 'Green Man,' a little respectable public house in Armory-street. Fisher went up and, knocked at his master's door and got the requisite permission. He was away perhaps for three-quarters of an hour and came back a little annoyed at the discovery that the whole thing was a hoax, indeed, he found out that his brother was not even in town, but that he had gone off for a few days' work in the country. When Fisher found that his master's evening overcoat and silk scarf were still hanging up in the passage he began to get alarmed. Getting no reply, after knocking at the door of Pennington's bedroom, he went in and found Pennington dead on the floor with a ghastly wound on the back of the head."

"Yes, but where does Mallison come in?" Gilette asked abruptly.

"Ah, that is the worst feature," Sir Marston went on. "As Fisher was hurrying along the corridor in the direction of Pennington's suite he met Mallison coming along as if he had been calling on Pennington. He had a little black bag in his hand, and seemed in a great hurry. Fisher was rather surprised, because he knew that his master and Mallison had been on extremely bad terms for some time, and therefore, he took particular notice. He says he spoke to Mallison, who seemed

disturbed at being seen there, and he made no response. But Mallison was also recognised by two other members of the inn, and they also spoke to him. In each case he made no reply, but pushed on hurriedly into the darkness. These two men were the first to turn up when Fisher gave the alarm, and at once suspicion attached itself to Mallison. He was arrested in his rooms about an hour ago, and as he could not, or would not, give any account of himself until he came to dress for our party, the police took him to Brent-street station, and he is there now. I must go and see him in the morning, for I am convinced that there has been some lamentable mistake somewhere."

Gilette stood there for a few moments in anxious thought. It seemed almost sinful to him that all this mad gaiety was going on at a time when a fellow creature was beginning to fight for his very life. From where he was he could see the slim, graceful figure in pink and watch the happy laughter in Peggy's eyes. The fun was now reaching its height, the band played on alluringly, the giddy throng floated across the floor—a light foaming sea of rainbow hues, with the shimmer and point of diamonds here and there. The incongruity of it seemed to shriek alone in Gilette's ears as he watched.

"Not to-night," he protested. "You can't possibly see Mallison to-night. It's almost cruel to leave that poor girl there smiling and happy when there is this hideous thing to face. Will you go and fetch them out, or shall I?"

"No, no, I'll go," Sir Marston said. "It is old folk like me that understand sorrow best. We learn that sort of thing as we grow older—there are so many breaks for us. No, I'll go, Roy."

Gilette stood there anxiously waiting. He had learnt a lot to-night, far more than had been dreamt of in his philosophy. That story of his founded on tragic and criminal facts gleaned in the Argentine was following him even to London. The blazing trail had hit him full in the eyes not an hour ago. And in a dim way he was beginning to see the connection between this new and startling development and the history of Mallison's misfortune. Gilette had an unerring instinct for the psychology of crime, and already his mind was subconsciously piecing the scattered fragments together.

Then he put it out of his mind resolutely. There would be ample time for that. What he wanted now was to get this ghastly business of breaking the news to Peggy Ferriss out of the way. He saw her come along presently smiling and dimpling, with a little girl hanging on either arm. Hetty followed on close behind more sedately, but with an approving gleam in her eyes, too. The painter, white and agitated, brought up the rear. It was no easy matter to choke off the fairy manikins, but it was done at length, and then Sir Marston led the way to a secluded corner of the lounge. And it was not till then that Peggy grasped that there was something wrong.

"Why, what's the matter?"' she smiled. "Oh, you have heard that Raymond is not coming. What a shame! And Mr. Pennington, too."

"No, he is not coming, my dear," the painter said gently. "I want you to be brave, Peggy. Something has happened."

Peggy of the pale cheeks and dewy eyes seemed to divine the root of the trouble at once. She caught her lip between her white teeth.

“It’s Raymond,” she said. “I have had the feeling for the last hour. If he is dead, tell me at once. I shall know how to bear it.”

Then, very gently and tenderly with tears in his eyes, the old man told Peggy all that he had learnt. He saw the pallor washed off her clear pale cheek by the rising red tide of anger and indignation. It was just as he had expected.

“They must he mad,” she cried. “Oh, the idea of Raymond even thinking of such a thing is fantastic. Sir Marston, I must go to him. You must take me there at once. He would expect me.”

Sir Marston shook his head sorrowfully.

“I am afraid that is impossible,” he said. “The authorities do not allow that sort of thing. We will do everything that is necessary in the way of employing counsel, and in the morning I will see what else can be done. Perhaps If I call on the Home Secretary he may give me a special permit to visit the—I mean Mallison. My dear, you are the bravest girl I ever met. And God knows you want that courage.”

But Peggy broke down badly enough once she was in the taxi on her way home with Hetty. Then it was that the precious solace of tears came to her aid, and she flung herself, weeping passionately, on the sympathetic breast of her companion. And far into the night she and Hetty discussed the tragic situation.

“He couldn’t have done it,” she said for the fiftieth time. “I say he couldn’t. Ah. You don’t know Raymond. Nobody knows him as I do. Oh, it’s maddening to sit here doing nothing and Raymond perhaps imagining that we have all deserted him. Yes, I know that there was bad blood between Raymond and Walter Pennington, but it was only some silly quarrel over some statement that Raymond made in a criminal case where the poor boy was giving scientific evidence. Raymond thought that Mr. Pennington was trying to discredit him and he resented it. Then they carried it on in the club, and there was a bit of a scene. Talk about women gossiping.”

Hetty sat there powerless to stop the flow of Peggy’s grief. There was nothing to say or do until, utterly exhausted, Peggy allowed herself to be put into bed, where she declared she could not sleep. And almost immediately she fell into a deep, but restless, slumber. Then Hetty stole away, her eyes dim and aching with sympathy.

Chapter III

The Green Spectacles.

Sir Marston Manley had quite made up his mind what to do before he said good night to Gilette. He was not going to leave a stone unturned in getting to the bottom of this mystery. Ever since he had purchased his romantic studio-residence at Merston on the coast of North Devon he had known Raymond Mallison, who was now confronted by a charge that sounded almost grotesque to anyone who knew him. For the great artist had a high opinion of Mallison, who had thrust his way into a fine position by sheer hard work and genuine merit. He knew the hard struggle that Mallison’s mother had had to send her boy to a public

school and maintain, him at a London hospital afterwards. He knew that Mrs. Mallison's income was a slender one derived from her father on the other side of the world, but as to that, Marie Mallison said very little, nor would she hear of Manley accepting any share in her beloved Raymond's professional training. It was in vain that the great painter protested that he had no kith or kin in the world who stood in need of his help, and that in any case his will would see Raymond handsomely provided for. And so he had watched the boy's career with almost fatherly interest until he had carved out a real reputation for himself. This had taken some years, of course, during which time Sir Marston had painted those famous pictures of his, both in the grand house in Regent's Park and at the lovely old place at Merston. In the latter establishment Raymond Mallison came and went at his own sweet will, and occasionally took a hand with the catering of that delightful establishment, for there Manley lived the simple life and was looked after exclusively by an old woman and her fisherman husband, who shut up the rambling place in the winter, and retired to their own cottage on the beach.

Here Roy Gilette put in an occasional week or so during the fishing season, when he camped in the cottage and preferred to cater for himself. And, strange to say, he had never met Mallison, who had either been away at school or keeping his hospital terms in London whenever Gilette had paid one of his flying visits.

Obviously, then, Gilette could not be expected to take the same interest in the tragedy as did Sir Marston. We shall see presently how far the great artist's conclusions on this point were correct. He dropped Gilette presently, and gave his chauffeur directions to drive to the House of Commons, where, from the light in the tower, he could see that legislators were still sitting. The presentation of his card to an attendant in the lobby exercised its usual magical effect, and a few minutes later he found himself in the private room of the Home Secretary. Fortunately the great man had just emerged with flying colours from a verbal combat with a truculent member of the Opposition, and was consequently in his most amiable mood.

"Well, what can I do for you, my dear fellow?" he asked.

Sir Marston came to the point at once. He described the whole of the tragedy in detail, and wound up with a request for an order to see the prisoner in private. Mr. Calverley pursed his lips.

"My dear man," he protested, "this is most unusual. If you think that there is one law for the rich and—"

"Another for the politician," Sir Marston interrupted dryly. "That fact has not escaped me, Mr. Minister. We are old friends, and that being so, I can speak plainly. That boy's welfare is very dear to me, though he does not know it. I have watched his career from the time he was a little chap in knickerbockers, and never once has he disappointed me. And, dash it all, I was in love with his mother and would have married her, but she preferred to remain faithful to a memory. There is something desperately wrong here, and I mean to get to the bottom of it if it costs me half my fortune. And now you know all about it. You can give me that order if you choose."

"Very well, then," the Home Secretary growled. "But if some of those Red Flag chaps on the Opposition side below the gangway get wind of it, there will be trouble."

Sir Marston departed presently with the precious order in his pocket. He naturally concluded that Mallison would be brought before the presiding magistrate the following morning, when the police would give no more than evidence of arrest, and then ask for a formal remand of probably a week. It was his intention to see Mallison before he was brought into court. It was about half-past 9 the following morning when he passed over his permit to the inspector in charge, and a few moments later found himself in the cell where Raymond Mallison was detained.

It was a dreary and depressing place. A narrow whitewashed cell dimly lighted by a small barred window some eight feet from the ground, and containing nothing more than a wool mattress and a stool whereon reposed an empty basin, from which, obviously. Mallison had been eating something that passed as a breakfast. He sat on the bed with his head in his hands, a picture of lonely despair. He glanced up indifferently as Sir Marston entered, and a flush dyed his face.

Then he rose awkwardly enough, and half held out his hand.

"This—this is very kind of you," he whispered. "Sir Marston, if you only knew what it is to feel—"

But Manley was having nothing of that. He took Mallison's hand, and shook it warmly. Then he noticed for the first time that Mallison was wearing a pair of green-tinted spectacles. Under the right eye was a nasty red scar. Just for an instant Sir Marston's faith in his young friend was a little shaken. He pointed to the glasses.

"In the name of goodness, what have you been doing to yourself?" he asked. "What's wrong with your one eye?"

"Oh, that's nothing." Mallison said. "Just a bit of an accident after I got home to change last night. I got back too late for your dinner, as I told you I might do, and when I was changing to join you after I had a fancy to do a few exercises with my Sandow outfit. When I was on my back pulling at the elastic straps the hook in the wall gave away, and the fastening struck me violently in the eye. Nothing very serious, but by way of a precaution I put on these glasses, and very glad I am because I find that the trouble is likely to last for a month or so. I'm afraid that I have damaged the optic nerve. But why do you ask? Oh, well, in the circumstances, I suppose that anyone might ask a pointed question."

Mallison smiled a little bitterly as he spoke.

"You are quite wrong, my boy," Sir Marston said warmly. "I am quite prepared to believe everything that you say. Otherwise, I should not be here to-day. Naturally this has been a terrible shock to us all, but there is not one of your friends that count who is not absolutely convinced of your innocence."

"That is the sort of thing that brings the tears into the eyes," Mallison murmured. "And Peggy—how is she? It must have been a terrible shock to her. Did she send anything in—?"

"Peggy is as true as steel," Sir Marston said. "She's a girl in a million, Raymond. She absolutely refuses to hear a word against you. And, as she said last night, even if you were guilty. It would make no difference to her. Raymond, you are not guilty?"

"No more than you are," Mallison said with a quiet sincerity that carried conviction to the visitor's mind. "I was nowhere near Rutland Inn last night.

Pennington and myself have not spoken for months, friends as we used to be. You will remember that I thought he had carried the privilege of counsel too far when he tried to discredit me in the Venn case. It was just after 9 o'clock when I got back to my rooms, and I was just dressing to join your party when they came along and arrested me. I was dumbfounded."

"But where had you been?" Sir Marston asked. "You should have no difficulty in proving an alibi. Someone must have seen you."

"So I thought at first. But it is not so easy as you think. I don't remember coming in contact with anybody who knows me. Upon my word, Sir Marston, I am in more desperate case than I thought. Here are three credible witnesses—people who have no sort of a grudge against me—who come forward ready to swear that they saw me coming along the corridor leading from Pennington's chambers a few minutes before his man found him dead—murdered. His man positively identified me. Then there were those two men outside, acquaintances of mine. And, mind you, I didn't get back to my rooms until a quarter of an hour after Pennington's body was found. Oh, as regards time, they have a splendid case."

"But where were you all last night?" Sir Marston asked. "Can't you see how vitally important it is?"

Mallison gave a groan of something like despair.

"Of course I can," he admitted doggedly. "And it is just here that I am going to test your belief in my story to the breaking point. Let me try and explain. About five o'clock I had an urgent message on the telephone to meet Blake—that's our big man—at an address in Willesden for an unusually interesting operation. I need not bother you with the details. Anyway, it was the sort of case that appeals to me, and I wanted the experience. I rather wondered why the venue was a private house, although it didn't very much matter. So I arranged to be there. Being a little short of exercise, I decided to walk. When I got to the address in question I found that the people in the house had never heard of Blake, and that no operation was needed. There was nothing for it but to come back and apologise to Blake for my stupidity in mistaking the address, and so I walked back again. But, Sir Marston, I shall never get a magistrate to believe that story."

"You never can tell," Sir Marston murmured. Even to his ears it sounded exceedingly thin.

"Did you 'phone to Blake when you got back? But of course you did. Blake's evidence ought to be a tower of strength to you. At any rate it goes to prove that you promised to go to Willesden, and in the circumstances anybody might be excused for blundering over the address. Let's have Blake by all means."

"Oh, I 'phoned Blake all right," Mallison sighed. "I got him personally. It was not Blake who called me up originally, but some assistant at the hospital, as I imagined. You can picture my feelings now when Blake told me that he had sent for me, and that, as a matter of fact, he had been out of town all day. Sir Marston, some enemy of mine has done this thing. My story will sound ridiculous in court, especially when Blake is called to depose that he never made any attempt to get me on the telephone. So you see the more truthful I am the worse it looks for me. And yet, so far as I know, I have not a single enemy in the world. It sounds like a scrap from some wild melodrama in which the villain lays a deadly trap for the hero. Who is it that hates me so virulently to get me hanged?"

To this wildly improbable tale Sir Marston listened with a queer sinking of the heart. A blacker case against an accused man he had never listened to. Still, so far as he was concerned, he did not doubt Mallison for a moment. But as a man of the world he was forced to the conclusion that Mallison's statement was terribly inadequate in the face of the evidence possessed by the police.

"I believe you, Raymond," he said. "And I am quite sure that the others will share my view. But it is the jury that we have to think about. You must have the best advice that money can procure. But that I have already seen to. I asked my own man on the telephone before I came here, and he recommended a criminal attorney who has a big reputation in cases like yours, and he will be here in due course. I expect that the evidence to-day will only be formal and that the police will ask for a remand. Now is there anyone else that you would like to see, because if so I think that I can manage it? What shall I tell Peggy, for instance?"

Mallison looked with almost loving gratitude at the benign figure of his old friend whose presence had heartened him so much. Here was one with a world-wide reputation, the friend of rulers, who had put everything else aside to come at once to his assistance. It was good to have such a friend as Sir Marston Manley.

"I think I understand."' he said thickly. "My fondest love to Peggy and tell her how her faith inspires me. But no, she must not come here—the very atmosphere would break her heart. I must go my own way and stick it as best I can until I am free or until I am forced to turn my back upon the world. I shall not fear."

Then came a warder with a curt intimation that time was up, though he was civil enough so far as Sir Marston was concerned. It was for Mallison that the almost brutal brevity was reserved, and Manley could see how the sensitive blood tinged his face. It was the first taste of what might follow in the hard time to come.

Then along a narrow corridor, and after that the dingy light of the courthouse with its stuffy atmosphere and the foul reek of humanity at its worst. A belated and sickly fly was buzzing against the grimy window pane, a thin light filtered on to the seat where the magistrate had already taken his place. In the gallery at the back a woman of tender years was seated nursing a whining child, a woman who would have been pretty save for her rags and dirt and the black eye that she flaunted defiantly like a banner. In the well of the court the reporters and a solicitor or two lounged and listened with a bored air to the usual sordid charges. In the dock sprawled a young man in a fine overcoat plastered with mud who listened with some show of vanity to the statement that it had taken four policemen to remove him from the Palace Theatre on the previous evening. His bloodshot eye and draggled white dress-tie stamped the charge. Over all these hung a prevailing odour of beer and boot-leather that seemed to dominate everything else. It was a positive relief to Manley when presently the name of Raymond Mallison was called.

He stood there with the dim light shining on his face, thankful for the hurt that had compelled him to don the green spectacles. The magistrate looked casually at the charge sheet through his glasses.

"Um, yes," he mumbled. "Quite so. Raymond Mallison, of St. Agnes Hospital, charged with doing grievous bodily harm to one Walter Pennington. Does the prisoner plead guilty or not guilty?"

Thus the representative of the law, with an air of detachment absolutely wooden. A thin man, with the face of an actor and keen eyes that seemed to flash sparks from behind his pince-nez, jumped to his feet. The man on the bench leaned forward.

"Well, Mr. Linnell," he said combatively. "What is it? And why do you presume to interrupt me?"

"Represent the prisoner, your Worship," the other said in a quick staccato voice. "Only instructed by telephone this morning. Understood that I was retained for the defence on a charge of murder. Now find it reduced to a charge of doing grievous bodily harm. Most 'straordinary. Appeal to Inspector Price to—"

Rising from the well of the court. Inspector Price explained that a remarkable mistake had been made. It had transpired late the night before that Mr. Pennington was not dead, as the police had concluded, but was in a state of collapse from which he might emerge, but that if so it would be something in the nature of a miracle. The charge sheet would have to be amended, and the Inspector proceeded to do so. A great burst of thankfulness welled up in Mallison's heart. Whilst there was life in Pennington's body there was hope.

Then up rose a little fat man with a red face exuding good nature, and announced the fact that he represented the Treasury. Sir Marston knew him for one of the shrewdest lawyers in London. It was a plain story that he had to tell, but it went dead against the prisoner. No venom or vindictiveness, but a simple tale delivered in an almost apologetic manner, as if counsel and prisoner had met at dinner the night before, and the task was a hateful one. Then he subsided with a sigh, and John Fisher, Pennington's servant, stepped into the witness box with a story as plain as that of the Treasury solicitor.

On the night before he had been called up on the telephone to speak to someone who said that he represented the witness's brother. That message was subsequently proved to be a false one, for the witness found no sign of his brother at the arranged spot. Nor had the tenant of the house of call sent or passed such message.

"It was a hoax, in fact?" the magistrate suggested.

"It must 'ave been a hoax, sir," the witness declared. "My brother hadn't been in London all day. Then I goes back, thinkin' that something was wrong, and that it was a burglar's trick, me being alone in the master's chambers, and sure by this time as he had gone out to a party at some hotel. But when I gets back Mr. Pennington hadn't gone out, for his coat and silk scarf was still hangin' up in the 'all. As I couldn't make him 'ear, I goes into his bedroom and finds him dead, as I thought."

Fisher went on to describe the injury sustained by the wounded man and how he had telephoned to the police at once. He was wandering on, rather pleased with his impression, when he was pulled up short by the barrister representing the Crown.

"One moment," he said. "Let us go back a bit. Did you pass anyone as you came along the corridor leading to the front door of Mr. Pennington's chambers?"

"That's right, sir," the witness said affably. "I met the prisoner in the dock. Mr. Mallison, that is."

“You are quite sure? Remember that you are on your oath. You met the prisoner coming from the direction of Mr. Pennington’s chambers. Are there any other sets of chambers there?”

“Not on the ground floor, sir. There are others reached by a flight of stone stairs that turn to the right.”

“Um, the prisoner might have been coming from one of these. By the way, was he wearing the green glasses that he has on now?”

Innocent as the question was. Sir Marston could fathom the deadly import of it. He waited eagerly for the reply.

“No, he wasn’t, sir,” the witness said confidently. “That I’ll swear to. I spoke to him, for he used to visit Mr. Pennington regular at one time. I says, ‘Good evenin’, sir. Haven’t had the pleasure of seein’ you for a long time.’”

“And what did he say to that?” counsel asked.

“Just nothing, sir. He seemed a little annoyed or disturbed at seeing me, and he hurried off without a word. Mistaken, sir? No, I ain’t mistaken—I’ll swear to it anywheres.”

Then came two more witnesses, typical society men about town, both of whom were personally acquainted with Mallison, to give much the same testimony. They were waiting outside the Inn for a man who had arranged to meet them there. The friend had not turned up—he had asked them not to wait very long as possibly he might be detained—but in the meantime they had seen Mallison and had hailed him by name. He had not responded, but perhaps it had been a little too dark for the prisoner to be sure of them, and they had only made certain as to Mallison’s identity as he passed a lamp.

Sir Marston bent over and whispered some thing in Linnell’s ear. The other nodded as he rose to ask a question or two.

“What was the name of the gentleman that you were waiting for?” he queried. “And where does he come from?”

The witness looked a little surprised.

“Name of Marne,” he drawled. “From the Argentine and on his way to Liverpool last night.”

Sir Marston sat back in his chair with a stolid face and never a word escaped him. But he smiled like a man who is not displeased.

Chapter IV

The Dragging Hour.

It was all over a few minutes later and the prisoner was remanded for a week on the application of the police. A demand for bail was curtly refused, and then Sir Marston walked out of the dreary atmosphere of the courthouse infinitely glad to find himself in the open air once more. He lingered for a moment until Linnell emerged and stopped him for a few words regarding the case.

“I know that you are a busy man,” he said, “but I shall be obliged if you can give me a minute. You understand, Mr. Linnell, that no expense is to be spared in this dreadful business. Please look to me for all that is necessary.”

“I am quite at your disposal, Sir Marston,” the lawyer said. “And I can assure you—”

“Quite so, quite so; in which case perhaps you will be so good as to come with me as far as the Athenaeum Club, where we can talk quietly over a biscuit and a glass of sherry.”

Linnell would be delighted. He had an hour to spare which was quite at Sir Marston’s disposal. Presently they were seated in the seclusion of the famous club, and the painter began to talk.

“I am deeply interested in this matter,” he said. “I have known Raymond Mallison ever since he was a boy, and a finer character I have never met. You may say that it is purely prejudice on my part, but I cannot believe that he is guilty. Everything is against that theory, but there it is.”

“My opinion also, Sir Marston,” the lawyer murmured. “And I speak from a long experience of such cases. The old criminal lawyer can always tell. But, all the same, there is no disguising the fact that my client stands in deadly peril. Everything is against him—the witnesses are credible, and there can be no suggestion of animus so far as they I are concerned. And that business of the green spectacles is very suspicious. Crown counsel will make great play with that—they will say that it was a mark made in the struggle. I attach a lot of importance to that.”

“Yes, I was afraid you would say that,” Sir Marston went on, “though the explanation struck me as quite logical. Is it possible that young Mallison is concealing something? I mean, is he shielding somebody out of quixotic motives?”

“Possibly,” the lawyer agreed. “But I might say the same thing about you. For instance, why did you ask me to put that question to the witness Marshall, who testified to the fact that he saw my client outside Rutland Inn? What possible connection can there be between the charge and a mere stranger called Marne, who seems to be a resident of the Argentine?”

“Really, I don’t know,” Sir Marston confessed frankly. “Only that a young friend of mine is acquainted with a man called Marne, who was dining at the Royal Windsor last night. It was a sort of second sight that prompted me to suggest the question. I have a presentiment that Marne could tell us a great deal. However, I will ask my young friend and let you know.”

“But hasn’t this man Marne left the country?” Linnell asked. “At any rate, that is my impression. We shall have to look a great deal nearer home than that. Meanwhile, I should like to go as far as Rutland Inn and examine the scene of the outrage. The police will put no obstacle in the way—I am too well in with them for that. And it you have the time to come along, Sir Marston—”

Manley wished for nothing better. It was impossible for him to think of anything else just now, and he jumped at Linnell’s suggestion. Not that he expected to come upon anything startling, but the feeling that he was doing something had a soothing effect. So they came presently to the rather gloomy chambers in Rutland Inn, only to find that the place was deserted, save for Fisher, who informed them that his employer had been removed early that morning to a hospital where he

could be properly looked after. He was still alive and might possibly recover, but could never be the same man again. Fisher went on to say that he was locking the place up and would have been gone a few minutes later. He raised no objection to his visitors seeing over the library where the outrage had taken place, and went off presently leaving Manley and his companion alone there.

For some time there was nothing to be seen in the least calculated to throw any light on the tragedy. Then from a mass of legal looking documents and papers on a large table Sir Marston picked up a photograph the sight of which brought him up all standing.

It was a cabinet picture of the man he had seen in the Royal Windsor the previous night—the man called Marne.

"Look at this," he said tensely. "This is Marne—the man alluded to by the witness Marshall. Surely this must have some bearing on the crime. This man crops up for all the world like King Charles's head in Mr. Dick's manifesto. You remember your Dickens, of course? But where is the sinister connection?"

"I am afraid that I cannot see any," the lawyer said. "Why should not Pennington be acquainted with a man called Marne? And why shouldn't you have seen him at the Royal Windsor last night? And if he was dining there, why he must have been in the hotel at the moment of the outrage on Mr. Pennington. Whereas my client was proved beyond a demonstration to have been practically on Mr. Pennington's threshold within a few minutes of the crime. Depend upon it this Marne trial will prove little better than a will o' the wisp."

Sir Marston shook his head, only half convinced.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, "but all the same I should like a note made of that photograph. Perhaps you will mention it to the authorities. By the way, I notice that the thing was taken at Buenos Aires. Not that it much matters."

Evidently there was nothing more to be gained here, and the searchers after truth parted a little later and went their different ways. Manley walked thoughtfully in the direction of Pont-street, where Peggy Ferriss was staying with Hetty Bond and her mother. Mrs. Bond, being a confirmed invalid, was not visible, but Hetty came into the drawing-room eager for the latest intelligence.

"The case is remanded for a week," Sir Marston explained. "I am afraid that it looks very black against Raymond, but everything is being done for him. How is Peggy?"

"Bearing up wonderfully," Hetty explained. "Very much distressed, of course, but splendid. She is asleep, and I think it would be a shame to disturb her. Have you seen Raymond?"

"I saw him this morning for quite a long time," Sir Marston replied. "He is quite well and cheerful with the exception of his eyes. He had an accident with his gymnastic apparatus, and got a nasty blow in the face. I am doing all I can for him, and have told the lawyer defending the case that no expense is to be spared. We will have the finest barrister at the Bar if it costs a thousand pounds. Oh, Raymond will come through it yet. There has either been an extraordinary mistake or Raymond is the victim of a dastardly plot to deprive him of his liberty. And I mean to get to the bottom of it if it costs me all the money I possess."

"Did Roy go with you?" Hetty asked. "He is so clever—"

"Yes, I know," Sir Marston said a little dryly, "but he is sometimes too clever. That inconsequent humour of his is very alluring, but sometimes it goes too far. It would certainly be out of place in a prison cell. I have no doubt that he is working out some ingenious theory of his own dexterously woven into that beloved film of his, but those high intellectual stunts are quite outside the region of practical politics. But when I see him at lunch-time I have no doubt that he will have found a solution."

But Roy Gilette's usual place at the luncheon table was empty when Sir Marston got back to the big house in Regent's Park, and he was compelled to take his midday meal alone—a thing that he disliked, especially just now, when he was filled with all those distracting thoughts. At such times Roy's breezy optimism acted as a fine mental tonic. Tea came at length, and with it Roy Gilette, in his very best form. He had apparently thrown off the alarm and horror created the night before by the arrest of Raymond Mallison, and was once more his clever, brilliant, humorous self.

"Hello, hello," he cried. "Upon my word, that was a nice trick you played me this morning. Why didn't you 'phone me to come along? I can't tell you yet how interested I am in this case, and why I feel convinced that it is in some way connected with my great film story. But it doesn't matter, I've just read all about it in the 'Evening News' early edition, and so I am pretty well *au fait* with what happened at the police court."

"I think you were just as well away," Sir Marston said. "Oh, by the way, I prompted one question that probably does not appear in the printed evidence. You remember one of those witnesses outside Rutland Inn said that he and his friend were waiting for somebody. I mean one of the men who positively identified poor Mallison, and what do you think he said, I mean the witness? He said they were waiting for a man called Marne who was about to go to Liverpool on his way back to the Argentine."

"What?" Gilette cried, jumping to his feet. "What? Here, give me a time-table. I must be off to Liverpool at once, and if I don't come back to-morrow I shall be on my way to the Argentine, too. Lord, what a story it's going to be."

He bounced out, leaving Manley dumb with astonishment.

Chapter V

The Verdict.

The weary time had dragged on with one adjournment after another, until at length Raymond Mallison was committed for trial on a charge of attempted murder. Fortunately for him, Walter Pennington's injuries had not proved fatal, though it was doubtful if the injured man would ever be himself again. There had been some trouble which had interfered with the spine, and it looked as if Pennington would in future be a hopeless imbecile. All this had taken time, and when the day came for Mallison to take his trial at the Central Criminal Court,

more than four months had elapsed. During that period nothing had been heard of Gilette except a postcard or two from the Argentine, and it was just like that brilliantly erratic genius to put in a dramatic appearance at a psychological moment. He dropped in on Sir Marston the night before the trial as if he had not been away at all.

"Well, here we are again," he said. "Just back from foreign shores. I have had a fine time out yonder, and I can tell you that the big film story moves apace. I have got all the Argentine details worked out, and I am back here because I feel it in my bones that the dramatic climax will take place in England."

"It all sounds very interesting," Sir Marston smiled. "But what have you been doing all the time?"

"Oh, practically everything. Clerk in a store, cattle-driving up country. For a whole fortnight I posed before an audience of cowboys as a magician. Jolly successful, too. As a conjuror they regarded me as 'It.' But never mind about me. Is it true that Mallison is to be tried to-morrow?"

Sir Marston nodded, and Gilette went on.

"Poor chap," he said. "It's a rum thing, Sir Marston, that I never ran against him. I know Peggy well enough, and I have been coming and going to Merston for years. And yet I never had a chance to see Mallison. I don't even know what he's like."

"Oh, well," Sir Marston said. "It doesn't matter. You see in Mallison's early days I had not the privilege of being your guardian. You never came to Merston when you were a schoolboy, and when you began visiting my Merston studio Mallison was in London carving out his career. But I suppose you'll go to the court to-morrow?"

"Why, yes," Gilette said dryly. "I came back almost on purpose. Unless I am greatly mistaken, that trial scene will figure in my big cinema play. But what about Peggy?"

"Oh, the poor child's bearing up well enough," the painter explained. "I believe she insists upon being present. I have tried my best to dissuade her, and so has Hetty, but all to no avail. I think it is a great mistake. Mallison is bound to be convicted; in fact, there is no alternative. As a protest I propose to stay away myself. I may have to attend as a witness to character, but beyond that I would rather keep out of it."

It was a grey and gloomy day that dawned on Mallison's trial, and the Central Criminal Court bore a chilling and forbidding aspect as Gilette turned into the building in company with Peggy Ferriss and Hetty Bond. He had gone round at Mrs. Bond's house with the idea of giving the girls some support, and Peggy had clutched at it gratefully. She looked very pale and drawn, and was evidently suffering keenly from the suspense and mental agony of the past few months. Moreover there was nothing in the way of hope to sustain her. She had tried to convince herself that some time or another the truth would be established, and the overwhelming evidence against Roy Mallison be dissipated by the cold logic of events. But nothing in the way of a miracle had happened, and she knew now that Mallison would have to suffer for what she was convinced was the crime of another. She sat there, in a dim corner of the court, watching the proceedings, and each minute becoming more and more convinced that there was no hope for

the man in the dock. It seemed to her that the whole thing was some evil dream, and that the slight figure there, the centre of all eyes, was not her lover but some figment of a diseased imagination. And when the time came to adjourn for luncheon, and the crushing weight of evidence against the prisoner piled higher and higher, she felt that she could stand it no longer.

"Take me away," she whispered to Hetty.

"Take me back to your house and let me lie somewhere and die. Oh, why did I come? Why didn't I listen to reason?"

Gilette rose promptly enough and presently put the two girls into a taxi. He came back to the court-house after lunch, and sat there following the proceedings with the deepest interest until at length the judge summed up dead against the prisoner, and the jury had retired to consider their verdict. It was impossible for Gilette to see the prisoner's face, for he kept it more or less steadily turned to the jury box, and, moreover, in the dimly-lighted court with its grey, depressing atmosphere, it was impossible to recognise anyone even a few yards away. Then with a sudden restlessness, which he would have found it difficult to account for, Gilette rose and left the court. He knew that it would be some time before the jury came back with their verdict, for the prisoner's counsel had raised one or two ingenious legal points, and these the judge had been at some pains to explain to the jury.

It was nearly dark when Gilette reached the street, and a cold slanting rain had already begun to fall, but he hardly heeded this, for his mind just then was far away. Nobody knew except himself how this tangled skein of crime and mystery was inexplicably wound in with the strange course of events which had sent him hot-foot to the Argentine. But sooner or later, unless he was greatly mistaken, the broken pieces of the puzzle would be fitted together and the amazing story brought to a logical conclusion. All this was rather confused and mixed in Gilette's mind, but that sanguine temperament of his, admitted of no failure. He walked along the dark wet streets seeing men as trees, and more or less lost to his surroundings. He was even unaware of the fact that it was raining; he was a different Gilette altogether from the volatile humorous youth that most of his friends accepted as the real man. And just then, when his thoughts were farthest enough away, he almost collided with a slender, veiled figure coming towards him.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, snatching at his hat. "Really, I—Peggy, good heavens, is that you?"

"I couldn't help it," Peggy said in a small, still voice. "I lay on my bed trying to sleep, but thinking, thinking, until I felt as if I was going mad. Then I slipped out without the others knowing, and came down here, because I could not wait for the verdict. Not but what I know exactly what it will be. Let us walk. Somewhere, anywhere, so that I can get away from myself. I suppose that it is not all over yet?"

"I think not," Gilette said. "That's what I'm waiting for. My dear girl, I have grown as restless as you are—I simply couldn't stay in court. Look here, let me put you into a cab. Do you know how hard it is raining?"

"Oh, what does that matter?" Peggy cried. "What does it matter if I'm wet through? Let us walk."

They moved along the streets in silence for the best part of an hour or more, but always coming hack to the place where they had met, and where they were likely

to get the first news. It was raining dismally still, a thin driving pencil of rain volleyed down the streets by the strong wind that was blowing. And so they wandered on side by side until presently a newsboy appeared in the distance shouting his wares. He came long, heedless of the storm, with a pile of wet sheets on his shoulders.

"'Evenin' Noos,'" he cried. "'Evenin' Noos.' Six-thirty edition. All the winners. Dastardly outrage in Clerkenwell. The Pennington case. Verdict of the jury. Speshul."

Peggy drew a long deep breath. Then she threw back her veil and looked Gilette straight in the face. She was deadly pale, but her eyes were brave enough.

"Get a paper," she whispered.

Gilette snatched a paper from the boy's shoulder and flung him a coin. Then he fluttered over the damp leaves until he came to the blank whiteness of the Stop Press column, and his eyes followed the one blurred line in the centre of it. The rain spat on the paper and blurred it still worse.

"Pennington Case," he read. "Verdict. Five years' penal servitude." And that was all.

Chapter VI

Behind the Bars.

Many weary months had elapsed since Raymond Mallison had disappeared from the world and his place had known him no more. A year or more had dragged along, and now it was the spring of the poet, and all nature outside was rejoicing in the glorious weather. But there was little enough of that in the gloom of Slagmoor Prison, where Mallison now was, and the mere glimpse of an occasional burst of sunshine gave him a longing at the heart and a pain that almost brought the tears to his eyes. He had taken it hard enough at first, and the spirit of rebellion raged within him; but that was all gone now, and something like despair had taken the place of the more combative feeling. He had grown a little grey on the temples, and his eyes were a trifle sunken, but otherwise he had altered little. Before him lay a weary prospect, stretching out another three years at least, even with the reduction of his sentence allowable for good conduct, and the deadly monotony of it fretted him at times to the soul. Once a month he was permitted a letter or two from the outside world, but it was inevitable that his correspondence should be restricted and somewhat restrained, because before it passed into his hands it was examined by the governor of the prison.

But his friends were loyal enough; he heard at frequent intervals from Peggy Ferriss, and Sir Marston Manley, and Hetty Bond, but it was very little he gathered from these letters as to what was going on in the outer world. He knew, of course, that Walter Pennington was not dead. Had it been otherwise, Mallison would have stood in the dock on a still more serious charge. His whilom friend, indeed, had quite recovered from his injuries.

But Pennington still stuck to the story as told by the witnesses during the course of the trial. He was absolutely certain that he had been attacked in his chambers by Mallison—a strange delusion on the barrister's part, and one, no doubt, coloured by what he had heard from other witnesses. And so the thing had drifted on—the same strange mystery that apparently baffled every attempt at solution. For Sir Marston Manley had been untiring in his efforts to clear up the tangle, and up to now, had spent a large sum in vain. It seemed to Raymond as if he would have to go through with it to the end, and emerge from his prison presently a broken man, with no hope for the future, and nothing to sustain him beyond the knowledge that Peggy was absolutely convinced of his innocence.

Not that that made much material difference, because, whatever happened in the future, Mallison was determined that nothing should induce him to drag Peggy down to his level. It would be a hard task, because Peggy had announced her intention of marrying him in any case, but that could never be, and however much she suffered Mallison would be firm. And so the months drifted on, with no hope in the present, and no promise in the future.

And yet, in himself, Mallison was well enough. The fine moorland air of the prison was like so much wine, the plain food was plentiful enough, and the exercise kept him in a fine and hard physical condition. He had rebelled against the manual labour at first, and had asked if he could not be given work to do which was likely to be of some use to the community. He wanted to put his scientific knowledge to practical work, but the governor of the prison had shaken his head. He was not unsympathetic, but he was an official, with the official mind, and he could not admit of anything outside the usual routine.

Therefore, there was nothing better for it than for Mallison to dig and plough, and make himself useful out of doors. Gradually he was learning something of convict life, though he had carefully abstained from taking any interest in his fellow prisoners at first; but the awful solitude had at length begun to tell upon him, so that if he meant to retain his reason, he must have someone to talk to. There were opportunities for this in the prison library, and at meal times, when the better type of convict and the prisoners who accepted their sentences philosophically, were allowed to meet at certain hours and talk under the eye of a more or less sympathetic warder. And thus it came about that Mallison got a view of life at quite a new angle, and heard many experiences that he had not even imagined before his trouble.

There were some men, of course, who were frankly impossible, the low and brutal type that nothing could tame—men who were predestined to pass most of their lives in gaol from the very first. It was amongst these that the warders moved cautiously, with their rifles in their hands; but those custodians, by long experience, had learnt something of the men under them, and there were many prisoners at Slagmoor who enjoyed a fair degree of latitude. And amongst these was one who gave his name to Mallison as Philip Baillie. He was obviously a man of education, and, as a public school boy himself, Mallison did not doubt when he said that he had been at a famous educational establishment. By favour of a friendly warder those two sat next to one another at meals, and for one hour a day the prison library was at their disposal. And strange to say, Baillie seemed to know all about Mallison and why he was at Slagmoor.

“Now, how did you find that out?” Raymond asked.

“Oh, that was easy enough,” Baillie replied. “You’ll know when you’ve been here a bit longer. There’s a sort of free-masonry in gaols which the authorities rather wink at, so long as it does not lead to trouble. And besides, don’t forget that I am a good-conduct man, and see a paper every day. I know you are Mallison, who was convicted of assaulting Walter Pennington. I knew it the very first day you came into the gaol. I read the case in one of the papers, and, do you know, I am half inclined to believe that you have been very unfortunate.”

Just for a moment Mallison had hesitated to reply. The wound was still very raw, and he did not feel like discussing his trouble with anyone. But he was human after all, and the desire for companionship was very great.

“I am absolutely innocent,” he murmured. “There has been a terrible mistake somewhere, or I am the victim of a vile conspiracy. But probably I shall never know.”

“They all say that,” Baillie smiled. “There isn’t an old ‘lag’ in the prison, not amongst those who have been convicted a score of times, who won’t tell you that he is innocent. I don’t know why it is, but every rascal in the world has a passionate desire to pose as an honest man. It is an example, I suppose, of the fact that the lowest of us has a conscience.”

Mallison thrilled indignantly.

“If you don’t believe me,” he began. “Why in that case—”

“Here, don’t get angry,” Baillie said. “Of course I believe you. I have read your case very carefully, and I believe that there has been a conspiracy against you. You are one of the few men who really are innocent.”

“Including yourself, I hope,” Mallison said politely.

“So I should say, if I was talking to anybody else within these walls,” Baillie grinned.

“But I don’t want to try and fool a man like you. I am guilty enough. Forgery is my trouble. You see, I was an artist in black and white, and from the time I was at school I always had a fatal knack of copying signatures. I could do it with a turn of the wrist. And when I got out into the world and had to look after myself, owing to the fact that my father died almost penniless, I was fool enough to live in the old way. You see, I was rather lucky with my sketches at first. Then I had the usual slump, and before I knew where I was, I was up to my neck in debt. Don’t ask me how it came about, but there was a certain rich man who was rather fond of posing as a Bohemian, and I forged his signature to a big cheque. I thought he was one of the careless sort of men, who would never find it out, but he did. He prosecuted me, and I got six months.”

“Six months?” Mallison asked. “Six months only? Then what are you doing in a convict prison?”

“Ah, that was the first time,” Baillie said coolly. “When I came out, of course I was done for. Most of my friends turned their backs on me, and, though there were others who no doubt would have helped, I was too ashamed, or too proud, to go near them. Then others approached me, professional criminals who knew my record and what I could do, and that was the beginning of the end. My idea was to make a few thousand pounds or so and try and live the past down, perhaps in

America. The same ill-luck followed me: the police were too clever for us, and I got five years. And so far as I am concerned, that is my story."

From that time something like a friendship sprang up between the two men, and because of the comradeship between them Mallison became more reconciled to his lot. It was lonely enough there on the open moor, with its dreary outlook, and nothing to do, for the most part, but till the poor soil and occasionally pass a week or so in the stone quarries, it was bad enough in the dreary winter weather, when the east winds swept over the tableland, and the sun was hidden for days, but it was worse still the first spring, when the hillsides were all aflame with gorse, and the larks were singing overhead in the blue dome, it was at times like these, when all the world rejoiced in the coming of summer and the feeling of freedom, that Mallison suffered most. There were days when he felt almost impelled to fling himself headlong down the stone quarries, and end it once and for all.

"Is it always like this?" he asked Baillie one afternoon early in April, when they were sweating over their barrows. "Don't we ever get a chance to see anything but limestone and gorse, and these everlasting fogs?"

"Oh, occasionally," Baillie said. "Last summer they used to send gangs of us as far as the coast, which is only twenty miles away. We were making a new cliff road there, and so far as I can ascertain, it isn't finished yet."

"That sounds interesting," Mallison said. "I had quite forgotten the coast was so near. I'd give anything to have a look at the sea again. How do we get there?"

"We go by train. Do you happen to know anything of this part of the world?"

With a thrill Mallison remembered for the first time that he was in North Devon. It was the country where he had been born and bred; he knew every inch of the coast for miles, and his heart was in it as it ever had been.

"Yes," he said. "I know Merston very well; in fact, I was born there. I lived there till I went to school. Come to think of it, Merston can't be far off."

"Not more than 15 miles," Baillie explained. "There is a light railway that runs across the moor from Everstone to Charlock. They used to take us to Witch's Gate Station, and we went by that little railway to our work. The train used to stop on purpose to let us get down."

Mallison drew a long, deep breath. He could see all the glory of that magnificent coast, with its clear trout streams running through wooded valleys to the sea; he could see the gigantic cliffs, and the towering expanse of Hangman's Rock pointing to the sky, and the perilous path down to the beach from the summit, which had once been shown him by an old fisherman. And on one occasion, at the risk of his neck, he had climbed up that secret path to the top, and actually down again. It had been something in the nature of a miracle, and he had never ventured to attempt it again. But he could see every step of the way, even after a lapse of all these years; he could see the group of bushes fringing a great overhanging rock where he had lain to recover his breath, until he had felt equal to tackling the last dizzy twenty feet or so. He could see the long stretch of sands at the foot of Hangman's Rock, and the glorious walk from thence four miles to the quaint old village of Merston, where he had lived with his mother until she died. He recollected, too, the narrow cliff roadway along the top, and how the old fisherman had always prophesied that some day or another the road would collapse, and that another one would have to be cut out of the cliff-side, along there by Hangman's

Rock. All this seemed to be a long way off, as if he were looking at light through the wrong end of a telescope, but he could see it plainly enough. And a wild longing to revisit the scenes of his youth possessed him.

"I know every blade of grass, and every twig there," he said. "It was there that I first found a raven's egg, and half-way up one of the cliffs one day I located the nest of a peregrine falcon. I very nearly lost my life on that occasion. Well, perhaps, it would have been better if I had."

"Here, cheer up," Baillie smiled. "Not but what I know the feeling exactly. And if you are particularly anxious to see that spot again, I have no doubt you will. I'll find out it the road is finished or not."

It was a day or two later, when the weather had grown suddenly warmer, and the whole moorland was enveloped in fog, so that it was almost impossible to work out of doors, when Baillie came along with the desired information.

"It's all right," he said. "That road isn't finished yet. It's just as it was when we left off last year. It was too dangerous to work there in the October gales, but we've got to finish it all right."

"Ah, if I could only be one of them," Mallison said.

"Oh, I'll work that for you," Baillie replied. "I am rather well in with Donaldson, who is one of our head warders. I mean the chap with the red beard. I made a little sketch for him of his little daughter, and he's as proud of it as if it had come out of the Academy. Any little thing that Donaldson can do for me, he will do, I am sure."

A few days passed, and Mallison heard no more of the matter. And, indeed, it was passing out of his mind altogether when Baillie recalled the subject again, during the precious library hour.

"I have been talking to Donaldson," he whispered. "I had to be rather careful, because those chaps are so infernally suspicious, and if I had told him that you knew Hangman's Rock like an open book, he would have been certain to have jumped to the conclusion that you have got something in the back of your mind. So I had to work it pretty carefully. Donaldson knows that you and I are pals, and I fixed up some yarn to the effect that you were getting into a very melancholy state, and that a change of scenery would do you good. He is not a bad chap, is Donaldson, and if you talk to him about that little girl of his, you can do anything with him. So I suggested that the first time there was anything doing off the moor he might put you into the gang. Of course, I had got that road in my mind, and it's all the easier because most of the men here hate travelling by train. You see, to begin with, we are handcuffed in gangs to prevent escape, and besides, passengers in the train are always so curious. Anyhow, Donaldson promised that when the weather cleared he will see what he can do. Then I spoke about the new Merston road, and he let on that work there was beginning almost at once."

"That's very good of you," Mallison said gratefully. "At any rate, it is something to look forward to. It is a hateful idea, to think of travelling in gangs chained together, like so many wild beasts, and there is always the chance that someone might recognise you. But the mere fact that I am going to see Merston once more is like a glass of champagne to me."

"I wonder if I shall ever taste it again," Baillie smiled. "I very much doubt it, but I'd give all the champagne in the world for one little cigarette. I wonder if you miss

your tobacco, Mallison. I've been without mine now for over two years, and the longing is as great as over."

But Mallison was not listening. His mind was far away along those sunny cliffs, where he could see Hangman's Bock standing like a sentinel over the smiling sea, and the village of Merston climbing the hillside with every cottage smothered with fuchsias and the begonias blazing in front of them.

Chapter VII

The Hangman's Rock.

Mallison woke up one morning early in May with his usual feeling of despair, and the dreariness of life, to find a slanting ray of sunshine penetrating into his cell, and the consciousness that the melancholy fogs had cleared away. He could hear the larks singing overhead, and catch the note of a blackbird somewhere in the distance, so that even he was uplifted and strangely moved by the beauty of the morning. There was, of course, the dreary routine of cell-cleaning, followed by breakfast, after which the various gangs were gathered together, presumedly with a view to the weary monotony of the quarries. But presently Baillie sidled along beside Mallison and whispered in his ear.

"It's all right," he said. "No quarry today; we are going to start work on the new cliff road, and what's more, we are going to stick to it until it is finished."

Mallison said nothing, though he was moved by the news to an extent which rather surprised him. He was going to see the sea again, from the top of Hangman's Rock, and gaze once more at the village of Merston, climbing up the side of the cliff like some gleaming white snake in the sunshine. He was going to see the place where he was born, and away on the far side, that big rambling bungalow of Sir Marston Manley's where the great painter spent his summer and completed some of his finest pictures. It was too early yet for Manley to be down there, as he rarely put in an appearance in these parts until the end of July, therefore, the bungalow, with all its wonderful art treasures, would be closed as it invariably was this time of year, being aired and cleaned up occasionally by the aged fisherman and his wife who were imported for the occasion.

It was here, in this bungalow, that Mallison had spent some of his happiest days. He could see the big hall in his mind's eye, with its ancient armour and fine Eastern rugs; he remembered vividly now how interested he had been when Sir Marston had first installed his telephone. It was almost a phenomenon in those days, and it had been one of Mallison's keenest delights to call up distant towns, like Plymouth for instance, and transact certain minor details of the great man's business.

And all this he was going to look at once more. He was dimly conscious of certain orders which were being given by half a dozen warders who were in charge of the party, and presently they moved off, across the moor in the direction of the little station on the light railway that was going to carry them to their destination.

It was a hateful and humiliating business presently, to stand on the platform and wait till the little light engine came along in the distance. There were certain carriages set apart for the convicts, but this did not prevent passengers craning their heads out of the carriages to gaze with eager curious eyes upon the outcasts in the blue overalls, who stood there, half ashamed, and half defiant, until the train moved on.

They were safe from the public gaze now, at any rate, and, unchecked by the presence of the warders, began to talk eagerly amongst themselves. It was a new experience for them, and one which for the most part, they appreciated. A young convict with a wistful face and an almost tender expression in his eyes, lifted up his head presently and sniffed.

"I can smell the sea," he said almost joyously. "Can't you chaps feel the breath of it on your lips?"

"You are fond of the sea?" Mallison asked.

"I was born at sea," the other man said. "My father was captain of a tramp steamer, and for the first 20 years of my life I was hardly ever off the water. Seen pretty well every place in the world, I have. Fairly gets into my blood, it does, and when I'm out of all this I shall go back to it again. There is always a place waiting for me."

There was a story behind all this, Mallison thought, and would have liked to be alone with the speaker, and hear something of it. For the man who sat opposite had nothing about him to suggest the average criminal. But then, there were scores of such cases at Slagmoor, and it seemed to Mallison that any novelist who knew his work might pick up a hundred stories at Slagmoor that would be something more than fascinating in the way of romance.

And then presently the train stopped, and the long stream of men in blue overalls found themselves creeping through a vast expanse of woodland, at the foot of which a trout stream went straight to the sea. Mallison could see a fisherman or two at work, and presently one of these, in his workmanlike suit of Harris tweeds, strolled casually by with a pipe in his mouth. On the fresh morning air the incense from his tobacco lay breast high, like some burning scent.

"Ah, lucky devil," Baillie murmured in Mallison's ear. "I don't wish that chap any harm, but if I were alone, I think I could murder him for a pipeful of tobacco. A man ought to have six months for puffing his Cavendish in the face of a chap like myself. But, there, I suppose it will come all right in time."

They passed through the woods, all green with the glory of new fern fronds, and blue with the carpet of bluebells at their foot. And every step they went brought Mallison nearer and nearer to the familiar ground, until at length he could see the summit of Hangman's Rock, that towered nine hundred feet over their heads. He turned away for a moment to fight the eagerness that had overcome him, for every step he took now brought back some recollection to his mind, and filled him with mingled joy and sadness.

"I feel like a man in a dream," he said to Baillie. "I shall wake up presently and find myself in my cell. There isn't an inch here that doesn't appeal to me."

"Yes, I think I can understand the feeling," Baillie, replied. "It's a lovely spot, isn't it?"

They were climbing the rising road now, until they came presently to the summit of the great cliff. Here a large portion of the road for some half-mile or more had given way, so that the path remaining was too narrow to allow more than perhaps a couple of foot-passengers abreast. It was necessary, therefore, to cut through the inside portion of the cliff, and make practically a fresh road over the shoulder of the hill to the village of Merston beyond. There were wooden huts here and there filled with the necessary tools, which had been left over from the last winter, and presently the gang, under the orders of the warders, fetched these out, and the work on the road began. Behind the pathway the cliff rose sheer for another fifty feet or so; therefore it was only necessary to have an armed jailor at either end of the cutting to render every means of escape impossible. Once these were posted the warders somewhat relaxed their vigilance; thus it was possible for a fair amount of conversation to proceed as the work progressed. Mallison found himself presently with a pick and barrow, prising out broken rocks and fragments of stone which had been strewn about there since the previous summer, when certain blasting operations had been made.

From where he stood he could see sheer down to the sea from the top of Hangman's Rock, a great rampart-like precipice, broken here and there by huge jutting boulders, and clad from head to foot with vegetation, gorse bushes, and the like, which had grown there in the course of time, and now formed a living screen of green. He could see about some twenty feet down a mass of rock sticking out some eight feet, and, almost hidden by the flaming gold on the gorse bushes. One false step on the edge of that path and there would be no stop until the sea was reached, and anyone meeting with an accident there would in all probability be dead before he reached the water.

"A nice place to get into trouble," Baillie laughed. "One slip, and it would be all over. I don't like it much; I always feel nervous when I'm standing on high ground."

"Yes, I have heard other people say so," Mallison said. "It's all a matter of what you are accustomed to. Do you see that white house yonder in the trees? I mean that house about a couple of miles away just off the beach at Merston."

"Oh, I see it right enough," Baillie said. "Just the sort of place I used to dream about when I was going to make my fortune as a black-and-white artist. I was always going to have a white cottage somewhere in Devonshire."

"I was born there," Mallison said quietly. "And there I lived until my mother died. Things might have been different if my father had lived, but I hardly remember him; he broke his neck in the hunting-field when I was quite small."

"It's a lovely village," Baillie observed, between the strokes of his pick. "It looks as if it had been there since the beginning of time. One can't imagine anything wrong or wicked in connection with an ideal place like that."

Mallison said nothing. He was gazing down at the White house in the distance with a mist in his eyes and a softness at his heart that he had not felt for years. It all seemed so near and yet at the same time so far off. It seemed almost impossible that he should be able to live through the years to come as if escape were impossible. He could see the white line of foam breaking on the sands to the left of Hangman's Rock, and pictured in his mind every inch of the three miles or so that lay between the base of the great rock and the peaceful village where he was born.

He could see a boat or two on the sea, and visualised the occupants. For every man in the village was known to him, he could even see what bait they were using. Then he put all these pictures sternly from his mind, and for the next hour or more bent resolutely to his work. There came an interval presently when they could sit down and rest, and partake of their midday meal, which every man had brought in his pocket. With the safeguards at either end, discipline was rather more lax than usual, so that it was possible for the convicts to talk when they had finished their portions of food.

Baillie lay on his back, basking in the sunshine, with a whimsical expression on his face.

"I call this uncommonly jolly," he said. "A sort of picnic, if you like to regard it in that way. For half an hour we are our own masters, more or less. Mallison, hand me my cigar case, I would smoke."

"Apparently I have forgotten it," Mallison said, falling into his companion's mood. "Very careless of me, no doubt, but I promise you it shan't happen again."

With that he rose to his feet and stood on the very edge of the cliff, looking down to the sea below. He called to Baillie, who reluctantly followed.

"I wish you wouldn't stand as near as that," he said. "It makes me so infernally nervous."

"Does it?" Mallison asked. "Now, look here, if anybody offered you your liberty provided that you found your way from here down to the beach without breaking your neck would you accept the challenge?"

"No, I wouldn't," Baillie said promptly. "Life isn't worth much to chaps like us, but somehow we cling to it all the same. I do, for one. You see, I tell myself that when this is over there is still a future for me outside England, because I really can draw, though I say it myself as shouldn't. And that's that. But you are joking, of course."

"Indeed I am not," Mallison murmured. "You may refuse to believe me, but once I climbed up from the foot of the cliff by a path that skirts the sea, and I managed to get up here to the very place where we are standing. And, what's more, I got down again. It hasn't been done for fifty years. An old fisherman showed me the way, and warned me not to attempt it, but I was always out for adventures in those days, and I managed it all right. Do you see that rock sticking out about twenty feet below? I mean the one covered with gorse bushes."

"Well, what about it?" Baillie asked.

"Oh, nothing, except that it happens to be a solid platform. If I jumped from here now I should land on a flat surface, and my fall would be broken by those bushes. Then, by crawling round the edge of the bluff, I should find a sort of path, and, with great care working backwards and facing the way I came, I should find myself presently at the foot of the cliff. Then there is a sheep track to the left, which will bring me to the sands. Suppose I were to jump now? What do you think our friends with the rifles yonder would say about it?"

"Well, there is only one thing to say about it," Baillie replied. "They would come to the conclusion that you had either committed suicide, or that you had met with a fatal accident."

"Precisely," Mallison went on. "They would argue that I had fallen nine hundred feet into the sea, and they wouldn't worry about me any more, because the tide

here has a rise of over forty feet, and if my body was ever found it would be at least fifty or sixty miles away. As a matter of fact people down on this coast are rarely if ever found; but, at any rate, whatever happens, no sane person would ever suggest that I had made good my escape without injury."

"Well, suppose you did?" Baillie asked. "What would be the good? You would have to go through Merston in the broad daylight with the Government mark on you under those blue dungarees, and you would be back in the prison again before night. It's a fool's game for a man to attempt who has no friends and no plans for the future. And, besides, you'd lose all your good conduct marks, to say nothing of having to serve your full time and be deprived of all your privileges."

"Yes, I suppose that's true enough," Mallison said. "And yet, standing here, in plain sight of the place where I was so happy, I am having great difficulty in restraining myself. You see, I know lots of people in the village, and it is just possible that somebody might be ready to help me. And don't you forget that there will be no search made for me. It will be reported to the Governor that I have fallen nine hundred feet into the sea there will be an inquiry into the circumstances, and that will be the end of it. It couldn't possibly occur to any of the authorities that I had made good my escape."

"Yes, that's right enough," Baillie agreed. "But there is one important fact you overlook, my friend."

"And what might that be?" Mallison asked. "Village gossip, my boy, village gossip. I don't care if everybody in the place is ready to shield you, the more people who were in the secret the worse it would be for you. Everybody would be talking about it, and before long the story would spread further afield to people who didn't know you, and who would be quite ready to give you away. Why, it's any odds that within 48 hours the story would have reached Slagmoor, and you would have half the police in Devonshire on your track, and before you could get 50 miles away they'd have you again."

"Yes, I dare say there is a great deal of truth in that," Mallison said. "It would be a mad adventure in any case, but a fine change from the monotonous existence up yonder, and I know that I should be amongst friends, even if it were only for a few hours. I've a precious good mind to try it."

"Better not, better not," Baillie said.

Mallison crept nearer to the edge of the cliff, then looked cautiously round him.

"I'm going." he said. "Good-bye."

With that he seemed to fall over the edge of the cliff, and, lighting on the mass of gorse below, was lost to view. Then Baillie jumped to his feet and yelled for help.

Chapter VIII

Over the Brink.

Baillie's cry rang out loud and clear as if it came from a full understanding of what had happened. And, indeed, the desperate step had been undertaken so

suddenly at the last that Baillie had been stirred to the depths in spite of himself. There was a strange pallor on his face and a moisture on his lips that was eloquent enough for deadly fear as the warders came rushing up to learn what had happened, for obviously not one of them had seen the incident. And this, of course, was all in Mallison's favour. Baillie would see to it now that his friend had every chance.

"Was it done on purpose?" the chief warder asked. "You know what I mean by that. Did he throw himself over?"

"Couldn't have done," Baillie gasped. "We were just talking quietly together and him standing on the edge looking down into the sea, wondering how far it was to the bottom, when his foot seemed to slip and he was over like a flash. A minute or two before I was asking him not to get so close, as it fairly gave me the shivers, but he only laughed, and told me that he was used to these high cliffs and wondered if it were possible to get to the bottom with a rope and some climbing irons, when he was gone. He just gave one cry, and I saw him strike that big rock and then fall clear to the foot of the cliff. He must have plunged straight down into the water and probably died before he got there."

"Probably he did, poor chap," the warder said, not unkindly, as he stood peering over the edge. "Then you don't think that it was a case of deliberate suicide?"

"I'm certain it wasn't," Baillie said with real conviction. "If you had heard him talking to me just now you would never have given what you say another thought. He was quite happy to be by the sea again, and he laughed when I told him that he was standing on dangerous ground. The idea is ridiculous."

By this time the rest of the convict gang had gathered round, and discipline for the moment was practically at a standstill. The simple horror of it had gripped them all, and they could think of nothing else. It was clear enough that there had been a tragic accident, and beyond all question the unfortunate man was beyond the reach of human aid.

"What are we going to do?" one of the warders suggested. "Is it any use to go down to the village and get a boat?"

The chief warder shook his head.

"Not the slightest," he said. "I was bred and born here, and I know all about the coast. When I was a boy I used to fish along here. The poor follow must have fallen straight down nine hundred feet into the sea, and probably he was dead before he reached the water. No, I am afraid we can't do anything. There is a tremendous tide along the channel here, and if the body is ever picked up it will be quite a hundred miles away. For my part. I don't think it will ever be picked up at all."

They stood there for some time in a listless sort of way before the chief warder gave the word to stop work for the day, and collect the convicts with a view to getting back to Slagmoor. This matter must be reported to the governor of the prison without delay. Just for a moment Baillie stood there looking down, and it seemed to him that he could see something moving in the bushes that covered the big rock some thirty foot below. It seemed to him also that he caught an outline of a white set face, but that might have been merely imagination. Then he turned away with the rest, and tramped down the road thoughtfully, hoping from the bottom of his heart that Mallison had not failed. At any rate, he had done his best for his companion, and there was consolation in that. A little later and the new

cliff road was deserted, save for the gulls wheeling overhead, and a timid rabbit or two creeping out of the bracken.

But it was no imagination on Baillie's part when it had seemed to him that he had seen the face peering through the gorse. Mallison had jumped cleanly enough straight on the face of the great rock. He had staggered just for a moment, and had indeed to claw desperately at the roots of the gorse bushes to keep himself from going over altogether. But the tough tangle of those had saved him, and when he lay at full length under the shelter of those sheaves of yellow blossoms he knew that he was safe and unhurt, and that, so far, the great adventure had been achieved without any sort of handicap. He was just a little breathless, a trifle scratched and bruised about the knees, but beyond that there was nothing to cause him anxiety. He lay there, securely hidden, face upwards, so that, to a certain extent, he could see what was going on overhead. He heard Baillie's wild cry, and his subsequent examination at the hands of the chief warder. Perilous as his condition was, he chuckled to himself as he heard how Baillie was putting the questioner off the track, and it encouraged him to hear what the warder said.

So far, therefore, everything was in his favour. There was no question, of course, that no one could possibly have been saved who had fallen over that cliff, and Mallison knew that the statement as to the tides there was true in every particular. It was very long odds indeed that no attempt would ever be made to find him, and that in the course of a few days he would be registered on the prison books as dead. This would mean, of course, that there would be no inquiry about him as to the future and if he could manage to communicate with friends he might get safely out of the country altogether, or so disguise himself as to pass for someone entirely different from himself. And all this was possible with any sort of good luck.

He lay there for quite a long time, until the workmen overhead had gone and the whole world seemed to be wrapped in a great solitude. Then he stood upright on the flat tableland of rock and stretched himself to make sure that he had come to no injury. It was good, at any rate, to know that after that perilous leap he was still in possession of all his faculties. And this being so the danger had to be faced.

And it was a danger, too, as Mallison well knew. Without a rope or a ladder or any aid from the summit, it would be absolutely impossible for him to get back to the road way, and that, of course, meant calling for help, and an ignominious return to the place from whence he had come. If the worst came to the worst, he could do that, and make the best of it by declaring that he had fallen providentially on a rock and had there, for the time being, lost consciousness. That was one thing to do in case he could not reach the foot of the cliff, but Mallison clenched his teeth grimly, and resolved that things would go hard with him indeed before he took that course.

He knew that the downward descent was the real beginning of the trouble. He knew that any slip or the loss of a foothold or the sudden yielding of a root would turn adventure into real tragedy like a flash. Therefore, for a long time he lay on the rock, trying to visualise the ascent he had made as a boy years ago, and, what was still more important, to realise exactly what he had to do on the downward journey. For the ascent was more or less child's play in comparison with the reverse journey. In climbing upwards he could see his way before him, but in the

descent he would have to work with his face to the top of the cliff, seeking a footing more or less blindly as he felt below him for a safe spot in which to place his foot. And then, when his memory had been taxed to the uttermost, he crawled across the face of the rock, and, hidden by its broad base, began to fight his way, inch by inch, towards the shore.

It was infinitely more difficult than he had expected. In the old days pretty well every inch of the route had been mapped out by the old fisherman, and now Mallison had to recall it after all these years. He knew that one step, or one foot deviation from the right path, must spell absolute disaster. And, again, he was conscious of the fact that his nerve was not what it ought to be. In his boyhood's days he had not known the meaning of the word fear, but the anxieties of the last few years, and the troubles he had passed through, had left their mark upon him, so that before he had won the first hundred feet of the journey he was sweating from head to foot and trembling in every limb. So far he was sure that he was on the right track, for he remembered certain landmarks which had never faded from his memory. But it was trying work, and presently he was thankful enough to come to a little outcrop of rock on the top of which he could seat himself and regain the strength that he so sorely needed. He did this by lying flat on the rock, face downwards, for it seemed to him that he dared not look the way he was going lest the magnitude of the task should fill him with absolute despair. But presently he came a couple of hundred feet lower down to a wider shelf of granite, and here, after pulling himself together, he sat with his feet dangling over the edge, and took a survey of the surroundings.

He had still more than half the distance to go, and so far as he could see the danger did not lessen as he progressed. Then he drew himself suddenly back, and hid himself behind the friendly leaves of a rowan bush for down there along the sheep-track that bordered the last two hundred yards of his journey he could see two men seated, obviously tourists, for by the side of them were fishing rods and baskets, a macintosh coat or so, and something in square brown paper parcels that suggested lunch. And here at this point Mallison realised the fact that he was desperately in need of food and that his tongue was literally cleaving to the roof of his mouth.

He wondered irritably enough how long those men would stay there because so long as they remained it was utterly impossible for him to descend another yard without the chance of being seen, and that, of course, meant absolute failure. There were some hours of daylight still to go, and if these men were keen fishermen they might remain in the neighbourhood till dark. Evidently they had come fully provisioned and prepared for all emergencies, and then for the best part of an hour, Mallison, looking through the bushes could see them sprawling on the grass eating their sandwiches and drinking something from a flask. It was so still and silent there that ever and again he could actually hear what they were saying, and he groaned to himself to find that his worst fears were confirmed.

Undoubtedly, these men were out for the day. They had come over from Merston along the sands to the ledge of rocks at the foot of the cliff where the big bass were to be caught, and, so far as Mallison could gather, they had had no sport as yet. They had abandoned their fish for the time, until the tide turned, and after lunch they were going back to try their luck again. There was nothing for it but to wait

until those men had finished, and Mallison estimated that it was nearly 3 o'clock before they took up their rods again and retraced their steps, leaving all behind them except the fishing rods.

Twenty minutes later the tourists were out of sight, hidden under a ledge of shale, and then, once more having assured himself that there was not a soul in sight, Mallison recommenced the last stages of his journey. It was just after 4 o'clock before he drew a long, deep breath as he stood up and stretched himself upon the sward where those mackintoshes and baskets lay. He would have passed them had the temptation not been too strong, but on top of one of the coats lay a packet of sandwiches, freshly opened, and by the side of it a portly flask from which Mallison could not detach his eyes. Moreover, he could see a box of choice Virginian cigarettes, and close beside it a matchbox. Without hesitating a moment, he crept forward and possessed himself of three of the substantial sandwiches; which he ate eagerly enough, after which he took a generous pull at the flash, which contained a mixture of whisky and water. Five minutes later Mallison was feeling a different man. He had no hesitation now in helping himself to the cigarettes, and half a dozen matches from a silver case, and then, heedless of what might happen, he lay back on the grass, and for the next twenty minutes revelled in the tobacco of which he had been deprived so long. He knew that no one could approach him from behind, because that was impossible. And to his left was a tiny stream rippling over a series of huge boulders, and behind these again a thicket of tamarisks. If anybody approached the spot where he was lying, then he would be able to hide himself before they could detect him, and with this comforting thought in his mind he lighted another cigarette. It was nearly six o'clock before his alert ears caught the sound of voices, then he darted under cover like a fox.

"Hello," he heard a voice say. "Hello, somebody's been here, unless you took the cigarettes, Matthews."

"Not I," the man called Matthews replied. "I never touched your cigarettes. I don't smoke one of the beastly things once in a month, as you know."

"Well, they've gone, anyway," the other replied. "Also the sandwiches, of which I left at least five. The flask, too, has got suspiciously light. Just look at it. It was only half through when we finished. Give me my macintosh."

"What do you want your macintosh for?" the second fisherman, asked. "Anything valuable in it?"

"Only my note-case," the other said dryly. "I lost my pocket-book last week on the rocks, so to-day—oh, it's all right, here the case is. Not a very desperate thief after all. One of the village boys, perhaps."

With that the two men packed up their traps, and went their way without further ado. Mallison was thankful to see the last of them as they disappeared down the slope, and he could make them out presently like two flies crawling across the sands in the direction of Merston. Then, very cautiously, he followed until he was at the foot of the cliff himself, after which he made his way warily, taking cover wherever he could find it, until he came at length to the little river that ran into the bay just below the village, and here, amongst the trees, he found the haven that he was in search of. It was a more or less disused barn, with a loft over, full of litter left over from the winter's use, and into this he thankfully crept, aching in every limb. Many a time in his boyhood had he used the old barn in

some of his childish games, and he had not the slightest fear of being disturbed. He flung himself down on the soft herbage and there for a time slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

It was quite dark when he awoke, and he listened for some time for an indication as to the hour. It came presently from the clock in the tower of the ancient Norman church, and he knew that by 10 o'clock, which was now striking, that the whole village would be in bed and asleep. It was only at the herring time that anyone in Merston was out of bed by that hour. He rose and crept out into the open. Not a soul was in sight, and not a sound was to be heard as he slunk across the bridge and up the short village street till he reached a path which led to a long flat cliff away to the right. He know pretty well what he was going to do now, and he knew how to accomplish it.

On the top of this cliff, standing in its own grounds, full of wild and solitary beauty, was the luxurious bungalow which Sir Marston Manley had built there some five-and-twenty years ago. And it was in the direction of this bungalow that Mallison wormed his way. He came upon it presently, all dark and silent, with no sign of human life, which was just what Mallison expected to find, because he knew that the old fisherman and his wife who acted as caretakers only came and went in the daytime, after which they returned to their own cottage on the beach. And at any, rate, it would be some weeks yet before the artist came down to his beloved Merston for the summer months.

Mallison was in the grounds at length, walking more boldly now as he felt sure of his ground. Presently be pushed back a catch in one of the windows of the big studio and boldly entered the house. If he could only secure a certain amount of food, he was all right for the next day or two.

Chapter IX

From Tragedy to Comedy.

Mallison drew a long, deep breath of relief as the heavy curtains of the studio closed behind him. There was a certain suggestion of reliance in that well-remembered haven that quite foolishly gave him a sense of safety, though a moment later he realised the absurdity of it. But at any rate he was on old, familiar ground now, and prepared to make a fight for it if things came to the very worst. He would not go back there.

Not that he was in the least blind to the perils that lay in front of him. So far everything had gone in his favour. By the accident of fortune he had found himself in a position to make good his escape exactly at a spot every yard of which was familiar to him, and this he had managed by the same set of curious chances in such a way as to convey a definite impression that he was lost beyond recall. This was greatly in his favour, of course, because it eliminated the faintest chance of anything in the way of pursuit. This was all to the good, beyond question, and Mallison did not fail to see it. But, on the other hand, he was all alone, with no

possible chance of communicating with any of his friends, and though the bungalow might hide him for some two or three days, it would not be possible to remain there unless he could find something in the shape of food, and that was utterly out of the question. Nor was he disposed to ignore Baillie's advice as to the necessity of keeping his presence in Merston a secret from the people in the village. He could see clearly enough that once this was known the story would spread rapidly, until it came to the ears of the authorities. Above all things, the story must be kept within a limited circle of his own particular friends, who would help him, though, of course, by so doing they would be what the law called compounding a felony, and that in itself was a punishable offence. Mallison could see one or two of his particular intimates who would take that risk, but certainly not a man in Sir Marston Manley's position. The famous artist would no doubt help him as far as he could legitimately, but that did not involve shielding an escaped criminal.

It was hopeless to expect to find anything in the way of provisions in the bungalow, and even if there were certain preserved foods, Mallison could not live on them alone. Just for a moment a wild idea occurred to him of creeping out in the dead of night and obtaining a loaf of bread from some adjacent cottage, but even that might be found out and questions be asked. The great thing was to get in touch with somebody who would come down there with a change of clothing and a sum of money, and smuggle the fugitive away under cover of the darkness.

But the first necessity, of course, was safety and shelter, and the comfortable knowledge that there was a bed to sleep in, and a sound roof over his head. It might be, of course, that the aged caretakers might invade the bungalow on the morrow, so it would be necessary for Mallison to sleep with one eye open.

But these were minor details. He knew exactly where he was, even in the darkness he could visualise every inch of the great studio, but light would be necessary, and very cautiously he struck one of the matches, which he had obtained from the fishermen on the beach. He saw that the heavy velvet curtains were closely drawn, and very cautiously he switched on one of the electric lights. He had half-expected to find the accumulators empty, but to his great delight a clear flame blazed in one of the electric bulbs. Then he crept outside to see that no ray of light was escaping, and, once assured that there was no danger in that direction, he went hack again and switched on the big sunlight in the roof.

It was all just as he had seen it last, the beautiful old furniture, the armour here and there, and the priceless eastern rug upon the inlaid floor. Mallison threw himself down upon a luxurious settee, and lighted one of the cigarettes that had come so providentially in his way. Till well into the next morning, at any rate, he was absolutely safe.

He sat there for a long time, luxuriating over his tobacco, and trying to elaborate some scheme for escape. But his mind was too much in a whirl for that, and for an hour or more he sat there waiting for an inspiration. He turned over all his friends in his mind, until he had catalogued at least half a dozen whom he felt sure he could trust. But how to get in touch with them, how to let them know where he was, when he lacked even the necessary coppers to purchase a stamp. And even if he had those humble coins he would have been just as far off the necessary frank as ever. No, safety certainly did not lie that way—it meant too

much time, and the risk that the caretakers might come along at any moment and discover his presence. He knew them both well, he knew that they would do anything for him in reason, but they were old and talkative, and there was trouble that way too.

He sat there, gazing round the room for inspiration, and then, quite suddenly, his eye fell upon the telephone. Here was something like an idea at last, and all the more so because there was no telephone exchange in the village, the nearest one being at Helworthy, the little watering-place some six miles further down the coast, from whence Sir Marston Manley had had a private wire carried as far as the bungalow. It had been rather an expensive hobby, but then expense was no great object.

"I wonder if I dare," Mallison said to himself. "And yet I don't know. I don't see how it's possible for anybody at Helworthy to know whether there is someone in the bungalow or not. At any rate, it is no business of theirs, and at this time of night I don't suppose that the girl in charge of the exchange will be particularly curious. If I call her up and ask for a number she will probably put me through and go to sleep again."

There was, at any rate, a chance of doing something in this direction, and the mere thought of being up and doing acted like a spur to Mallison's imagination. With that telephone in the corner of the room he was in touch with all England. He could reach an area outside Merston where no questions would be asked, and beyond that, call up the necessary friend. But who to call up? That was the question. It might take hours to get through to London, and perhaps necessitate a great deal of conversation between one exchange and another, and in that direction danger lay. But if, on the other hand, he could think of somebody no further remote, perhaps, than Plymouth, he might be striking a real blow for freedom.

Yes, Plymouth was on the direct line, and not more than 60 miles away. And surely he knew somebody at Plymouth—he was often there in the good old days. And then, all at once, the name leapt to his mind. Why not call up Trevor?

Trevor was an old friend and schoolboy of his, a scientist himself, who had gone very far, especially with regard to diseases of the eye, and for considerations of health found it necessary to reside in the south. And Trevor had been very good when the trouble came along. He had written to Mallison several times, and on two occasions had come up to London on purpose to visit him in his cell. Trevor, moreover, was absolutely convinced of Mallison's innocence, and had expressed himself as ready to do anything to help him.

Yes, that was the idea, call up Trevor, who would be certain to be at home and probably up still, for he was the kind of man who loved to burn the midnight oil, and who declared that he could do little or no thinking until the rest of the world had gone to bed. Mallison reached out for the telephone directory, and without further hesitation called up the exchange at Helworthy. After some delay a sleepy voice answered him.

"Give me 79083 Plymouth," he asked.

Then he gave his own number, and sat down patiently to wait to hear from the other end. The sudden jangle of the bell at the end of half an hour set Mallison's nerves quivering, but he took up the receiver eagerly and called out:

"Is that 79083 Plymouth?"

"That's right," a voice at the other end said. "Who is that speaking, please?"

"You wouldn't know the name," Mallison replied. "I am an old friend of Dr. Trevor's, and I am sure he will be glad to hear from me. I want it to come as a surprise to him. Would you be good enough to ask him to come to the telephone?"

"Dr. Trevor is not in," the voice said. "I am his private secretary. It you will give me a message—"

"I'd much rather not do that," Mallison said. "I want to give Dr. Trevor what I flatter myself to be a pleasant surprise. I know it's rather late, but if you would be good enough to ask him to ring up 15 Helworthy I shall be more than obliged."

"With pleasure," the pleasant voice at the other end of the wire said. "It's very unfortunate that the doctor is out this evening, for he rarely leaves the house after dinner. But to-night he went out to dine with an American professor. I am sure be won't be long now."

"It's very good of you to take all this trouble," Mallison said. "You quite understand, I hope, why I would much rather not mention my name. Thanks so much."

With that Mallison rang off, and sat down with what patience he could until he could hear something from the other end. He knew that the best part of an hour at least must elapse before he could expect to hear Trevor's voice, and, meanwhile, he had leisure to realise the fact that he was most unromantically hungry. He had had nothing since those few sandwiches early in the afternoon, and the pangs of hunger were now growing painfully acute. With the aid of a match or two he found the neat little perfectly-appointed kitchen, and, to his delight, made out the electric cooker and kettle there. On a shelf was a brass caddy containing a small amount of tea, and in a cupboard a jug of milk, proof positive of the fact, which he had half dreaded, that the caretaker and his wife were in the habit of visiting the bungalow every day. He boiled a kettle and made himself a pot of tea, which greatly cheered and stimulated him, and then, by happy chance, discovered a tin of some sort of savoury stew, which he proceeded to open with a knife that he found in a table drawer, and with those eatables and the dry heel of a loaf of bread, sat down and ate the most enjoyable meal of his life.

He had hardly finished and carefully cleared away every sign of the feast before the telephone bell rippled out again, and he hastened back to the studio. He unhooked the receiver and placed it eagerly at his ear.

"Hello," came a familiar voice at the other end "Is that 15 Helworthy?"

"That's right," Mallison said. "That you, Phillip? Who do you think is speaking. Can't you guess?"

There came a startled exclamation from the other end of the line, and then a long silence.

"Oh, it's all right," Mallison went on. "Of course, you are intensely surprised to hear me talking, and it would be just as well perhaps if you don't mention any names, I don't suppose for a moment anybody is listening, but in the circumstances it is just as well to be careful. Do you remember Mallison?"

"But, my dear fellow—"

"Oh, shut up. I asked you if you remembered Mallison—the chap you and I were at school with. A scientific chap, who used to live here at one time, and afterwards

was with you at your hospital. I mean the fellow that got into trouble in connection with a murderous assault, and was till quite recently a prisoner at Slagmoor. You used to be rather fond of him at one time."

"I not only was, but am," came the deep voice over the wire. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for him. I firmly believe in Malison's innocence, and if I could get him out of gaol I'd run any risk to do it. But go on tell me all about him. Has anything happened to him?"

"Ah, that's just the trouble," Mallison went on more cheerfully, feeling sure of his ground now, and caring very little whether he was overheard or not. "As you know, I am a friend of Mallison's as well as you are. I am staying just for the moment at Sir Marston Manley's bungalow at Merston, and I was going to try and see Mallison in prison, but this morning, when he was out working with the gang on the top of Hangman's Rock, he fell over into the sea, and, of course, was instantly killed. You know the spot as well as I do."

"Any trace of his body'" Trevor asked in a queer, choking sort of voice. "Excuse me, old man, I've got a bit of a cold to-night. But I need not ask; knowing the coast as I do, I feel quite sure that poor old Mallison will never be seen or heard of again. Very sad, isn't it?"

"Very sad indeed," the other said. "Do you remember the time when our poor friend climbed up to the top of the Hangman Rock, and also climbed down again? Strange that he should meet his death on the very spot of that adventure."

"Yes, I was thinking the same thing," Trevor said "By the way, is Sir Manley there?"

"On no, I am absolutely alone in the house. Nobody knows I am here. I was wondering if you could see your way to getting over here to-morrow and bringing a few things with you. You know what I mean."

"Oh, I know what you mean well enough. Just hold on a moment, and I'll look up the trains... are you there? Yes, I find I can get over by about six. I'll drive from Helworthy and look you up at the bungalow."

"That's all right." Mallison said. "But don't come till after dark, because I may be out. Suppose you put up at the inn down on the beach, and come along about ten o'clock."

"Yes, that will do very well," Trevor said. "You can rely upon me. Is there anything else? So long."

"Here, stop a moment," Mallison said. But he heard the click of the receiver as it was hooked in its place and realised that it was too late to say any more. More or less angrily he turned from the telephone and looked round to find himself face to face with a man who was standing there with a smile on his lips and a deeply humorous twinkle in his handsome eyes. He was a young man with a keen, clever face, clean-shaven, and athletic, and most beautifully turned out. He eyed Mallison in his convict garb from head to foot, and then, to the latter's great astonishment, held out a friendly hand.

"Well met," he cried. "Well met, indeed. 'Pon my word, my dear fellow, I am the most fortunate individual in the world. Here am I in the very devil of a mess, and none the less so because it is my own confounded fault, and instead of suffering as I should from my crass folly, I blunder right into the arms of the very man who can help me to put things right. I don't want to be in the least curious, my dear

sir, neither do I wish to hurt your feelings, but the necessity that knows no law compels me to ask you a really impertinent question. Now, are you merely masquerading, or am I absolutely correct in my conjecture that you are a genuine Simon Pure convict?"

"Since you put it quite so plainly," Mallison said bitterly, "I am a real convict. I don't know who you are, sir, but you appear to be a gentleman—"

"That is my endeavour," the other man smiled.

"You appear to be a gentleman," Mallison went on. "And I am absolutely at your mercy. All I ask you to do is to be discreetly silent as to my presence here for another twenty-four hours, and that is all I need."

The stranger smiled in that fascinating, sunny way of his, and once more extended his hand.

"That's a bargain, old chap," he cried. "I have only one stipulation to make, and that is a very simple one. If you will change clothes with me, your secret is absolutely safe. Now, tell me, are you game?"

Chapter X

The Heels of Adventure.

"Change clothes with me?" Mallison echoed. "Change—"

The other man laughed in a whole-hearted way that appealed to all Mallison's sporting instincts. There was a breezy freshness about him and an inconsequent suggestion of reckless humour that there was no resisting. He laid an entirely friendly hand on Mallison's shoulder as if they had been free of each other for years.

"My dear sir," he laughed. "That is precisely what I did say. By the great God of Chance I happen to blunder upon the very thing that I most need in the hour of my dire necessity. I will not attempt to disguise from you the fact that the trouble is entirely my own fault, and is due mainly to a certain sanguine temperament not unlike that of the inimitable Micawber, in other words, a tendency to wait upon events and trust to something turning up. And something has turned up—you have."

"But I don't understand," Mallison said. "It seems almost incredible for me that a man in your position should take everything for granted like this. I told you just now that I was a convict, and it ought to be pretty obvious to you that I have lately escaped from Slagmoor prison."

"Of course you have; that's the cream of the joke. At least, I don't suppose it's a joke to you, because there cannot be anything humorous in the fact that a gentleman of birth and education like yourself should be under the stigma of the broad arrow. You will pardon my speaking in this frivolous way, but I am so dashed sorry for you, my dear chap, that really—"

There was something in this suggestion of delicacy that touched Mallison on the right spot. It seemed to him that he had found a new friend, and certainly a man

who would go a long way to help him in his misfortunes. He had only to look in the face of his vis-a-vis to see the kindliness that shone behind those reckless, humorous eyes.

"Don't you think we had better understand one another?" he suggested. "To begin with, I take it that you have a right here which, emphatically, I have not!"

"Oh, why go into that?" the other man smiled. "I quite understand. You have managed to make good your escape from the prison—which was devilish plucky of you by the way—and I presume that you are in search of something in the way of a disguise. Now by the most extraordinary coincidence, I am practically in need of the same thing. You give me that realistic uniform of yours, and, by way of return, I present you with this neat combination of dittoes, designed by a Bond-street tailor, to say nothing of the etceteras, which are, in the language of the advertisements, the finest that money can procure. In addition to that, my exchequer to the extent of ten pounds or so is entirely at your disposal. Why, my dear fellow, this is absolutely providential. After the exchange you go your way and I go mine, and if we should meet again, as is highly improbable, then it shall be as strangers, if you like. I have rather taken a liking to you, I like your face and manner, and I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that you are suffering a grave injustice. You know what I mean."

"All convicts are," Mallison said dryly. "Out of the eight hundred odd at Slagmoor there isn't one who wouldn't tell you the same thing. But need we go into that?"

"Not unless you like," the other man said politely. "I suppose I may venture to ask if you have friends who are ready to help you later on?"

"I have," Mallison admitted. "I escaped from Slagmoor this afternoon in circumstances which will leave no doubt in the minds of the authorities that I fell over the Hangman's Rock and was drowned. While working there this afternoon, I made my escape. Naturally enough, I am looking for a change of clothing, having found food in this bungalow. You see, I happen to know Merston very well, and I was aware of the fact that Sir Marston Manley's bungalow is usually empty at this time of the year. I calculated I should find, amongst his professional wardrobe, a decent suit of clothes which I could get away in. I have already telephoned to a friend at Plymouth, who is coming here to-morrow night to meet me. You see, I place myself quite in your hands."

"And your confidence will not be betrayed," the other man said. "You need have no anxiety. It was very fortunate that I happened to be quite at home here."

A sudden thought flashed into Mallison's mind.

"I wonder if, by any chance, you happen to be Roy Gilette?" he asked. "I mean Sir Marston's nephew. I have never met him myself, strange to say, but of course I know all about him."

"Good heavens," the other man said. "Do you mean to tell me that you are Raymond Mallison?"

"I dare go, even as far as that," Mallison smiled. "I am, and I am equally sure that you are Gilette."

The other hold out a hand with something more than eager, friendship, and a strange, light flickered in his eyes.

"Now, this is most amazing," he said. "When I suggested just now that you were an innocent man I little realised how near I was to the truth. My dear fellow, I know that you are the victim of a vile conspiracy, and during the last year or so I have been devoting all my energies to getting at the bottom of it. I haven't succeeded yet, but I am on the track. Indeed, it is more or less on your business that I am here this evening. But I'll come to that presently. Now, look here, are you game to take part in this adventure?"

"Would it be safe?" Mallison asked.

"Oh well, we should have to talk that over, but I can tell you what I can do. I can put you away in a spot where you will be as safe as if you were in the middle of the great Sahara, and to-morrow I will come back here and call up your friend Trevor in Plymouth. I'll tell him who I am, and also, that the friend he was interested in has made other arrangements. If I put it diplomatically on the 'phone, he will quite understand that his presence here is unnecessary, especially if I tell him who I am. Don't you think that would be the best way of working it?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," Mallison said. "Events have followed on the heels of one another so fast that I am almost dazed. But I shall feel quite safe in your hands, though I have never had the good fortune to meet you before. Still, I have often heard your uncle speak about you, to say nothing of Peggy Ferriss, and her friend Hetty Bond. Didn't someone tell me that you had adopted a literary career?"

Gilette smiled as he produced a gold cigarette-case, which he passed over to his companion.

"That was rather flattering of someone," he said dryly. "My dear chap, I have written five tragedies, six comedies, a couple of farces, and a revue, not one of which has ever seen the light. By some blind instinct, I have been restrained from producing these myself, and to that fact I owe my escape from a brilliant bankruptcy. Then I turned my attention to the cinema. I have got a company of my own, down in this part of the world at this present moment, and we are now engaged in filming certain scenes connected with a drama that I am writing myself. The drama is a long way from being complete, but it is going to be a great story when it is finished, if I can get to the bottom of a web of intrigue and fraud in which you are mixed up. My film play is the history of a man who has been made the victim of a cruel conspiracy; in other words, yourself. There are scenes in England and scenes in the Argentine, and, because the chief villain happens to be in England at the present moment, I am hot upon his track. He is down here at the present moment, but he little realises the connection between the Long Trail Film Players and his own rascality, and by Jove! this is just where you come in."

"Where I come in?" Mallison echoed.

"Certainly. It's like this. Did you ever happen to hear of a man named Argo Marne?"

"Never in my life," Mallison declared.

"No, well perhaps not. All the same, if I am not greatly mistaken, he is a relative of yours. But I am not going into a question of pedigree at this time of night. Besides, there is too much to do. Now, look hero, Mallison, in that charge made against you I was lucky enough to find something out which put me on the right track. My investigations carried me from London to Buenos Aires and from thence half through the Argentine. I was not quite so successful as I expected, but when I

returned to London at the time of your trial, I didn't come back empty-handed. But I couldn't do anything, because the thing was so infernally complicated, that any false move on my part would have been exceedingly disastrous for you. But I don't mind telling you that I am getting on, and when the whole thing is finished, it will be presented to the public in the form of the Long Trail Players' first big effort. And it will be some story."

"All this is very interesting, of course," Mallison murmured. "But I don't quite see what it has to do with me."

"Ah, but you will, my boy, you will. Now, as I told you, one of the central figures in my big drama is a man called Marne, and when I say called Marne, I am speaking advisedly. At the present moment, this man called Marne is living at Chilstone Castle, which you may know."

"Of course I know it. It's the big place on the cliffs yonder, which the Tregennen family sold to a wealthy South American merchant about two years ago."

"That's it," Gilette went on eagerly. "That's the spot, and this man called Marne is my principal mark. Apparently he has command of unlimited money. Is a man of infinite resource, and the most amazing and desperate courage, and he's as clever and cunning as they make 'em. But I happen to know a great deal about him, and when I can expose the whole conspiracy, then not only will my great drama be finished, but you will be free once more to hold up your head in society. Still, there's a long row to hoe yet, and I want all the help possible. You may not know it, but this man called Marne is at the bottom of all your troubles."

"You amaze me," Mallison said. "How, can a South American whom I never saw in my life be the source of events that have ruined me, both professionally and socially?"

"Ah, that for the moment I can't tell you, but I shall be able to explain before I have finished. There are certain threads which, as yet, have not come into my hands, but I may grasp them at any moment. It may be to-night, because, you see, Marne is giving a fancy dress ball at the Castle this evening, and I have every intention of being present."

"You are an invited guest, then?"

"Indeed, my dear chap, I am nothing of the sort," Gilette said cooly. "So far as I know, Marne isn't even aware of my existence, and I may tell you that I have every reason for preserving my modest reticence. But I am going to the dance, all the same, and this is why I am so anxious to borrow your toggery."

"Then you haven't a dress of your own?"

"Well, I had, but my portmanteau went astray. So I came here, knowing that my uncle has about a hundred and fifty odd costumes hanging about the house, and I burgled the bungalow with the intention of getting hold of one."

"Yes, but you have no invitation."

"Perhaps not, but I have got a card, which comes to exactly the same thing. You see, at this very moment some of my leading actors are camping out on the moors, not far away from the Castle. I have rather a swagger caravan of my own, where I eat and sleep. And when I realised this afternoon that Marne was giving this show to-night I made up my mind to go. I telegraphed to Exeter for a kit, but, as I told you, it went wrong."

"But if you hadn't been asked—"

“Oh, that’s easy,” Gilette said coolly. “A couple of hours or so ago I simply kidnapped a guest on his way to the Castle and borrowed his card of invitation. At the present moment that unhappy youth is fast asleep in my caravan under the influence of a drug which will render him placidly unconscious of what is going on for some time to come. You may call this a pretty cool proceeding, but then I have an infernal scoundrel to deal with, and this is a case where necessity knows no law. I must be in the Castle to-night, and I must be so made up that Marne would not recognise me if he met me again. Unless I am greatly mistaken, I have the missing threads of the conspiracy in my hands before I sleep the sleep of the just again. Now, you give me those clothes of yours, and help me to make up. I think I shall wear a red wig of closely cropped hair, and darken my features so that even my best friend wouldn’t know me. Now, come along and give me a hand. I know where everything’s to be found, and if anybody does happen to see a light outside, or if one of the caretakers turns up by any chance, we shall be all right, because, you see, I have been using the bungalow once or twice lately, and the people who look after the place naturally know me, and accept my presence here as a matter of course. By Jove!”

Gilette started, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him, and that peculiarly recklessly humorous smile of his lighted his eyes. He turned eagerly to Mallison, and impulsively laid a hand upon the latter’s shoulder.

“A regular brain wave,” he cried. “One of my very best efforts. Why not come along with me?”

“Come along with you?“‘Mallison echoed. “Do you mean that I am to accompany you to this dance?”

“Precisely,” Gilette said coolly. “My dear fellow, you might be no end of use.”

“But you forget that I have not been asked.”

“Oh, pooh, what’s that got to do with it? We’ll invent a name for you, and you shall go as my friend. And as to disguise, why there are at least a hundred of them under this roof at the present moment. I mean the wardrobes that my uncle’s models use when he is painting one of his historical pictures. There is a Palmer’s dress in the corner yonder, just the very thing. A long flowing robe with a comical hat, and your face all covered with hair. With the cockle-shells in your headgear you will look the character to the life. Now what do you say?”

Mallison shook his head dubiously. He was far from liking the suggestion, because it seemed to him very much as if Gilette were inviting him to put his head into the lion’s mouth. And yet there was something alluring in the adventure after all. He had more than his natural share of courage, and now he was beginning to feel the wine of freedom burning in his veins he was more than half inclined to embark upon anything that was likely to take the taste of the prison out of his mouth.

“Upon my word, you rather tempt me,” he said. “Before I settled down seriously to science I loved adventure as well as any man. And again, it you are working as you say you are, more or less on my behalf, then it would be most ungrateful of me if I refused to lend you a hand. Still, it’s a big risk, Gilette. If I stay where I am till to-morrow night and Trevor comes along I shall most assuredly be able to get out of the country without being molested. Do you see what I mean?”

"Yes, and what then? You would be utterly miserable. You might hide yourself in some foreign village, but I doubt if you could possibly be happy. Now, let me tell you another thing. Peggy Ferriss is staying down here with Hetty Bond and her mother, and I know they will be at the dance to-night. And if that fact doesn't lure you, then I've no more to say."

Mallison glanced up with shining eyes.

"I'll come," he said curtly. "Say no more."

Chapter XI

The Right Track.

In some subtle way the atmosphere of the studio seemed to have changed. The suggestion of tension was no longer there, but in its place an air of restfulness and confidence that Mallison found to be infinitely soothing after the strenuous hours that he had passed with no sign of a friend on the horizon. And now behold something almost in the nature of a miracle. The very right man had suddenly appeared, literally oozing friendship and help at every pore and more than eager to be up and doing.

And at any rate for the moment the critical time had gone by. Given anything like an opportunity to get away from the neighbourhood, unseen by anybody who knew him, and Mallison was free. But he had not forgotten what Roy Gilette had said as to the future. If he crept out of England like a fugitive from justice, then henceforth he would have to start afresh under a new name, away from all his friends, and carve a new road to fortune. The mere suggestion of asking Peggy Ferriss to share his lot in the circumstances was unthinkable, and this all the more so because he knew that she would come if he only gave her the slightest encouragement. But perhaps there was another way out, and as he looked into Gilette's eager face he began to hope that this might prove to be true.

"So that's all right," Gilette said, "it will be no end of a rag in itself, though that is only a side issue. If anybody had told me an hour ago what was going to happen this evening, I should have regarded it as incredible. And, mind you, I am not devoid of imagination. I may not he able to write stories and plays, but I know that my cinema work is all right, and I hereby appoint you as the hero in one of the biggest stories ever written. And, by gad, you are the hero, though you don't realise it as yet."

"You might put it a bit more plainly," Mallison suggested.

All at once, Gilette dropped that inconsequent manner of his. His face took on a more serious cast, and a thoughtful light came into his eyes.

"All right, old chap," he said. "You see, I can't help taking the humorous view of life. Upon my word, if I was going to be hanged to-morrow, I should find a comic side of things. But I will try and restrain myself for your sake. Now, sit down and have another cigarette. There's plenty of time, and we are perfectly safe here. If the inquisitive village policeman turns up, I will go out and interview him. He is quite

accustomed to seeing me down here at all sorts of times, and now, if you don't mind, I am going to ask you a few impertinent questions."

"As many as you like," Mallison smiled.

"Very well, then. In the first place, what do you remember of your father?"

"Nothing," Mallison said. "I believe that I have told one or two people that he died before I was old enough to remember him. But when I come to think the matter over properly, I remember my mother telling me that he died three months before I was born. It's rather funny that a man should forget anything of that sort, but I believe I am telling you the facts."

"Well, anyway, it's rather important," Gilette said. He was still quite grave, and spoke with a seriousness of manner that did not fail to impress his companion. "I'll explain presently. Do you think it is possible for you to prove that your father died before you were born? Of course, I know you can do it through Somerset House, but I don't want publicity of that sort, and it is necessary to move with confidence almost at once. Is there anybody living who can confirm your statement?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," Mallison said. "Oh, yes, of course there is. How infernally stupid I am. There's that old nurse of mine, Elsie Dorida, who lives in a little cottage on the cliffs. Perhaps you know her?"

"I have certainly seen her," Gilette said. "A queer old picturesque foreign woman."

"That's right. We used to call her Elsie, but her real Christian name is Eleva."

"Upon my word, all this is working out beautifully," Gilette cried. "Here we have a living witness, whose testimony will be vital when the time comes. That is, of course, if my theory is correct. I have a good many facts at my fingers' ends, but I have had to construct a theory which at present is largely based on supposition. But all that I will explain in due course. Now, look here, my friend, how do you account for the fact that your old nurse was a foreigner?"

"That's easily explained," Mallison said. "My mother was not English."

"Ah, quite so. Please correct me it I am wrong in my statement that your mother was Argentine born."

"Now how on earth do you know that?" Mallison asked. "But of course. Sir Marston Manley told you.'"

"Yes, I did get that fact from him in the first instance. It had no significance in my mind at the time, but after my first visit to the Argentine, and a certain adventure I had there, I began to put two and two together. And, mind you, it is very important that I should not make five of them. But never mind about that—your father was English, at any rate."

"Yes, my father was Major Mallison, at one time in the cavalry. As far as I recollect, he married my mother during the time she was on a visit to England, and retired from the army on his small means and his half-pay. He had just enough to live comfortably in the country, and the small house where I was born, and he managed to keep a horse or two. Three months before I was born he broke his neck in the hunting-field."

"Yes, that exactly tallies with what I have heard. Now, If my information is correct, your mother's father was bitterly hurt to think that his daughter should

have married without asking his consent. He was a Spaniard of the bluest blood, and emigrated to the Argentine in his early days and made a large fortune."

"This is all news to me," Mallison said. "I was under the impression that my father left just enough to keep my mother and myself, and pay for my education."

"Ah, there you are wrong," Gilette said, with the air of a man who speaks with authority. "From the time that your mother was married she never heard another word from her father. He cast her off entirely, under the impression that she had made a mesalliance, which, however, was not strictly true."

"Of course not. My father was a gentleman, though not an aristocrat."

"Ah, but that was not quite good enough for the old gentleman in the Argentine," Gilette went on. "Family pride, with him, was a sort of disease. He was a real hidalgo, and always hoped to see his daughter married into the old Spanish nobility. So you can imagine what a blow it was to him when your mother made her own choice. I dare say you wonder what all this has got to do with our expedition this evening, but possess your soul in patience, my boy, and you will learn, all in good time. But I think if you seek out that old nurse of yours, she will confirm all that I am saying. Of course, you can't go and see her yourself, not at any rate openly, but later on I want you to interview her, that is, if she is to be trusted."

"My dear fellow, I would trust her with my life," Mallison cried. "Why, she was my mother's nurse, as well as mine, and she would have cheerfully died for either of us. As a matter of fact, before I came here tonight, I had half made up my mind to call at her cottage and throw myself on her mercy. Oh, you will find Elsie a useful ally, if you really want one."

"Excellent," Gilette cried. "Excellent. Now, bear in mind, my dear chap, that your grandfather turned his back upon your mother, and cut her off with the proverbial shilling. I think you will find that your mother wrote to her father on many occasions without eliciting any reply. Like Pharaoh, the old gentleman hardened his heart, and refused to listen to the voice of nature. You will see, later on, how important all this is. It is rather a delicate subject, but I know that after your father died your mother was left in abject poverty."

"But that's impossible," Mallison exclaimed. "We lived for years just as we had done in my father's time, and, at any rate, there was enough money to educate me at one of the big public schools, unless, of course, my very dear friend, Sir Marston Manley, helped. He was always like a second father to me, as you must have heard. Yes, that must have been it."

"I don't think so," Gilette said. "In fact, I know he didn't, because I asked him. You see, I was in the Argentine just before the time of your trouble, and again after your conviction. As a matter of fact, I have not long come back from there. But I am getting rather in front of my subject. And now for a really pertinent question. What was your grandfather's name?"

"Upon my word, I can't tell you," Mallison smiled. "It seems a most extraordinary statement to make, but I haven't the remotest notion what my mother's name was before she was married. She used to talk to me a lot about her early life, and describe the country in which she was born, but if ever I asked any questions she always put me off by saying that all her relatives were dead. She

seemed so upset by any curiosity on my part that I dropped the subject when I got old enough to understand. But perhaps you are in a position to tell me?"

"I am," Gilette said, almost curtly. "I am. Your grandfather's name was Marne—Argo Marne. He had a big establishment in the Argentine, and was, or is, the possessor of an immense fortune. Now do you begin to see anything?"

"No, I can't say I do," Mallison confessed. "I am bound to say—but here, stop a minute. Didn't you tell me an hour or so ago that it is a man named Marne who has just become possessed of Chilstone Castle?"

"That's right enough," Gilette said dryly.

"And he, I presume, is my grandfather."

"That we have to find out," Gilette said. "I have my own opinion on the subject, and that is why I am so anxious to attend the big show this evening. I don't want Marne to recognise me; in fact, it would be fatal if he did so. Of course, if I am altogether wrong, then it doesn't matter a row of pins, but I feel absolutely convinced in my own mind that I am not wrong. There is a vile intrigue and conspiracy going on here in this quiet little village under our very noses, and you are the central figure of the whole thing. It all revolves round you, and when I have established your innocence, as I shall do before I have finished, then the guilty will be punished, and innocence will be triumphant, quite in the good old-fashioned way, and incidentally my big film will be nicely rounded off, and I shall stand confessed as the real goods in the cinema line."

Just for a moment Gilette had dropped back into his old inconsequent manner, then he grew grave again.

"And now perhaps you begin to understand," he went on, "Now comes the critical time. Of course, I could call in the police, but I don't want to do that, because it would spoil my story, which I want to work out my own way. I want to bring the rascals to justice in a world of vivid melodrama, and I shall do it too, if you only help me. If I am right, it is the most amazing story that ever happened. And it will be still more amazing if you, the escaped convict, should be able to help me to establish your own innocence. I dare say you think I am a beggar to talk, but I am chock full of my subject, and I do know what I am talking about. Unless I am greatly mistaken, events will be on the move before morning. If you come along with me to-night, you will see things that will open your eyes, and the best of it all will be that the man we are after will not have the slightest idea who you are. He won't know who I am, for the matter of that. Oh, I have worked it all out in my mind, and if I don't give him the shock of his life, then you can write me down an ass."

"Oh, I'll come right enough," Mallison said "I made up my mind to that directly you told me that Peggy Ferriss would be there. Do you think I could possibly get speech with her? Of course I know it might be dangerous, but still, if it could be done, I should be more than glad. In a day or two my supposed death will get into the papers, and—"

"Say no more," Gilette said. "I can quite see what's passing through your mind, and if we can spare the poor girl that additional trouble, we will. You leave it to me, my boy. At the first opportunity I will make myself known to Peggy, and it will be confoundedly hard luck, in a great barracks of a place like Chilstone Castle, if you don't get an opportunity of a word or two. I am very sorry, old chap, that I

can't say any more at present—all I can do is to ask you to trust me absolutely, and I will see you through. Here, by Jove, it's nearly 11 o'clock. Come along, get those clothes off, down to the last stitch. It, would never do for you to be wearing anything that came out of the prison, because, if things went wrong even a pair of socks might lead to trouble. I, of course, could easily prove my identity if necessary. And when you have done that, you can get into that Palmer's kit, and we can make one another up."

A little while later, and Gilette stood in the middle of the studio, arrayed in Mallison's convict garb. It was just a little tight for him, but that mattered nothing.

"I could wish that the stockings were a trifle longer," he said. "And I should feel more comfortable if I were not showing quite so much bone about the region of the wrists. But still, people don't look for anything fastidious in the way of tailoring in prison clothes, and perhaps, on the whole, your scanty garments make for realism. Now, hunt around, like a good chap, and find the make-up. As far as I remember, all that sort of thing is to be kept in the big oak chest yonder."

It was even as Gilette had said. The old muniment chest disgorged every requisite of the dressing-room of a modern theatre. There were colours in grease paint, with pads for the cheeks, and even the sort of plaster which is used in covering up a tooth, so as to present the appearance of age. By the time that Mallison had finished, Gilette presented a perfect picture of the last word in the way of a degraded and desperate convict. There was a blue tinge on his chin, and on his padded cheeks the perfect suggestion of a life of hardened dissipation. He looked the last word in ruffianism, to the very life, indeed, it would have been absolutely impossible for even his mother to recognise him.

"By Jove, that's something like a makeup," he said, as he admired himself in the glass. "The whole thing is so perfect that I feel half inclined to go off at once and commit some crime. I don't see how a chap with my appearance could help being a criminal. Dear Mallison, you have done your work to perfection. Now, come along, and I will treat you in a like manner."

The whole business was finished at length, and a few minutes later the two conspirators stole cautiously away from the bungalow and crept along the cliffs in the direction of Chilstone Castle. This was a big building standing in its old and picturesque grounds, overlooking the sea, and approached by a pair of ancient iron gates on the top of which were two standards where now the electric lights were blazing. It was getting a little late, and evidently most of the guests had arrived, for there was not a soul to be seen along the drive as they approached the brilliantly lighted portico where Gilette, in that easy way of his, presented his card and a moment later they were inside.

"Now for it," Gilette whispered. "Carry it off boldly and remember that this is the first step towards freedom."

Chapter XII

The Man Called Marne.

It was not for the first time that Mallison found himself standing in the great hall at Chilstone Castle. He had been there many a time and oft in the old days when he was a boy, and the ancient family that had held sway there for over five centuries dispensed their simple hospitality to the best of their means. But they had passed away now with so many of their clan, and their place knew them no more. Mallison had known perfectly well, even in those days, that before long the castle must inevitably pass to strangers, but, so far as he could see, there was no change. Here was the massive oak, as it had been any time in the last 500 years, the armour under the big stained windows, and the faded Oriental rugs upon the floor. He took all this in more or less mechanically, for all at once he was very tired and overcome, and, just for a moment or two, it seemed to him that he was going to collapse altogether. It was not till then that he had realised how strenuous a day lay behind him, and how much more he might have to endure before daylight. Roy Gilette, in spite of that careless manner of his, seemed to know what was going on, for he put his hand under Mallison's arm.

"Here, steady on, old chap," he whispered. "Pull yourself together. I was a fool not to have remembered what you have been through. If I had thought of it we would have burgled the old man's cellar and given you a pick-me-up before we started. What you particularly need is a couple of glasses of champagne. You shall have those presently, as soon as I can lead you to the buffet without attracting attention. Are you feeling very done?"

"Not very," Mallison confessed. "I dare say I shall be all right presently. After what I have gone through lately it is rather trying to get back to these old scenes. But I am better now. Let's go and get it over."

They threaded their way across the great hall, through a brilliant group of guests dressed in all the fancy costumes of the last few centuries, and moving about in a changing kaleidoscope under the full blaze of the electric light. At the far end of the hall by the foot of the great staircase a man was standing with a faded-looking woman by his side.

"There he is," Gilette murmured. "That's the chap we are after. Argo Marne, at least that's what he calls himself."

"And the lady?" Mallison asked. "Oh, never mind the lady," Gilette said rather ungallantly. "She is more or less of a lay figure, a sort of borrowed chaperon of foreign extraction, and perfectly harmless. We are not concerned with her. But come along, we must go and shake hands with them, and do the polite generally."

With that Gilette strode coolly forward, dragging Mallison more or less unwillingly behind him. Roy was in his element now, and carrying the whole thing off in his very best manner. He bowed before the faded-looking woman, and then turned to Marne with his easiest smile. He was quite secure in the knowledge of his prefect disguise, and he was prepared to take liberties accordingly.

"Ah, Mr. Marne," he said. "Very pleased to meet you again. It was very good of you to find that I was staying in the neighbourhood and send me an invitation for your brilliant entertainment. I never expected so great a personage as yourself would give a second thought to so humble a person as Edward Martin. I was no end bucked, by Jove, and, because I knew how amazingly hospitable you are, I ventured to bring my friend with me. This is Mr. George Beggarly, of the well-

known family of Neighbour. Of course you have heard of the Beggarly Neighbours. Well, this is one of the cadets of the family."

The whole thing was so amazingly impudent that Mallison found himself changing colour under his make-up. But apparently the chaff went clean over the heads of the man and the faintly smiling woman by his side.

"Quite right, quite right," the man called Marne said, speaking with a strong foreign accent. "Charmed to meet any member of your aristocracy. Do you live in these parts, sir?"

"Well, no," Mallison said. "I am down here quite by accident. I was half-afraid to come, but my friend here told me that I should be welcome."

He hardly knew what he was saying, but the amazing personality of the big man was not lost upon him. He was tall and broad, with what had once been a mass of dark curly hair, now sparse and turning grey. His features were heavy and hawk-like, and in the black eyes was an amazingly benevolent expression. With his lofty brow and suggestion of high intelligence, the man called Marne would have passed for a philanthropist anywhere, indeed, Mallison felt rather drawn towards him.

They stood there chatting for a few minutes, until another rush of guests pushed them on one side, and they drifted towards the ballroom, where already dancing was in progress. Beyond the great room with its carved ceiling and historic frescoes was a small apartment devoted to refreshments, and towards this Gilette made his way. The buffet was quite empty yet, so that it was possible to obtain the champagne of which Mallison stood in such need, and retire to a corner out of earshot of the attendants.

"Do you feel any better now?" Gilette said, as he watched Mallison finish his second glass.

"Quite another man. I feel ready for anything. I did not realise till just now what a trying time I have been through. But now I am with you all the way. Anything you want I will do for you. But weren't you just a bit daring when you talked all that humbug to Marne? Anybody but a foreigner would have seen that you were pulling his leg at once."

"Upon my word, I can't help it," Gilette confessed. "When that frivolous mood comes upon me, I have to go all the way or perish. But it was all right, I don't suppose our man ever heard of a game called beggar my neighbour, but, by Gad, he's going to before I have finished with him. Now, tell me, what impression did the chap make on you?

"I was rather taken with him. If you hadn't given me a hint that there was something wrong, I should have put him down as something big. Certainly he is a man of high mental capacity, and that benevolent look of his will carry him anywhere. Quite an attractive personality."

"Yes, I thought you would say that," Gilette went on. "But all the same, you are quite wrong, my boy. This man called Marne is one of the most poisonous rascals that I ever came across. He would stick at nothing to get his own way, and if he only guessed what I know, or who you are, neither of us would leave the Castle alive. He would knife you in the back as soon as look at you. As a matter of fact, he and I have met before, though he doesn't recognise me in the present disguise, and it's most imperative he shouldn't. But he is a most amazing scoundrel."

“Yes, but look here,” Mallison said. “I was rather under the impression that I was coming here to meet my own grandfather.”

“Well, so you shall before I’ve finished, with any luck,” was the cryptic reply. “But the man called Marne isn’t your grandfather; in fact, he’s no more Marne than I am. Ah, my boy, we’ve got a long way to go before we get to the bottom of this business. Meanwhile, you had better make the best of your opportunity. You stay here, and I will go and make myself known to the girls.”

“But what are they doing here at all?” Mallison asked.

“Oh, well, Mrs. Bond, that’s Hetty’s mother, you know, has taken a house for the summer not very far away. As a matter of fact, it was I who persuaded her to rent the place, knowing perfectly well that a good deal of the big drama would be worked out in this neighbourhood. And that being so, what more natural than that Hetty should ask her dear friend Peggy Ferriss to come down here and spend the summer months with her. Of course, if the man called Marne had not taken it into his head to come over here and set up in business as a country gentleman, I should not have met you at the bungalow this evening. It’s all coming right in time, my boy; the fates are playing into our hands, or we should never have met in these romantic circumstances.”

“It is all Greek to me,” Mallison said.

“Maybe, but not for long. Before many hours have passed you shall know all about it. And now, if you don’t mind, I’ll go and look up the girls. I should like to impress the fact upon them that my name is Martin, and that I have no connection whatever with that erratic genius, Roy Gilette. You sit here and smoke a cigarette and wait here till I come back.”

With that, Gilette wandered off, more or less aimlessly, and set out in search of Hetty Bond and Peggy Ferriss. He found them presently, in the ballroom and had to wait with what patience he could until the dance was finished. Then, when the two girls drifted away from their partners, he approached them and addressed them by their names.

“I have no doubt you ladies have forgotten me,” he said. “But my name is Martin.”

He saw the look of surprise in Hetty’s eyes, and the startled expression on her face.

“Why,” she began. “Surely—”

Gilette laid a finger on his lips.

“Not too loud, if you please,” he whispered. “There may be someone listening, and that might be fatal. Now, if you girls have got nothing on for the next dance, you might follow me out into the hall. There’s nobody there now, apparently everybody had arrived, and I have a good deal to say to you both.”

“My programme’s empty for the next three dances,” Peggy Ferriss confessed. “You see, we know so few people here.”

“Oh. that’s all right,” Gilette went on. “So much the better. Now, you stroll out into the hall quite casually, and I will follow in a moment. There is a funny little alcove just opposite the big door and there we shall be able to talk in peace. I have got a big dramatic surprise for you, Peggy. You are going to have one of the shocks of your life. You needn’t be frightened; it will be a very pleasant shock, unless I am greatly mistaken. Now do as you are told, and trot along.”

The girls faded away as if in search of a little fresh air, and a few moments later Gilette joined them in the alcove. Hetty Bond turned to him eagerly.

"Now, what's the meaning of all this?" she asked. "How did you get here? We didn't even know you were in England. And what's, the object of calling yourself Martin?"

"Ah, that will all come out when the drama begins to unfold itself," Gilette smiled. "Didn't I tell you ages ago that I was writing the film story? Well, it's nearly finished, and though you may not know it, all the principal characters, including the villain of the piece, are under this roof at the present moment. I might even go so far as to say that the injured hero is also on the stage. But we will come to that presently."

"What an extraordinary boy you are," Hetty laughed "Always full of mystery, and never doing anything like anybody else. Do you actually mean to tell me that you are here under false pretences? I mean, that you have not even been asked."

"That's right," Gilette said coolly, "Not only have I not been asked, but there would be the devil to pay if Mr. Marne knew that I was under his hospitable roof. The last person he wants to meet is Roy Gilette, and I do assure you, my dear girl, that I am equally anxious to remain anonymous; and that, for the present, is as much as I am going to tell you. If anybody asks you who I am, then my name is Martin, and I am merely a casual acquaintance whom you have met in London. You know nothing whatever about me, and that—"

"But suppose you are found out?" Hetty suggested. "If you came here without an invitation."

"Well, not exactly that either," Gilette said. "I took the liberty of borrowing a card from another man who really was an invited guest. At the last moment, owing to circumstances over which he had no control, he was prevented from putting in an appearance. I don't mind telling you girls that it was I who prevented him from turning up to-night. But there's nothing to be afraid of. It is nothing to do with you, and as long as you stick to the Martin story, then you two are all right. But you are going to see a lot of exciting events presently, which are not down on the programme. Altogether, it is going to be a great evening. Watch out for the new drama by that brilliant playwright Roy Gilette—something entirely fresh and original played for the first time on any stage, at the Chilstone Castle Theatre Royal. Behold me in a leading part, sustained by a London company. At the present moment, the aforesaid company is not far off, and is waiting without the castle walls for the cue. And when the cue does come, then you just sit up and take notice. I think you will admit afterwards that you are getting full value for your money. For further particulars, see small bills."

This was Roy Gilette in his most inconsequent mood, and the girls were amused accordingly. But they did not seem to notice that Gilette spoke a little more incisively than usual, and that his lips had lost their usual gay smile. Still, they knew him well enough to believe that he was about to bring off one of those amusing practical jokes of his, and that before long the castle would be the scene of something quite fresh in the way of comedy.

"And you won't tell us any more?" Hetty asked.

"Not a single word," Roy replied "And now, let us talk about something a little more serious. Peggy, do you ever hear anything from Raymond Mallison?"

Peggy Ferriss's eyes grew dim.

"He writes to me once every two months," she said. "And I reply as often as the authorities allow me. But it isn't like writing at all. I often wonder what the poor boy thinks of my letters. They must sound very strained and cold to him, but how can a girl put her real feelings on paper when she knows that every word that she writes is read by the governor of the jail? He may be a kind, sympathetic man, but, on the other hand, he may be a cold official, or even a cynic, which is worse."

"And you still believe in him." Gilette asked.

"Believe in him," Peggy echoed indignantly. "Of course I do. Raymond is as innocent as you are. Some day the truth will come out, and he will be free. I pray every day that Walter Pennington may recover from the injury to his head that has made him more or less of a lunatic, and if that should happen I shall not have long to wait before I see Raymond again."

"Perhaps you will see him before that," Gilette said.

Peggy looked up almost wildly.

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Not so loud," Gilette said. "Try, and control yourself, my child. Shut your lips tight and hold on to Hetty. Because Raymond Mallison is only a few yards away from you at the present moment, under this very roof, disguised as a Palmer. Now, don't faint, and don't ask me any questions. If you stay here alone while I go off with Hetty I will send Raymond to you."

"I wasn't even aware you knew him," Peggy said unsteadily.

"Nether did I, till an hour or two ago. But we are wasting time. I will send Raymond to you, and you can talk in this little dark corner to your heart's content. It is a most amazing story, but I know perfectly well that you would rather have it from his lips than mine. Come along, Hetty."

Chapter XIII

The Other Man.

Huddled up in her dark corner and shaking from head to foot with excitement. Peggy sat there almost afraid of what was going to happen next. Even now she was half doubtful whether or not Gilette was playing one of his practical jokes on her. But even he with all that irresponsible humour of his, would never have gone quite so far us that. No, something amazing had happened, and she was going to see the man of her heart again.

It was rather difficult to sit there, all alone, in that immense hall, waiting on events, and hoping for the best. Still, she could not but be conscious of the wild beating of her heart and the knowledge that she was going to see Raymond Mallison once more. It was no fault of hers that she had not seen him already. More than once she had suggested a visit to Slagmoor, but greatly as Mallison had been tempted, he had almost curtly refused to allow her to do anything of the sort. He knew what it meant for a delicate shrinking creature like herself to

comprehend at first hand what prison life was really like. It was all very well to try and visualise it, and conjure up pictures, coloured by what one reads in books, but the grim reality was a different affair altogether. To begin with, she would have to see him behind prison bars, in the presence of a hard-hearted warder, who would listen to every word that they said. And it was from that that Mallison shrank more than anything.

And now, by some extraordinary means, he was free. Not that he had been released, or Peggy would have been the first to hear of it. But by some amazing combination of circumstances he had emerged from the prison, and here he was, under the same roof as herself, disguised, she hoped, beyond recognition.

That there was something sinister going on in Chilstone Castle she felt certain; otherwise, why all this mystery? She knew that Roy Gilette was heart and soul on the side of Mallison, and firmly believed in his innocence. To this day, Peggy had no idea why Gilette had disappeared so mysteriously, and had departed for the Argentine within a few hours of Mallison's arrest. He had come back in time to attend the trial, and then once more, South America had claimed him. And now he was back again full of mysterious hints and suggestions, all of which, for some illogical reason, filled Peggy with hope. Mallison must have escaped from Slagmoor in some clever fashion, and, no doubt, Gilette was at the bottom of it.

Peggy was still turning these strange events over in her mind when a strange figure joined her. She saw a man in a long brown robe, a man whose face was covered with hair, and who wore a high hat with a cockle shell in front of it. Then she felt an arm about her, and, with a little smothered cry, she responded to Mallison's embrace and laid her lips on his. It was perfectly safe there, in that dim little alcove which was absolutely deserted at that moment. From the ball-room came the murmur of voices and the strains of the band, and it seemed to those two that they were all alone in the world.

"What does it mean, Raymond?" Peggy whispered. "I feel as if I were in the middle of a dream. Roy Gilette came to us just now and told me that you were here. Of course, I couldn't believe it. Then he told us that he was not an invited guest, and that he had come here in disguise and that we were to say nothing about it. I am quite bewildered."

"You are no more bewildered than I am," Mallison murmured in her ear. "I seemed to have lived years since this morning. And now, let me tell you all about it."

Secure in the knowledge that they were not being overheard. Mallison told his story. He told how he had come away from the prison with the working gang as far as Hangman's Rock, and how he, yielding to the impulse of the moment, had flung himself over the cliff and made his way down to the beach below. Then he went on to tell her how he had reached Merston, and his adventure in the bungalow, until he had found himself face to face with Gilette, whom he was meeting for the first time.

"And that's about all, my dearest," he said. "There is some amazing conspiracy here, which Gilette understands, but which is still an absolute puzzle to me. All I know is that there is something wrong with this man Marne. Do you know anything about him? Have you known him long?"

“I can tell you very little,” Peggy said. “I am down here, staying with Mrs. Bond, and Hetty, who have a house in the village for the summer. Mrs. Bond is here somewhere. The lady who keeps house for Mr. Marne called upon us a little time back, and, later on, we were invited here this evening. I can’t even tell you the name of our hostess. She is one of those insignificant women who never make the slightest impression on anybody.”

“Yes, I noticed that when I came to-night,” Mallison said. “And that’s all you can tell me?”

“I am afraid so,” Peggy replied, “It’s very strange, because I rather like Mr. Marne. It struck me as being generous and kindhearted, but if you say—”

“I didn’t,” Mallison smiled. “It was Gilette who said so. The man called Marne impressed me rather favourably. But Gilette says he isn’t Marne at all, but a mere adventurer who is using another man’s name. But the strange part of it is that my grandfather was called Marne. I didn’t know it myself, till Gilette told me, and I suppose he is right, because he seems to have made quite a study of my past.”

“That’s very strange,” Peggy murmured. “Do you mean to say you never knew the name of your own grandfather?”

“It’s the simple truth,” Mallison said. “My mother was always very reticent on the subject. Of course, I knew that she was not English, and that she came from South America, but she never wanted to talk about it, and, to tell the truth, I was not particularly curious. But Gilette, who seems to have been spending a lot of his time in South America, tells me that my grandfather was, or is, a wealthy man in the Argentine, and, moreover, a member of one of the most exalted families in Spain. He says that there was a bitter quarrel when my mother married, and that the old man cast her off. It seems that there was no money for us to live on after my father died, so how we managed, and how my mother contrived to send me to school, and to the hospitals afterwards, I haven’t the faintest idea. But Gilette says I shall know all about it in good time. Meanwhile, so far as I can gather, the key to the mystery lies somewhere under this roof, and the man called Marne has it in his possession.”

“Is that why Roy Gilette insisted upon you coming with him to-night?” Peggy asked.

“So I gather; but like other dramatists, Gilette has a strong objection to disclosing his big scene until the proper moment. I believe that I am to take a hand in this game, and I shall be quite willing to do that, even if it’s only for my own sake. Peggy, for the last twelve months, I have been wondering and wondering whether one could ever get to the bottom of the mystery that has ruined my life. I am not saying anything about your life for the moment, but I think I feel that side a bit more keenly than I do my own. At first, I thought that there had been some cruel mistake, and then it began to dawn upon me that I might be the victim of some amazing conspiracy. And, if Gilette is right, that is the truth.”

“But why?” Peggy asked. “Why?”

“Ah, that’s a thing we have to find out, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, Gilette is on the right track. In that eccentric way of his, he is making the whole story into a film play, and he will work it out in his own erratic fashion. And he wants me to help. And I can help.”

“But the danger of it,” Peggy whispered.

“My dear girl, there is no danger at all. Can’t you see that I am, to all practical purposes, free? I am supposed to have met with an accident, or, if the worst comes to the worst, I committed suicide this morning in a moment of desperation. You see, everybody knows that it is impossible to fall over the Hangman’s Rock and live, and as the tide in the Channel is so strong, there is very small possibility of my body being found. What I mean is, that no one is in the least likely to search for me, and, to all practical purposes, I am free. You see what I mean? So long as the secret is kept between us, there is little likelihood of my identity being disclosed. For the present, I am going to stay with Gilette. He has his own company down here, and, for the moment, he is living out of doors in a most luxurious caravan which he has fitted up for himself. He is going to find me an efficient disguise, and I am going to stay with him as his guest. Very probably I shall be introduced to the rest of the company as an actor who is just joining the Long Trail Players. And all this time Gilette is finding things out. I don’t think you need have the slightest anxiety about me. Why, in my disguise, I shall be able to walk about the village, therefore we shall be able to meet freely, without fear of trouble.”

Peggy sighed delightedly as she laid her head on her lover’s shoulder. It was good to have him by her side, good to know that they would be together all these glorious summer days. And yet there was another side of the question.

“Yes, that will be lovely,” she said. “But it does not quite satisfy me, Raymond. I want you to be free, I want you to walk about the world like other men, to go on with that fine work of yours, and make the big reputation that lies before you. It’s all very well to know that we can be together, but that is not everything. Don’t mistake me, Raymond. I would follow you to the end of the world, if necessary, and share your lot, however humble it might be, but I shall never be really happy till your innocence is proved, and you can look the whole world in the face.”

“Ah, I wonder when that will be,” Mallison sighed. “There is one man who could prove my innocence.”

“Oh, yes, you are speaking of Walter Pennington.”

“That’s the man. Is there any possibility of his ever being himself again?”

“I don’t think so. I often ask, but from what I can gather he is just in the same condition as he was a year ago. Physically, he is as strong as you are, but after that injury of his he has never properly recovered his reason. Of course, he may get quite well, but, on the other hand, he may live in his present condition for many years. But I am sure, if he ever was properly sane again, he would be the first person to come forward and declare that you had nothing to do with this trouble.”

“Yes, I believe that,” Mallison said. “We had rather a bitter quarrel, but Pennington never was a vindictive man, and perhaps there were faults on both sides. But it is no use depending upon him. I shall have to prove my own innocence, and I believe that I shall do it with the aid of Gilette. Peggy, he is a much cleverer man than we imagine.”

“Oh, I know all about his brilliant qualities,” Peggy said. “He likes to pretend that there is nothing in life worth troubling about, but he is ambitious enough, and will never be content to sit down and live on the fortune that his father left him. If Roy Gilette says he is getting to the bottom of this mystery, he will surely

do so. But don't let us talk about that any more; let us make the best of this wonderful stroke of good fortune."

They sat there for an hour or more, talking intimately in the secluded little alcove looking out into the big hall which was absolutely deserted, and listening with a sort of dreamy delight to the music of the band. It was nearly time for supper when Gilette joined them.

"Well, you young people," he said gaily. "How are you getting on? Enjoying yourselves, I hope? My word, Peggy, this is a bit of an adventure, what?"

"I am still trying to believe it," Peggy laughed. "And I am half afraid that I shall wake up presently to find that it is all a dream. My dear Roy, are you quite satisfied that Raymond will be safe in that caravan of yours?"

"Safe, of course he'll be safe. Before morning he will be fitted out with a disguise so perfectly designed that even his own mother wouldn't know him. I have already thought out a part for him in my big drama and he will be introduced to the rest of my company as an English actor who has passed most of his time in America. Don't you worry that pretty little head of yours about that. Mallison's escape will be forgotten in a day or two, and, anyhow, I shall be greatly surprised if the authorities take any further interest in him. You gather your flowers while you may, my child. On with the dance, let joy be unconfined, and all that sort of thing. And there is one thing you can make up your mind about. Before many days Mallison will be a free man. I have got all the threads in my hands, and I shall be able to spot the villain in the play when the times comes, and a pretty vile conspiracy it is. Now, why not come into the ballroom and enjoy yourselves? You used to be keen enough on dancing at one time, Peggy."

"So I was in the happy days," Peggy admitted. "But for the last year, I haven't, had the heart to."

"Well, come along now. Hetty is waiting for me, and I am getting all the pleasure out of life possible before the serious business of the evening begins."

"What do you mean by that?" Mallison asked.

"Well, I didn't come here exactly for the joy of the thing. You will remember when I had the good fortune to run into you in my uncle's bungalow. I was anxiously looking for a disguise which would enable me to come here to-night without being recognised by our more or less worthy host."

"I had forgotten that," Mallison said.

"Well, there you are. I had the most pressing reasons for coming here this evening as somebody else. I brought you with me to see the fun, and perhaps to lend a hand in case things went wrong. But things are not going wrong, everything is moving splendidly. But I haven't really begun yet."

"What is the programme?" Mallison asked.

"Ah that, my boy, you will see before many minutes are over. You will see the first brilliant act in a highly ingenious and original drama. You will witness the spectacle of the villain of the piece scratching his head and wondering what is going to happen next. You will see Roy Gilette at his very best, and all his friends know what that means, and moreover—"

Gilette lowered his voice suddenly, as a footman in livery emerged through the big doors into the hall, carrying a couple of suit cases and followed by a young man in grey tweed, who had obviously just come off a journey, probably in a

motor. As he passed the alcove Peggy drew a deep breath and grasped Mallison's arm.

"Look," she whispered. "Look. The likeness."

To Mallison it was as if he was gazing at himself in a mirror. For the newcomer was his absolute alter ego. In expression, in line, in colouring, even down to the minutest detail, the man in the grey suit was Mallison over again. Then the newcomer passed on up the stairs and was lost to sight.

"Good heavens," cried Mallison. "What does it mean? Is that my ghost wandering about, or did my eyes deceive me? Gilette, what on earth do you make of it?"

Gilette was the first to recover himself.

"Magnificent, splendid," he cried. "This is a bit of unadultered good luck which I should never have dared to pray for. Now, come on you two, and watch the development of the drama. You are going to see something that you will remember all your lives."

Chapter XIV

„Mr. S. Allison".

The four people in the dim little alcove stood there themselves unseen watching intently the drama which instinctively they knew was unfolding itself before their eyes. Even the gay and inconsequent Gilette appeared to be moved, for Mallison could catch the sound of his loud breathing.

"Say nothing," he whispered, "make no comment and don't be surprised at anything that happens. The trap is baited and the rat is nibbling at the cheese. Here is the amazing confirmation of a theory of mine so grotesque that I dared hardly dwell on it myself. But, dear friends, it is always the utterly unexpected that happens, or so a great authority has said. And the best of it is that the rogue to the play is as ignorant on some points of the conspiracy as you three are. Say nothing and keep your eyes open."

The young man, preceded by the footman, was standing close by the alcove, apparently trying to explain matters.

"I am very sorry to be so late," he said. "But the fact is the car which a friend in Exeter lent me broke down. So I had to get hold of some sort of a conveyance eight or ten miles away, and we have been crawling along ever since. If it isn't too much trouble, I should like to see Mr. Marne. You had better tell him that Mr. Allison—Mr. Stephen Allison—is here, and would be glad of a few words with him."

"Very good, sir," the footman said.

With that, he vanished in the direction of the ballroom, and returned a minute or two later, followed by his employer. It seemed to Gilette, watching everything with a keen eye, that Marne was hardly himself. He was restless and uneasy, and apparently he had some difficulty in returning the gaze of the other man. He waited for Allison to speak.

“I hope you won’t think this is infernal cheek on my part,” the latter said, “but you see, I have taken you literally at your word. You told me when we last parted that you were buying an estate in England, and that if ever I came back from the Argentine I was to be sure to look you up.”

“Isn’t there some mistake here?” Marne asked.

“Mistake,” Allison echoed. “Oh, I don’t think so. I went out to the Argentine with you the last time you were in England. Don’t you remembered that you practically guaranteed an engagement out there? I don’t mean on your estate, but in a theatre in which you had some interest.”

“Strange,” Marne murmured. “Strange. But, upon my word, sir, I have no recollection of it.”

The other man’s face flushed angrily.

“Oh, well, if it’s like that,” he said, “the best thing I can do is to go back where I came from. I can only remind you that from the first time we met, and onwards, you always seemed to be glad enough of my company, and you were willing enough for me to do you a good turn. It was quite another Marne who invited me to accompany him to the Argentine. I am doing my best to keep my temper under trying circumstances, but if you insist upon saying that you have never met me before, then I will leave you, and do my best, even at this time of night, to get some sort of accommodation in the village. But to say you have forgotten me is ridiculous. I don’t blame you for not finding me the position you more or less promised, because, being an old actor, I know how difficult things are. I didn’t even mind when you more or less left me out there to look after myself, because I was not entirely without funds, and I thought I would stay out there and see something of the country. But when you say that you never met Stephen Allison before, and that you never gave him an invitation to come and see you at your place in England at any moment, without the formalities of an invitation, then I say, sir, that you are getting very near to a deliberate misstatement. However, it doesn’t matter, only don’t you forget that you once made use of me, and you never quite explained why. I wish you good-night.”

Marne hesitated just for a moment, then with a sudden assumption of friendship held out his hand.

“My dear fellow,” he said, “how on earth can I explain myself? What must you think of me?”

“Eh, what’s that?” Allison asked open-mouthed.

“Well, I am going to tell you a secret, and I rely upon your honour not to mention it to a soul. Some few months after we parted in the Argentine, I had rather a bad attack of sunstroke. For a long time it was touch and go whether I got well or not. And ever since then, I have strange lapses of memory. Would you believe me when I tell you that just before dinner to-night, and when I was expecting a house full of guests to a dance I am giving, I was actually going for a long walk along the cliffs, having forgotten all about my little party. If I hadn’t looked into the ballroom and seen the bands men there, I should certainly not have returned before midnight. Nobody knows anything about this, except my confidential secretary, who is a man I can implicitly rely on. You see, I have not altogether retired from business, and it might do me a great deal of harm if any of my rivals found out all about this little weakness of mine.”

“It must be very inconvenient,” Allison said, still only half convinced. “And do you means to say you had forgotten me?”

“Entirely,” Marne replied. “I couldn’t for the life of me think of anybody I knew by the name of Allison; to be quite candid, I thought that you were some impudent thief, coming here with a view to a robbery. I was within an ace of sending you off without coming to see you at all. Of course, I remember you now, my dear fellow, and I can only regret the strange way in which I received you just now. But come along, better late than never. I’ll ring the bell and get one of the footmen to show you your bedroom, where you can change and join my guests in the ballroom. I might tell you it is a fancy dress dance, but there are a few here in ordinary evening dress, so that you will not feel uncomfortable, and I only hope, now you are here, that you will remain till the end of next week, when I have to go back to town for a time.”

Smiling, but still not quite convinced, Allison allowed a footman to conduct him up the big staircase, and vanished, leaving Marne standing in the hall, evidently a prey to considerable anxiety and biting nervously at his finger nails. Then he seemed to throw off the trouble that brooded over his head, and with something like a sigh, turned in the direction of the ballroom.

“Now, what do you think of that?” Gilette asked his companions. “Did you ever see a man more confused than our worthy host. And do you suppose for a moment he had forgotten our friend Allison? Of course he hadn’t. But he was frightened out of his life to see him here, and he would have been more frightened still had not the footman told him the visitor’s name, and thus gave him a few seconds to recover himself.”

“It seemed to me,” Mallison said, “as if he had changed his mind. In the first place he had resolved to ignore Allison altogether, and then a better scheme occurred to him. He was afraid that Allison might go away and make trouble. And if Marne is the man you say he is, then I should feel inclined to think that the man who bears such an amazing likeness to myself is likely to find himself in serious trouble before long. Did you notice the way that Marne looked at him? I have some professional experience of criminals, and if ever I saw murder in a man’s eyes, I read it in Marne’s more than once when those two were talking together. Allison ought to be warned.”

“I think you can safely leave all that to me,” Gilette said. “I have been working on this business for the best part of two years, gradually finding things out, until I have nearly all the threads in my grasp. But the coming of this man Allison to-night is a bit of pure unadultered luck of which I had no expectation, though, mind you, it has long been a theory of mine that Allison, or somebody like him, really existed. But, as I promised you just now, you shall hear all the story in good time. And now, if you don’t mind, we will get back to the ball-room. Things are beginning to move at last, and before morning I shall have something definite to go upon. I want you people to play up to me, and back me in everything I do. Take my cue, and follow it blindly. And there is nothing to be afraid of.”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” Hetty said shrinkingly. “I don’t know why, but I feel absolutely terrified.”

“My dear girl, there is no occasion,” Gilette said soothingly. “I give you my word of honour that nothing is likely to happen tonight that is not pure comedy. There

will be tragedy lurking behind it, of course, but no eyes but mine will be able to see it. You are not afraid, are you, Peggy?"

"I am afraid of nothing that will help Raymond," Peggy said.

"Then, allons, mes enfants," Gilette cried gaily. "Back to the dance. But it would be just as well if we didn't all drift into the ballroom together. I'll go first, and start the ball rolling, and you two girls can follow a minute later. Mallison can bring up the rear."

For the next hour of more the dancing went on with no sign of the trouble that was lurking under the gay and brilliant surface until, at length, the dancing ceased, and the guests paused under the painted roof of the great room, waiting for supper to be announced. And, meanwhile, Gilette had been moving amongst the dancers, the gayest of the gay, and impressing that amazing personality of his upon everybody with whom be came in contact. Amongst all the dancers there, there was nobody more popular than the man in the convict suit. He stood in the centre of a more or less admiring throng, exchanging witticisms with everybody around him, including Marne himself, who seemed to have thrown off his late anxiety, and had plunged whole-heartedly into the gaiety of the evening. It was just at this point that a footman threaded his way through the dancers, and stood hesitatingly by Marne's side.

"It's a note for one of the guests, sir," the footman explained. "For Mr. Martin."

"Well, why don't you give it him, you fool," Marne said rudely. "It's the gentleman in the convict dress."

Gilette took the note, and, with a bow to the rest of the group around him, tore it open.

"What a fine idea," he cried. "Listen to this, Mr. Marne. A friend of mine who is the head of a great cinema business, has a big company in the neighbourhood filming a drama. He wants to know if you would mind him coming here to-night with one or two of his principal actors, and taking some pictures of this fancy-dress dance of yours. He will bring all his accessories, such as lighting, and so on, and he seems to think that if he can work it into his story, it ought to make a most attractive feature. Of course, it's rather a large order to ask a favour of the kind, but you might feel inclined to grant it. At any rate, if you don't, no harm will be done. What do you say?"

"Well, upon my word, I don't know what to say," Marne replied, "At any rate, I admire your friend's audacity so much that I almost feel inclined to say yes. But then, this is a private dance, and I don't think the majority of my guests would care to appear in a cinema story."

"I wonder," Gilette cried. "I wonder. Speaking for myself, I should be highly flattered. Now, what do you say to taking a consensus of opinion? Put it to the vote."

From all sides of the room come murmurs of approval. There was something so amazingly novel in the suggestion that it appealed almost irresistibly to everybody there. With a tolerant smile, Marne looked round the room.

"We'll take a show of hands," he said. "Those in favour of having the film people here raise an arm. Now then, those in favour, please. Hold up your hands."

A ripple of laughter and a faint murmur of applause, practically every hand there was hold up in favour of the scheme. Most of the people there had attended

more than one fancy dress dance, but the idea of being filmed in that magnificent old ballroom, with an eventual appearance In public in a score of cinema palaces, appealed strongly to human vanity.

"Agreed, agreed," Gilette cried. "The thing is as good as done. Mr. Marne, most of your guests will have an opportunity later on of seeing what they look like in public. And really, it will make a splendid scene. All these gay dresses, and this magnificent background, will present a picture almost unique. Shall we take the photographs now or wait till after supper?"

Marne muttered something to the effect that it was all the same to him. Anything that pleased his guests would be equally pleasurable to him. He was perhaps a little uneasily conscious of the fact that Gilette was dominating the situation, but in the circumstances that mattered little.

"Better have it now, then," Gilette went on. He turned to the footman standing by his side. "Take a message back to my friend, will you?" he asked. "Say that he can come along as soon as he likes. Mr. Marne will be very pleased to see him."

With that the footman vanished and at Gilette's suggestion an extra dance was inserted in the programme. By the time it had finished, and expectation was beginning to run high, the big door at the end of the ballroom was flung open, and a small knot of men entered, bearing a camera, and the necessary accessories for taking the pictures. It took some little time to fit the extra lamps which the operators brought with them, but these were merely a sort of accessory, for the electric lighting scheme at Chilstone Castle was excellent, and the blaze of light there was all sufficient. Then there came four or five men and women, obviously actors from their makeup, and these, under the guidance of a little dark man with keen eyes, and a clean-shaven face, proceeded to go through what was evidently a set scene in their story, with the mass of dancers in fancy dress for a background.

And then the scene was mixed with another dance in progress, in which the professionals took a prominent part, dancing together, during which the click of the shutter was heard incessantly. Then the little dark man threw up his hands and the camera stopped. "Is that all?" Marne asked.

"Well, not quite, sir," the producer said. "We have done most of the comedy, and we want to introduce just a touch of drama. One moment."

In the centre of the stage so to speak, the leading actors had effectually grouped themselves without any instructions, evidently knowing exactly what they were doing. They stood in the foreground, going through their parts in dumb show, with a big throng of guests gathered curiously behind them. And then on the wordless drama there intruded a strange figure that seemed to strike an almost grotesque note.

The figure came in the shape of an old broken actor with long hair and ragged beard. He had a high bald forehead, a thin long nose and a mouth that spoke eloquently of suffering. He crept along till he came within the eye of the camera, then he raised his two thin hands, whilst the rest of the actors turned and regarded him with every indication of astonishment and, in one case, at least, of absolute fear.

"What does it all mean?" Peggy whispered to Mallison. "I feel that there is something behind all this."

"Of course there is," Mallison murmured. "I dare say we shall know all about it in good time. But look at Marne."

Marne was standing there in the background, gazing with eyes that seemed almost starting from his head at the old man in the centre of the little group. He seemed to clutch at the air as if for support, and a queer sort of cry broke from his lips. It was only for a second, and then he was himself again. But Gilette's keen eye had not failed to notice Marne's confusion and he smiled to himself grimly behind his hand.

Chapter XV

The Conjuring Trick.

Yet Gilette's face was unclouded and sunny enough; it was as if he were there for the sake of enjoyment alone. So far as his outward appearance was concerned he might have been absolutely outside the electrical atmosphere that was entirely of his own creation. He stood there, with a radiant smile on his lips, glancing round the room, as if he had been the founder of the feast, and this was one of the happiest nights of his existence.

And yet from behind those laughing eyes he was watching Marne keenly enough, and carefully noting every motion that was passing almost transparently across the South American's face. It was plain enough to see that Marne was intensely alarmed, and, at the same time, palpably puzzled. He gave the impression of an animal that knows it is caught in a trap, and yet cannot discern the barriers closing around it. And all this Gilette watched with the eye of the connoisseur in human feelings. It was only for a brief space indeed that Marne had betrayed himself, but it had been quite long enough for Gilette to see what was passing in the back of his mind, and it pleased him to know that he had obtained exactly the effect he had intended.

"Don't you worry about Marne for the present," he whispered. "You leave him to me. The evening's entertainment is by no means over yet, and when it really is finished you won't have to wait very long before you know all about it."

With that Gilette plunged into the giddy throng of dancers, and for the moment was seen no more. But in a strange sort of way Mallison could feel his personality, and knew without being told that there was some purpose in Gilette's every movement. Meanwhile the dance was going on, and it was almost bewildering to see the way in which the cinema actors mingled with the crowd at one moment, and a second later, almost by magic, were posed in various dramatic attitudes in front of the camera. And all this while it seemed to Mallison that never once had Marne taken his eyes off the picturesque old figure that more or less dominated the scene which was being taken.

And then, conscious perhaps that he was betraying more than an ordinary interest in what was going on, Mallison turned away from the contemplation of the drama, and held out his hand to Peggy, who was standing by his side. He seemed

to have caught something of Gilette's mood, for there was a sparkle in his eyes and a certain recklessness in his manner that Peggy did not fail to notice. It was as if the old Mallison had suddenly come back again.

"Let us dance," he said. "My dear girl, let's make the most of the opportunity, because it may come to an end at any moment. I am just as utterly bewildered as you are, except that I feel there is something going on here which closely concerns your future and mine. It's quite evident to me that Roy Gilette is a much more brilliant man than we take him for. At any rate, he tells me that I shall know all about it before morning. So come on, let's enjoy ourselves like we used to do in the good old days before all the trouble came."

Peggy smiled up into her lover's face. She was quite ready to fall in with his mood and abandon herself to the joy of the moment without any heed for the morrow. There was something delicious in the feeling of security as she floated round the room in Mallison's arms, with the music in her ears and her eyes filled with the brilliancy of the scene about her. It was getting on towards supper time now, the first feeling of strangeness had worn off, and all those gaily dressed figures there were given over to the sheer ecstacy of life. And by this time the novelty of the cinema actors had somewhat worn off, and gradually the strangers were forgotten. But not by Marne, who stood there gloomily detached, watching the scene with a suspiciousness that was none the less disturbing because he could make nothing of it. He knew, in his inner consciousness, that he was being made the sport of circumstance, and that there were some real meaning behind all this mummery, and yet for the life of him he could not see what it was. It had all come about in the most natural fashion, but still he had an uneasy reeling that it would spell trouble for him later on.

He came forward presently in an interval when the camera stopped, and addressed himself to the little man who appeared to be responsible for the technical side of the drama.

"Have you nearly finished?" he asked. "Not that it very much matters. And, by the way, who is that picturesque old gentleman with the white beard? I mean—"

Marne broke off somewhat abruptly and gazed vaguely around him. Almost as he spoke, the aged individual with the thin nose and long white beard had vanished. This was all the more disconcerting because Marne had his own very good reasons for getting a little private conversation with the aged figure before the latter finally left the castle.

"Why, he's gone." he exclaimed.

"Very likely," the producer said coolly. "He's a queer old chap, is Moses, as we call him, and he does exactly as he likes. Of course, that's not his proper name, indeed, I doubt if anybody does know his proper name."

"Has he been with you long!" Marne asked.

"On and off, just a few months. He came out of nowhere and asked me for an engagement. He was tramping from one town to another and ran against our show quite by accident. He told us he had been acting all over the world, mostly in South America."

"Ah." Marne said a little hoarsely. "Ah."

"Well, he seems to know his business all right, and as we wanted an old man, our boss gave him a job. But he's quite a law unto himself. He comes and goes

pretty well when be pleases, and when he had finished this evening, he vanished, as you saw."

Marne hesitated just for a moment.

"I'd rather like to have a chat with him," he said. "He strongly reminds me of a man I knew years ago in the Argentine. I suppose you couldn't get him to come up here some afternoon?"

"Well, I can try," the producer said. "But I don't think I shall be successful."

With that, the speaker turned away to give certain directions to his company, and Marne stalked away more or less moodily. He was still uncertain in his mind as to whether he was up against certain amazing coincidences, or whether somebody was playing a series of audacious tricks upon him. He had satisfied himself, at any rate, that the manager of the cinema company had nothing to do with the plot, in which he was entirely right, because the man whom Gilette had spoken of as Conway was, in fact, the business director, and knew no more of the inner story of the big film than did the man in charge of the camera. He knew, certainly, that Gilette had seized the opportunity of making the Chilstone Castle dance the background for one of the big scenes, but beyond that, Conway neither knew nor cared. For some reason or another, his employer, Gilette, who had engineered the whole thing had stipulated that he was not to be addressed by his own name for the present, and with that Conway was content. He was not in the least a curious man, but one entirely wrapped up in his business, and so long as that went well nothing else mattered in the least.

The dance was finished at length and then a halt was called because the hour of supper was at hand. The pictures were finished and Marne more or less graciously offered his hospitality to the principal artists concerned. Then Mallison, handing Peggy over to Hetty Bond for the moment crossed the room and addressed himself directly to the man called Allison, who was standing by himself and watching the brilliant scene in a detached sort of way. In doing this, Mallison was acting entirely on the impulse of the moment and without waiting to think what Gilette was likely to say. He had an intense, almost overpowering longing, to talk to the man who bore so amazing a resemblance to himself. Here, he felt, was where the secret of the drama lay. And he was secure in his disguise with his long flowing robes, and face covered with hair. Moreover, Gilette had done his work thoroughly well, so that even the contour of Mallison's face was changed beyond recognition. The man with whom he desired speech could not possibly be aware of the remarkable likeness between them.

"Excuse me, sir," Mallison said. "But I have a curious feeling that I have seen you before.".

"I should think that is exceedingly likely," Allison said casually. "You see, I happen to be an actor."

"Yes, so I should imagine," Mallison said. "I must have seen you in London."

"I should hardly say so," the other man went on. "You see, I was on the London stage for a very short time, and then only in minor parts. As a matter of fact, most of my stage work was done in the Argentine."

Mallison started slightly. It was strange how the Argentine cropped up at every point now, and it was equally strange that this pleasant-looking young man, with

the easy manners and air of entire confidence, should be called by a name which was Mallison's own, save that the initial letter was missing.

"It must be a very jolly life," Mallison went on, speaking as calmly as he could. "In my younger days I was attracted towards the stage myself."

"Oh, my dear fellow," Allison laughed. "Most of us go through that phase of madness. It's a sort of disease that attacks youth, about the age of twenty-one. Some of us never get over it, and go on suffering for our sins, whereas others throw it off, and become respectable members of society. And really, it's a rotten life, unless you have money."

"Let's hope that's your case," Mallison murmured.

"Only lately," Allison said frankly. "You see, my people were comparatively poor. I was born, as Mark Twain says, of parents neither particularly poor nor conspicuously honest. In other words, my father was in a very small way of business as an engineer. He managed to give me some sort of education, and I was lucky enough to pick up a scholarship. But the stage always called me, and I had to go. I enjoyed the life, but I know what it is to starve, and sometimes walk from town to town. Then I met Marne, who seemed to take a sort of fancy to me, and offered me a job in the Argentine if I would go with him. That was about two years ago, so I went, but somehow or another the job didn't seem to materialise, though I understood from Marne that he had a considerable interest in more than one theatre out there. I don't know how it came about, but I missed him, and he vanished somewhere up country. But not before he told me that he was settling down in England, and he gave me a most pressing invitation to look him up whenever I got back here again, and not wait for an invitation. So, being at a loose end just now, I took him at his word, and here I am."

Mallison nodded thoughtfully. It was not for him to say what he had seen and overheard in the hall an hour or two ago, when Allison had put in his most unwelcome appearance.

"It's a lovely part of the country," Mallison said. "I used to know it well in my boyhood, and if you are fond of scenery you ought to have a most enjoyable time here."

"Yes, I think I shall," Allison said. Then he became more confidential. "Do you know anything about Marne?"

"Absolutely nothing," Mallison said truthfully. "I am more or less an uninvited guest. I came here with my friend Martin—the man over there in the convict suit. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," Allison said casually. "Only it seemed to me that Marne had changed. He doesn't seem to be so pleased with himself as he was. He has lost all that commanding manner of his, and, between ourselves, when I got down here this evening he didn't know me. Swore he had never seen me before. I am a pretty hot-tempered chap, and just for a moment I had to hold myself in, because I thought that Marne intended to be deliberately offensive. Then, all at once, he changed. He said he was glad enough to see me, and told me some story about a sunstroke, and all that sort of thing. Perhaps I ought not to talk like this to a stranger, but it struck me at the time as devilish odd, but I thought that if you lived in the neighbourhood you could give me a tip or two."

“I am afraid I can’t,” Mallison said. “You see, I am quite a stranger here. I suppose you intended to stay here for a few days, at any rate?”

“That’s the idea,” Allison went on. “Then I return to town with Marne, when I hope to get an engagement.”

“I sincerely hope you will,” Mallison said cordially.

“Oh, it isn’t absolutely necessary,” Allison laughed pleasantly. “Things have changed with me the last twelve months; whilst I was struggling out yonder for a living my mother died, and three months ago, I heard that my father had followed her. Then came something exceedingly pleasant in the way of a lawyer’s letter. I was told that my father, just before he died, had been entirely successful with one of his inventions. The poor old chap was inventing all his life, and that is probably why he never succeeded in business. But the last effort turned out real trumps, and, moreover, the dear old chap came in contact with an honest business man who put the thing in a practical form. They tell me that the Allison Sleeveless Valve is the last word in that sort of thing. At any rate, I came back after pawning all I had to pay my passage, to find myself a partner in the concern which already is making some thousands a year.”

“I congratulate you,” Mallison said. And he meant it too, because there was something about this young man’s personality and his engaging frankness that appealed powerfully to Mallison. “In that case, you won’t trouble about the stage?”

“Oh, indeed I shall,” the other said. “I am genuinely fond of my profession, and when I get hold of the comedy I am looking for I shall take a London theatre and run the company on my own. And you must come and see me act.”

“I most certainly will,” Mallison cried, quite forgetting himself and his unhappy surroundings. “That is, I will, directly circumstances allow me to get to London. I am rather tied in this neighbourhood for the present.”

“Then you live here,” Allison asked.

“Well, I do and I don’t,” Mallison said, speaking as coolly as he could. “We all have our worries and responsibilities, and I have mine, like most people.”

“If I can help you in any way,” Allison hinted.

“Perhaps, you might,” Mallison said. “But not quite in the way you think. We’ll have another chat before the evening’s over. Meanwhile, if you will excuse me, I must go and look after the ladies of our party.”

With that Mallison went across the room to where Gilette was standing with Peggy and Hetty, evidently waiting for the doors to open and supper to be announced.

“Here, what have you been up to?” Gilette asked. “I didn’t give you authority to take a hand in the game.”

“I couldn’t help it,” Mallison confessed. “I found that alter ego of mine such a fascinating study that I really had to go and speak to him. He’s quite a taking personality. I don’t know why, but I feel quite drawn towards him.”

“Ah, well, you’ll know why before long,” Gilette said mysteriously. “Ah, supper. Come along, and forget all about your troubles for half an hour, and there’s one thing I can promise you—the fun of the evening is a long way from being finished yet.”

Chapter XVI

The Trick Finished.

Gilette led the way gaily enough through the big panelled doors leading from the ballroom into the great dining hall, where supper had been laid out. It was much as if he were really the host of the evening, and, indeed, that humorous personality of his had more or less dominated the situation for the last two hours. To all outward appearance, he was there for the sole purpose of enjoying himself, without a single ulterior thought. It was almost amazing to think that, situated as he was, in the midst of a perfect web of intrigue, which he was heart and soul in solving, he was able to detach himself entirely from the serious problem of the evening. And yet he pushed his way through the glittering throng of guests, throwing a word here and, there, and having a quip ready for anybody.

"You are the most extraordinary man," Mallison said. "How on earth do you manage to do it?"

"Now, that's very nice of you," Gilette laughed. "But please don't worry to throw bouquets at me just now. You will have to be careful, my dear chap. I saw Marne watching you very uneasily when you were talking to Allison just now. I don't see how he can possibly suspect you of being in the plot, but it would have been much wiser had you left that prototype of yours alone. Oh, I quite see the temptation."

"I am bound to confess that I found it quite irresistible," Mallison said. "Put yourself in my place. I come here, more or less dragged at your heels, after the most exciting day in my life, when I am not quite sure whether I am dreaming or not, and, on the top of all these bewildering events, I find myself looking at another Raymond Mallison, much as if I were regarding myself in a mirror. The man bears such an amazing likeness to myself that I wonder that I didn't give the whole show away. These dramatic surprises of yours are all very well, but don't you think it would have been more prudent if you had given me a hint?"

"Oh, my good man, I would have done so had it been possible. But even I am not omnipotent. I give you my word, I was just as much astounded to see Allison here to-night as you are. I had a pretty shrewd suspicion that somebody like him was knocking about in the world somewhere, but I never dreamt for a moment that he would materialise under this roof to-night. It is a fine instance of the fact that the gods of war are always on the side of the man who takes risks. I have been taking a good many this evening, but it is all for the best."

Mallison asked no further questions. It was neither the time nor the place for that sort of thing, and besides, Gilette had assured him that the whole mystery would be explained in the course of the next few hours.

"Now, go on just as if nothing had happened," Gilette said. "Sit down and enjoy your supper, and thank the fates for the kind things they are doing for you. You are perfectly safe, and, so far as I am concerned, I have scored a triumph in that drama of mine which tickles my creative vanity. Be thankful that you are here with Peggy by your side."

The great banqueting hall was a blaze of light from the big electroliers overhead that showed up the pictures on the walls and the fine carving of these ceilings. At separate tables some arranged for two, and some holding as many as six, were shaped lamps in pink shades, casting reflected pools of light on gleaming silver, and banks of flowers. It seemed as if Marne had spared no expense to make his house-warming a success. He sat with one or two favoured guests at a long table in the end of the room, and for the time, at any rate, he appeared to have cast aside all his fears, and to be entering fully into the enjoyment of the evening. Gilette led the way to one of the smaller tables, where he and his party seated themselves, and prepared to do full justice to something exceptional in the way of supper.

"Now, I call this most uncommonly jolly." he exclaimed. "Just like the old times we used to have in London."

"I feel like a character in a story," Peggy laughed. "I ought to have a mask, and all that sort of thing. It seems almost impossible to believe that this elderly pilgrim by my side with his long beard should be—"

"Better not mention any names," Gilette said warningly. "Hallo, there's our friend Allison looking for a table."

"Ask him to come here," Hetty suggested.

Gilette was on the point of vetoing the idea sternly, but the appeal to his reckless side was irresistible.

"All right," he said. "I am a perfect fool to listen to any request of the sort, but it tells on the story, and if you don't mind the risk, I am sure I don't."

It fell out a few minutes later, therefore, that the man called Allison found himself seated at the same table with Mallison and the rest of them. Evidently the request to make up one of their party conveyed nothing to him, for he came quite willingly not to say eagerly, and appeared to be grateful for the opportunity of sitting down in their company.

"Now, I call that very nice of you," he said. "I only hope I am not intruding."

"Quite the contrary," Gilette said dryly.

"You are quite sure of that? Because there are just four of you, apparently old friends, if not something more. But it would be impertinent for me to go into that."

"You are quite right," Gilette admitted frankly enough. "We are something more than friends. This is Miss Hetty Bond, and the other lady with the grey eyes is Miss Peggy Ferriss. My name matters nothing for the moment, and as this is a fancy dance, my vis-a-vis prefers to remain anonymous."

Peggy laughed almost hysterically. There were moments, every now and then, when the situation was getting upon her nerves. She felt almost like screaming now, as she turned from the contemplation of Mallison's rugged hairy face to the clean-shaven symmetry of Allison's. And yet, if the latter had only known, he was seated at the same table with the man who was his exact facsimile down to the remotest detail. It was hard, therefore for Peggy to preserve her composure, feeling, as she did, that any moment might produce an explosion.

"As I said before," Allison went on "All this is very nice of you, especially to a man who is practically a stranger in a strange land. I should feel a great deal more comfortable in my mind if I had a fancy dress. But, as I have already explained to this Palmer gentleman, I came down here to see Mr. Marne, practically uninvited,

and, as he was too busy to introduce me to anybody, I have been wandering around for the last hour or two like some lost spirit."

Gilette made some gay inconsequent reply that put the stranger entirely at his ease, and from that moment things moved smoothly between them, so that even Peggy forgot her fears and threw herself heart and soul into the enjoyment of the moment. There came a time presently when Gilette, at the head of the table, placed a paper cap on the top of that red wig of his, and proceeded to entertain his companions with a few clever tricks of sleight of hand. It was an amusement that he had cultivated from his youth, and, indeed, as Hetty remarked, if anything else failed, he would have no difficulty in getting a living at it. The noise and laughter from the little table aroused the attention of other guests, and, before long, quite a little gallery stood round, watching Gilette perform. He looked up presently, and saw Marne standing on the edge of the crowd watching almost approvingly. Gilette glanced in his direction and nodded, and Marne pushed his way to the front. He seemed to have quite shaken off his brooding suspicion now, and there was an engaging smile on his lips.

"You are evidently a man of many parts, Mr. Martin," he said. "It's a strange thing how those conjuring tricks fascinate people. I have travelled all over the world, and have frequently noticed the same thing. That last trick of yours was exceedingly clever—simple, but effective. It reminds me of something I once saw in India. Perhaps you learnt it there?"

"No," Gilette said modestly. "As Shakespeare would say, it's a poor thing, but mine own. I hope you don't mind?"

"Oh, dear no," Marne said graciously. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind showing us a few more."

By this time the space round the little table was crowded with guests. It would be some little time yet before dancing recommenced, and apparently the company was exactly in the mood to enjoy the little entertainment that Gilette was affording them. There were loud cries of approval and a clapping of hands, in acknowledgment of which Gilette rose and bowed graciously. He looked a queer grotesque sort of figure as he stood there in his convict suit, with that ridiculous paper cap on the side of his head.

"It is true," he said, "that one does good by stealth, and blushes to find it fame. Not that I have got quite the right quotation. I mean that one wakes one morning to find oneself famous; though again that sounds rather confused. But still, it you like—"

Again the ripple of applause and laughter broke out, and the gaily thronged guests clustered more closely round the table. It was exactly the right type of conjuring entertainment, without a stage, and everything in full view of the audience. Most of them had supped well, the champagne had been excellent, and Gilette could see that exactly the right atmosphere had been created. It was not for the people standing round to know that he had been deliberately working up this situation. He had promised Mallison that the fun of the evening was a long way from being finished, and he was leading up to another act in the amazing drama.

Outwardly, at any rate, he was nothing more than an amusing person who was living entirely for the enjoyment of the moment. He stood there smilingly pattering on in that light inconsequent way of his and raising a ripple of laughter at every

other word. So deep was he in the theme of the moment that he had almost forgotten Mallison and the rest of the party, but one glance at Marne's face recalled him.

"Now, I wonder if anybody can provide me with a pack of cards," he said. "Mr. Marne, have you such a thing in the house? A new pack if possible."

"Oh, I think we can manage that," Marne said. "But I warn you that I am a hardened card player, and there are few games with which I am not familiar, I flatter myself that I could hold my own with any card sharper in the world."

"That's a challenge," Gilette said gaily. "I must confess, for my own part, that there are certain players I have met in whose hands I should be a perfect child. However—"

Marne turned and gave an order, and presently a footman came along with two packs of unopened card's on a tray. For the next half hour or more Gilette astonished and delighted the throng that stood round him with various tricks, ending at length with one in which he took a fresh unopened pack of cards, and, holding them above his head, named each of them in turn without making a mistake in the whole fifty-two. He smiled rather broadly to himself as the whole of the onlookers burst into a torrent of applause. It was so neatly and swiftly done that the select audience went into raptures.

"Now there," Gilette smiled, "is an instance of how easily people are deceived. That's a new trick, invented on the spur of the moment, and performed for the first time in public. You saw how I took a new pack of cards, and, after tearing the cover off them, raised them above my head so that it was impossible for me to see one of them, and yet I took each card in turn with my right hand and named it before I placed the same on the table. And you will further observe that I did not make a single mistake. You were all facing me at the time, and intently watching my every movement. But now, perhaps you would like me to tell you exactly how the thing is done."

A chorus of affirmatives followed.

"It is quite simple," Gilette went on. "And shows how easily people can be deceived when they want to be deceived. As I said before, you were all facing me, and that is why none of you noticed that high up on the wall behind you is a round Florentine mirror in which I could see every card before I named it. You see how easily these things are done when you know how."

The spectators broke into cheers and laughter, and even Marne's grim features relaxed.

"Now one more little trick, and then I must finish," Gilette said. "Please watch me carefully."

With that, he took up three unused coffee cups, and placed them in a row on the table in front of him. Under the centre cup he appeared to hide a champagne cork, and then, manipulating the cups, much as a card-sharper manipulates the three pasteboards in what is known as the three-card trick, asked any one of the audience to nominate the cup under which the cork was concealed. But the first guess revealed a large ripe peach, the second exposed a red silk handkerchief, to the discomfiture of the man who hazarded the assertion that the cork was there, and there remained only the third cup. Gilette turned to Marne.

"Aren't you going to have a guess, sir?" he asked.

“Seems rather obvious,” Marne smiled. “Of course the cork must be under the third cup.”

“Would you mind lifting it up?” Gilette asked.

Marne raised the third cup, but no cork appeared. Instead was a small photograph that Marne dropped at the first glance, as if it burnt his fingers. A girl, standing by, snatched it up eagerly.

“Why, it’s that dear old gentleman who was playing in the theatricals just now,” she cried. “The man with the long, white beard. How amazingly clever.”

But Marne stood there as if he had been frozen.

Chapter XVII

Towards the Dawn.

The pretty girl in the Flemish costume looked up with engaging frankness into Marne’s eyes, confident that she would see there an expression of bewilderment and curiosity, to say nothing of amusement; but at the first glimpse of the man’s face, she recoiled almost as if someone had struck her. Unversed as she was in the ways of the world, she was still not blind to the murderous expression on Marne’s features, and the concentrated fury that seemed to come from his eyes like liquid fire. With a little exclamation of fear and wonder she fell back amongst the general body of the guests, most of whom had seen nothing but a little clever conjuring, and almost immediately Marne’s expression changed.

He seemed to know almost by instinct that he had come very near to betraying himself, and therefore, it was up to him to turn it off as lightly as possible.

“Did you notice anything?” Peggy whispered to Mallison.

“My dear girl,” Mallison murmured, “I have been noticing things all the evening. I thought I was coming here to a fancy dress ball to please some whim of Gilette’s, but he seems to have immersed me in a perfect cave of mystery. I haven’t the remotest notion what it is all about, but it’s serious enough, if Marne’s face is any criterion. All I hope is that Gilette’s sense of humour won’t take him too far.”

It was some time before Marne spoke, and before he wiped entirely from his face that mixed expression of fury and baffled impotence. He seemed to know that in some way he was being deceived and fooled, and yet there was nothing he could take hold of, nothing that he could carry home to the man whom he felt quite sure was engaged in the congenial task of humbugging him. But be got himself in hand at length, fully determined before the dance was over to get to the bottom of the whole business. “That was amazingly clever,” he said almost genially. “Now, how did you manage that, Mr. Martin? And where did that photograph come from?”

“Oh, as to that,” Gilette said, “you can’t expect me to betray the secrets of the prison house. Besides, it is about the best trick I do. I don’t want a clear stage, and I don’t mind how many people are standing close round me. I merely pull up my sleeves, as you saw, and the thing is done. The peach I took from the fruit stand in the middle of the table, the handkerchief I borrowed from that gentleman

in the cavalier dress, when, in a moment of abstraction, he was thinking about something else. Permit me to restore your property, sir."

A ripple of laughter went round the group, as Gilette restored the handkerchief to its owner.

"I am vastly obliged to you," the latter said. "You are well disguised as a convict, and I should not particularly care to meet you, say, in a crowded thoroughfare where I was carrying anything of value."

"Yes, I flatter myself I am realistic," Gilette laughed. "Perhaps, some of these days—"

"But the photograph," Marne could not resist saying. "The photograph. Where did you get that from?"

"Oh, that I picked up." Gilette said carelessly. "You see, like Autolycus, I am a snapper up of unconsidered trifles. One never knows when these things will be of use. But I won't tax your credulity too far, though I might have made a good deal of use of the photograph of that picturesque old actor who was here an hour or two ago. Probably he dropped it, and it occurred to me that I might make use of it in one of my tricks. Perhaps Mr. Marne will accept it as a souvenir."

With that Gilette offered the pasteboard to Marne, who favoured him with a piercing gaze, as if trying to read his most inmost thoughts. But there was something so bland and ingenuous about Gilette that even Marne began to doubt there being anything sinister behind this little comedy. At the same time, he took the photograph, and dropped it carelessly into an inside pocket.

"I am very much obliged to you," he said.

"If you have time before the dance is over, Mr. Martin, I should like to have a few words with you. Come and smoke a cigar with me in the library. I have a proposal to make to you—"

With that, Marne turned on his heel, and at the same moment the band in the ballroom began to play once more.

"You heard that," Gilette whispered to Mallison. "Our benevolent friend is not easy in his mind, and he wants to know exactly where he stands. Well, before I have finished with him, he won't know whether it's on his head or his heels. And look here, old chap, you'll have to be careful."

"Fancy you saying that," Mallison laughed

"Oh, well, perhaps I have allowed my sense of humour to carry me a bit too far, but there's no harm done yet. I never can resist the chance of pulling a man's leg if I have the opportunity, and when one has such a cunning old bird as Marne to deal with the desire becomes an obsession. Mind you, I wanted to alarm him, I wanted him to feel that he was up against something that he doesn't understand, and by the lord Harry, I believe I have done it."

"Then he's the villain in the play? I mean he's the centre scoundrel in the drama you are writing."

"Ah, you may well say that," Gilette cried vehemently. "He's one of the biggest scoundrels that ever lived, and you, above all men, have the right to say so. But we shall come to that all in good time. Meanwhile, I'll frighten him. He doesn't know what to make of me, and he doesn't now that the theatrical make-believe which we saw an hour or two ago is essentially part of the scheme that is going to expose him at the finish. Just now he doesn't know whether to regard me as a

determined enemy or an inconsequent ass who has, by a set of curious coincidences, intruded upon his own shameful past. I suppose the beggar's some sort of a conscience, indeed, everybody has for that matter, but conscience or no conscience, he is going to try and pump me presently. And now you go off and enjoy yourself, and if I happen to want you presently, which is very probable, I will give you a signal. Stick to the girls, and keep as free from everybody else as you can, and—yes, by Jove, I was nearly forgetting the most important thing—avoid Allison as you would the plague."

Mallison looked up in some surprise.

"Is there anything wrong with him?" he asked.

"Oh dear no, Allison is all right, and it's for his sake that I want you to keep as far apart as possible. The man who bears such an amazing likeness to yourself must come to no harm. We shall need him badly presently, when Marne is brought to bay, and, if anything happens to him, it might cause us a great deal of inconvenience. I was a great fool to let you approach him at all this evening, but that mania of mine for the mysterious always gets the best of me. But never mind that, go and enjoy yourselves, and keep out of Allison's way."

Gilette waited for no more, and a minute later was swallowed up by a sea of dancers. Thus it came about that Mallison was left with the two girls and another guest whom Hetty Bond knew, so that it was possible for Peggy and Mallison to get away together, and seek one of the quiet little retreats leading out of the picture gallery, where they could be entirely alone.

They sat there for some time, in the dusky light, surrounded by a bower of fernery, and talked freely enough, without the slightest chance of anything they said being overheard.

"What does it all mean, Raymond?" Peggy asked presently.

"What does all what mean?" Mallison replied.

"Then you are not going to take me into your confidence?" Peggy said in a rather hurt tone of voice.

Mallison drew her towards him, and heedless of any interruption, laid his lips upon hers.

"My dear girl," he whispered. "I am as much in the dark as you are. Twenty-four hours ago I was a mere prisoner in Slagmoor Gaol—a number only, in which no man on earth was interested. Then, as you know, I managed to make my escape in a moment of something like madness. I have already told you that my idea was to get to Plymouth to my friend there who had arranged over the telephone to get me out of the country. Then, by some extraordinary accident, or the decrees of providence, whichever way you like to regard it, I ran against Gilette. When he asked me to come here this evening I thought it all part of some practical joke. I hadn't met him before, but you had frequently told me what sort of a man he was, so, being utterly reckless and desperate, I abandoned myself to Gilette's mood, and here I am. But nothing would have induced me to have come this evening if Gilette had not told me that I should meet you here. And I don't think you blame me for taking the risk."

Peggy nestled a little closer to her lover.

"Blame you?" she echoed. "Raymond, it was splendid. If you only realised what it meant to me to hear your voice again and to feel your arm about me, you

would—but I should like to see you just for a moment as you really are. At the same time, you are my dear Raymond, and yet I have an odd sort of feeling as if I were allowing a stranger to make love to me. That awful dress, and that repulsive beard of yours—"

"And yet I dare not take it off," Mallison said. "I should only be too pleased to if I had the necessary courage."

"Oh, you mustn't do anything of the kind," Peggy said in alarm. "Please don't listen to that foolish remark of mine. But, Raymond, I feel that there is something very wrong going on here. What was our host frightened about? Why does he look every now and then like a tiger caught in a trap, and why, in spite of all his fair words, is he so angry with Roy?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you," Mallison said, "for the simple reason that I don't know. Gilette has promised to tell me presently, when I go off with him to spend the night in his caravan. But all that you have heard already. I am going to stay with the film players for a time, carefully disguised, and pass as one of them, though goodness knows what my duties will be. At any rate, I shall have the bliss of meeting you every day, and that is all I want for the present. But as to what is going on, I know no more than you do."

Meanwhile, Marne had been carefully shadowing Gilette, and had at length detached him from the crowd of dancers, and they were alone in the library together. Marne indicated a silver box filled with cigars, and, quite at his ease, Gilette lighted one and dropped into a big arm-chair.

"This is a topping place of yours, Mr. Marne," he said, speaking in his lightest manner. "You haven't been here very long, have you? I mean the castle has recently changed hands."

"A few months ago," Marne explained. "All my life I have had an ambition to buy one of these historic castles of yours, and settle down in England."

"You might have done a great deal worse," Gilette smiled. "It's a lovely spot, and the more I see of it the better I like It. I am half inclined to settle here myself."

"Than you know little of the neighbourhood?" Marne asked.

"Practically nothing," Gilette lied glibly. "I shouldn't have been here to-night but for your invitation. I suppose you had forgotten all about me?"

"Well, I have, that's a fact," Marne admitted with a smile. "I sent my invitations almost broadcast, especially amongst my business friends in London, and I am almost ashamed to admit that when you turned up in your convict garb this evening and gave the name of Martin, I entirely failed to recognise you."

Gilette emitted a thin wisp of smoke down his nostrils. He seemed to be having some sort of difficulty with his cigar.

"Oh, there is no occasion for an apology," he said. "I know when I came into the hall to-night that you didn't remember me. But then, in this predatory garb of mine, how should you? Now let me recall something to your mind. About three weeks ago you were talking to Mr. Everson in the Cosmopolitan Club. You asked him to come down here this evening, but he declined on the score that he had business engagements elsewhere. Then you turned to me, as I happened to be lunching with our friend, and gave me the invitation quite informally, and I accepted."

“Yes,” Marne said thoughtfully. “I remember something of it now. Everson said something about you being a dancing man, but I am under the impression that the man he called Martin was much taller than you are and more robust.”

“Oh, well,” Gilette said. “The dress makes a good deal of difference. Still, what does it matter? It is not as if you regarded me as an impostor.”

There was something like a challenge in Gilette’s voice, and Marne hastened to reassure him.

“Oh, dear no, my dear fellow,” he said. “Oh, dear no. But tell me one thing. How did you come to be acquainted with the film company—the Long Trail Players, I think they called themselves? Surely it was to you that the manager sent his note this evening? I presume he is a friend of yours?”

As Marne spoke he looked at Gilette searchingly but the young man’s bland smile never changed. He seemed to be entirely at his case.

“Oh, that,” he cried “That is easily explained. You see, I have a certain amount of money, and nothing to do with it, and, as the late Dr. Watts told us that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. I decided that the Prince of Darkness should have no extra hold on me, and therefore, I made up my mind to take up film acting. More than that, I put some money into the concern you speak of. I am not much good at the game myself, but I have some little talent for writing plays, and it is a coincidence that I should have been down here with the company on the moors when I suddenly recollected your invitation. When I was leaving my quarters this evening, the manager of the company made rather a daring suggestion to me, hence the appearance of some of the leading actors here to-night.”

It all sounded so reasonable that Marne found himself forgetting his fears. But there was yet a good deal to explain—the unexpected appearance of the old man with the white beard, the dramatic production of his photograph, and other disturbing incidents.

“It must be a most interesting life,” he said quite genially. “And one that takes you all over the world. I presume you have done a lot of travelling, Mr Martin.”

There was a trap here, and Gilette saw it instantly.

“Ah,” he cried. “That is an ambition I have yet to realise. Some of these days I hope to see Japan and Australia, and after that South America. But I am afraid that that won’t be for some years to come. If ever I do go to South America, I am going to ask you to favour me with a few introductions.”

Marne appeared to be relieved, but he had many questions to ask yet, shooting them out suddenly, but never once catching Gilette unawares. The dawn was beginning to break before they parted, and Gilette went off with a smile on his face and a jest on lips to gather up his party. He was happy in the knowledge that Marne had learned nothing, whilst, on the other hand, he had picked up more than one valuable bit of information.

“Isn’t it about time we were moving,” he said, as he found the others. “How are you girls going home?”

“Walk,” Hetty said promptly. “We walked here. It’s a fine morning, and the fresh air will be very grateful.”

They made their way presently through the castle grounds in the pearly dawn of a glorious day and parted at length outside the charming old house at the end of the village where Hetty Bond's mother had taken up her summer quarters.

"Now, you and Mallison can meet as often as you like," Gilette said to Peggy. "Come and have tea at the caravan whenever you feel disposed, or we can drop in and see you. But not too often because there is a risk, as far as Mallison is concerned. Now, good night and pleasant dreams."

Very quietly and thoughtfully the two men made their way along the cliff path which led to the moors, where the players were camped out in tents in a sort of enclosure at the far end of which was Gilette's dainty little caravan.

"Well, here we are," he said. "I can rig you up a bed for to-night, and to-morrow you shall have proper sleeping quarters between the wheels. I have every accommodation you need, and fifty likely disguises to choose from. There isn't a finer wardrobe than ours in the world. There is only one thing I regret."

"And what's that'" Mallison asked. "Oh by the way, how did you get on with our friend Marne?"

"That was all right," Gilette explained. "But I wish we had brought Allison with us. It would have been dangerous, but I had half a mind to risk it."

"Why, is he in any danger there?"

"Ah, that's the rub," Gilette said. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, he is in imminent danger of his life."

Chapter XVIII

In the Caravan.

There was a note of seriousness in Gillette's voice that almost chilled Mallison. He spoke in a way that was altogether foreign to his usual tone. If was as if Tragedy had pushed her sister Comedy aside in the very climax of the farce, and laughter had all at once been turned to tears. Perhaps because it was late and Mallison was feeling the strain of the long trying hours, he was more than usually responsive to the suggestion of evil.

"You mean that our friend is in danger?" he asked. "Do you mean at the hands of Marne?"

"That is precisely what I do mean," Gilette said gravely. "Oh, we have a long way to go yet before we get to the bottom of this sordid business. My boy, we are in the very heart of the conspiracy. And you are the victim of it."

"You mean that Marne is the man whom I have to thank for all my trouble? Most extraordinary! Why, until this evening I never so much as heard of him. He comes from South America, too, and I have never even crossed the Channel. What have I done to this man that he should bring this trouble on me?"

"Ah, that we shall come to all in good time. Meanwhile, let us seek the seclusion of the caravan, and there we can talk more at our ease. If you are not too tired, there are many things that I should like to discuss with you before we sleep."

With that Gilette led the way past a row of tents that dotted the moorland slope, and came at length to a small, compact little vehicle, to which at such times as it was desirable to travel, was attached a motor. But just now the motor had been removed, and the caravan was resting on smooth turf. Passing up the steps, Gilette switched on a light, and disclosed a neat little sitting-room, most luxuriously furnished, and fitted with everything from a small library of miniature editions to a bed that let down from one side of the vehicle. Here he passed most of his time during the summer months. The whole thing was so artistic and luxurious that Mallison was loud in his praises of the many ingenious devices for the saving of room and the conveniences of life.

"Yes, I flatter myself that it is not bad," Gilette said. "It is the outcome of many experiments. I have everything here even to a folding indiarubber bath, which I take under the floor of the caravan. Also I can rig you up a bed there by inflating the bath with air, and with some curtains there is your bedroom complete. And here you are going to remain for some time."

"Rather dangerous, don't you think?'" Mallison asked.

"Not at all, my boy, not at all. I am going to introduce you to our manager, Trevor, as a new hand at the game, and a celebrity who would prefer for the present to remain anonymous. Trevor is used to the eccentricities of my peculiar type of genius, and will take it all for granted. When I ask him to fit you up with a neat workmanlike disguise that will not appear eccentric he won't turn a hair. Also he can sit on a secret as closely as the harmless, necessary hen on her eggs. At make up, and all that sort of thing Trevor is an absolute artist. He is certain to come here presently to see if I require anything."

Surely enough a moment later there came a knock at the door, and Gilette's right-hand man appeared, the same man in fact that Mallison had seen at Chilstone Castle in connection with the filming of the dance. He was about to draw back on seeing that Gilette was not alone, but the latter restrained him.

"Come in, my dear chap," he cried. "You are the very man I want. Sit down, Trevor."

Trevor dropped into a seat and beamed mildly at his employer through his glasses. There was an eager, intelligent light in his eyes that impressed Mallison very favourably.

"Certainly if you wish it, Mr. Gilette," the little man said, "if it is not too late. Any thing that I can do, sir—"

Gilette nodded approvingly as he produced a decanter, a syphon of soda water, and a box of cigarettes.

"Now let us talk matters over comfortably," he said. "In the first place, Trevor let me introduce my friend Mr. Fergus. I think that Fergus will do as well is anything else. Mr. Fergus is a gentleman, Trevor, whose fortunes are closely bound up in my own. To a great extent he is part of the show, indeed I might go much further and say that he is the show. But for him the great drama that we are filming would probably never have been written. I have already told you, Trevor, that our big story is founded on fact, and this you will see all in good time. Mr. Fergus is our persecuted hero; and the villain in the piece is that picturesque foreigner, Mr. Marne, whom you met to-night."

“Indeed, sir,” Trevor exclaimed. “That explains a good deal that has been a mystery to me. Those were excellent pictures that we secured to-night, but I am still quite in the dark as to how we are going to work them into the story.”

“All in good time, Trevor, all in good time. Meanwhile Mr. Fergus desires to remain anonymous. At present you see him most ingeniously made up as a Palmer. Behind that ragged hair and dusky cheeks is a most presentable young man who is almost morbidly anxious to preserve the secret of his identity. Especially in these parts. It is up to you with your wonderful skill in make up and disguise to turn my friend into somebody else so that his own father, say, could not recognise him. Nothing showy or striking, but a neat, workingman-like disguise suitable to a young man who may have to trust to his personal powers to save his skin if necessity should arise. And not a word to a soul until the disguise is accomplished, Trevor, I don’t want anyone to know that I am entertaining a guest until the metamorphosis is complete. Bring all that is necessary here after we had breakfasted to-morrow, or rather to-day.”

Trevor expressed no surprise. He was too accustomed to all sorts of grotesque suggestions from his employer for that. He would be round directly after breakfast with the necessary clothes and make-up, and was prepared to guarantee that he would so effectually change his employer’s guest as to render him immune from all suspicion.

“So far so good,” Gilette said. “Now one more thing and I have finished. My professional name so long as we are in these parts is Martin. Please impress this on the company, because it is important. I am a sort of curious amateur who has tacked himself to the company. I think that will do for the present, Trevor.”

The little man took the hint and his leave. For some time Gilette smoked in thoughtful silence.

“It’s a devilish odd business,” he said at length, “a very queer happening altogether. Now I wonder if you have got on to the hang of it yet, old chap?”

“On the contrary, I am more overwhelmed than ever,” Mallison confessed. “Why all this mystery? And why was Marne so frightened to-night? Because he was frightened.”

“Ah, that was his conscience. Every man at times feels the bite of conscience, however carefully he may have trained it. But mainly the man was frightened because he was puzzled. The fact that everything occurred so naturally was the very thing that jolted him so horribly. He doesn’t know what to think or what to be at. And because he is fighting in the dark he is going sooner or later to play straight into my hands. And you are going to help.”

“Only too delighted,” Mallison murmured. “But can’t you give me a few hints? I am groping in the dark as badly as Marne. What, for instance, was the meaning of that mummery in connection with the old man with the beard? Did you happen to see Marne’s face when he came on to the picture?”

“Of course I did—that’s what I was there for. Ah, that was one of my brain waves. If you are not too tired, it seems to me that the time has come to throw a little light on the dark places and initiate you into the conspiracy.”

“Go on,” Mallison said eagerly. “I am ready. But don’t forget that I am as a child in your hands.”

“In that case we will go right back to the beginning,” Gilette smiled. “To start with, I may say that everything revolves around you. It is your story that I am filming, and I wrote it from first-hand knowledge. When I took up this business with the rather large capital at my command I did so out of personal conceit. I could not get my plays produced, and I regarded the fact as a reflection on managers. But when I began to produce them on the film I soon changed my opinion. I saw how artificial they were, and how far from real life. So I scrapped them, and cast about me for something nearer to nature. Then I got hold of the idea of writing something founded on fact. I was travelling in the Argentine a few months before your unfortunate business when I stumbled quite by accident upon the very thing I wanted. It was only a germ at first, but after I had seen the second big character a few times the story began to develop. Then, when the story began to live, I came home to write it up, with the idea of returning to the Argentine later on to do the filling in. I came back just in time to find you up to your neck in trouble. Remember that I was to have met you, curiously enough, for the first time on the very night of your arrest.”

“I am not likely to forget it,” Mallison murmured.

“Quite so. Now just before we heard that you were in the hands of the police I saw in the restaurant the villain of the piece that I was writing. I don’t think that he has ever seen me face to face to recognise me, but I was taking no risks, and I more or less disguised myself in a paper cap and Sir Marston’s spectacles till the man had left the place. Then, at my request, Sir Marston followed the man and ascertained his name, and the fact that he was on his way to Liverpool that very night en route to the Argentine. Just at that moment I was not thinking of you but of my play; but when later on witnesses who identified you as coming out of Pennington’s chambers, after the attack on him, admitted that they were waiting for the man I had seen in the restaurant, I had an inspiration. The man in the restaurant calling himself Marne was in fact the same man we have been with to-night. When I realised what had happened to you I followed him to Buenos Aires.”

“But what connection has he with my affairs?”

“Ah, we shall come to that presently,” Gilette went on. “I had a clue. It was inspired by a bit of idle gossip that I picked up down here some four years ago, not that I gave it a second thought at the time. But in view of what I heard in the Argentine and in view of the fact that the man called Marne—”

“Why do you always say ‘the man called Marne’?” Mallison interrupted. “Isn’t that his real name?”

“I couldn’t prove it yet,” Gilette explained. “But as a matter of fact it isn’t. And now for what the immortal Dick Swiveller called a staggerer. My dear boy, the sham Marne is the man who is responsible for all your troubles.”

“Impossible,” Mallison cried. “The man is an absolute stranger to me. I never saw him in my life till to-night. And what possible harm have I ever done him?”

“That we have to discover,” Gilette said. “You may not have done him any direct harm, and in any case I don’t think that the matter is a personal one. But there are other reasons, and a man of that stamp will do anything for money.”

“But, my dear fellow, I haven’t any money.”

“No, but you might have some day from a certain relative of yours in the Argentine,” Gilette said dryly. “Wasn’t your grandfather born and bred out there?

Of course I am aware of the fact that you know hardly anything about him; but in the face of what I have told you the significance should be plain. Your grandfather's name is Marne, and the man we are after calls himself Marne, but I happen to know better. In other words—"

"In other words, he is posing as my grandfather?"

"Ah, now we are getting at it," Gilette cried. "This man most certainly is—"

"Stop! Then my mother's father is still alive."

"That is certainly my impression," Gilette replied calmly. "I shall be all wrong if it proves to be otherwise. I have every reason to believe that the old gentleman is very much alive, though in considerable peril, and that the other man, his secretary, is passing as Don Argo Marne, and spending his money in England. It was my chance meeting in romantic circumstances with Don Argo that first gave me the plot of my film, not that I dreamt then that you were in any way mixed up in the tangle."

"You mean that you didn't know that the Don was my grandfather? But perhaps you did. My mother never mentioned him, but, as an old friend of hers, Sir Marston might have known."

"As a matter of fact he did," Gilette explained. "What I got was only sketchy matter, and when I first went to the Argentine I didn't know whether Don Argo was dead or not. I discovered the fact that he was still alive in a most amazing manner, and at the same time got my live plot. In what circumstances I found the old gentleman I will tell you presently. A little later I found the other man, who, by the way, is really one Julien Barros, Don Argo's one time private secretary and righthand man. The old gentleman is practically a prisoner and perfectly irresponsible for his actions. For over 20 years Don Argo has not been seen on his estates, and most people regard him as dead. Beyond all doubt Barros has got away with practically everything, and is posing in England as his master. It's a safe game for a Spanish-American whose employer has never visited this country. But if your aged ancestor had made a will leaving everything to his child—your mother—after his death, and had secreted that will where the rascal Barros could not find it, what then? Now do you begin to see what I am driving at? Isn't it getting plainer?"

Mallison glanced round the neat little room with a feeling of security that was distinctly stimulating. It was broad daylight now, and the familiar moor expanded before his eyes. And something more was beginning to expand as he looked into Gilette's eager eyes. It was as if he were seeing the smiling face of Hope through the wrong end of the telescope. He could see at any rate what object the man really known as Barros had to gain. For if Don Argo Marne had done justice to his child at the eleventh hour, or if he left no will, then he, Mallison, would be a rich man. Gilette, watching the expression of his friend's face, smiled broadly.

"Yes, I can see that it is coming home to you," he said. "To enjoy his stolen wealth Barros had to get you out of the way for a time at any rate, and he hoped that after your release you would go abroad and disappear discreetly. But so long as you were free and respected you were a constant menace. And so the great conspiracy was hatched. Is that clear so far?"

With a perfectly clear brain and a really intelligent grip upon the story, as Gilette had outlined it, Mallison was following the meshes of the amazing

conspiracy. For a long time he sat there, smoking his cigarette, and going through all that Gilette had had to say, until it was all fixed in his mind.

"Yes, I clearly understand so far," he said presently. "If Barros was to profit by his dastardly scheme, it was absolutely necessary for him to get me out of the way. I presume, from what I can gather, that he came over here some two years ago for that very purpose. But how did he manage it, Gilette? How did he carefully lay the trail so that it would lead up so conclusively to me?"

"Well, perhaps I had better try and explain," Gilette replied. "You see, in the first place, Barros knew all about your history. He knew that your mother had made a runaway match with your father, and, of course, he must have seen for himself how terribly the old gentleman's pride was wounded. You may be pretty sure that he did nothing to heal the breach. When he came to England, he found, quite by accident, as such men do, when they want to commit a crime, the instrument ready to his hand. It was an unconscious instrument, but the fact remains that the instrument in question was none other than your own brother."

Mallison fairly jumped from his chair.

"My brother," he cried hoarsely. "My brother. Why, I haven't a brother. I haven't—good heavens. I begin to see. The man who turned up at the castle to-night."

Chapter XIX

A Story in a Story.

Mallison threw back his head suddenly and burst into a fit of more or less hysterical laughter. The strain on his nervous system was beginning to tell, and just for the moment he seemed to see Gilette through a mist. How many years was it, he wondered vaguely, since he had made that daring leap for freedom over the edge of Hangman's Rock? The dreary monotony of the prison life had passed into a bygone episode. But his surroundings were real enough down to the details of the dainty little caravan and the glory of the morning sun shining into the silk-covered window.

So was Gilette with that jaunty smile of his and the careless triumph on his face that nothing could disguise.

"That was a bit of a jolt for you, old man," he said. "Go easy for a minute. It isn't every day that a chap finds himself suddenly provided with a fully equipped brother, of whose existence he was absolutely ignorant. Still, after what you have seen to-night you will hardly be prepared to dispute the fact."

"I am in that condition of mind when a man can dispute nothing," Mallison smiled unsteadily. "If you told me that my name was Norval I could not argue the point. So the man who calls himself Allison is my own brother. I sincerely hope that there is nothing sinister behind that fact."

"Not in the sense you mean," Gilette hastened to reply. "The man called Stephen Allison is your brother right enough, and, if I have made no mistake, your twin."

“Go on,” Mallison said grimly. “Let’s have the whole of the thrilling romance. But, until the present moment, I had not the slightest idea that I possessed a brother. I was always told that I was the only child, not that I ever asked my mother any questions on the matter because I took it all for granted, knowing that my father died before I was born. But after what I saw tonight, I am bound to accept your point of view. And perhaps you can explain where this brother came from.”

“Well, to a certain extent, I have already done so,” Gilette said. “Stephen Allison is your twin brother, though, like yourself, I never met him till this evening.”

“No, but you expected to meet him.”

“Upon my word, I didn’t,” Gilette said. “When he walked into the hall this evening, I was as much astonished as you were. Don’t forget that I was standing by the alcove when Allison turned up. I heard all that was said, and then I knew that fate was playing straight into my hands. Here was the very man I had been seeking for the last two years.”

“Oh, then you knew he existed?”

“Well, I suspected it. It was like this, Mallison; When you were convicted on trustworthy evidence by men who could have had no possible object in injuring you, it occurred to me that you were the victim of some vile conspiracy. There was the evidence staring me in the face. First of all, take the matter of that little excursion of yours on the night Pennington was attacked. You swore that you had been sent for professionally, to meet a distinguished colleague in the suburbs. And you told a story to the effect that when you got to the house the patient you went to see was not there. And that distinguished confrere of yours declared on oath that he never called you up from the hospital and that he had no appointment with you at all.”

“I was called up, all the same,” Mallison declared.

“Of course you were, my dear chap, but not from the hospital. You were called up from some district office, by the chief conspirator, who was familiar with all your movements, and had made himself acquainted with your daily pursuits. He had thought the matter out down to the minutest detail. He wanted to get you out of the way, whilst he, or his tools, made an attack upon Pennington. Precisely why he wished to injure Pennington I can’t tell you yet, but I shall find that out presently. Unless I am greatly mistaken, Barros was at the bottom of the whole thing, and he had worked out an ingenious scheme whereby he could kill two birds with one stone.”

“Do you mean that Pennington was in this business’?”

“I believe so more or less. I mean that it was equally necessary to get Pennington out of the way. When you had been watched, and the rascals were certain you were out of the way then your enemy, or enemies went on with the plot. It was so carefully laid that the evidence against you was impregnable, and that, my boy, was because it was your twin brother who was seen coming along from Pennington’s chambers, and not you at all. When those witnesses had been very carefully planted on the right spot by Marne for the purpose of identifying you, they were confronted not by you, but by Stephen Allison.”

“What?” Mallison cried. “Am I to understand that my own brother was conspiring against me?”

“Oh, you can get that out of your head at once,” Gilette said hastily. “Stephen Allison was quite an unconscious instrument, a mere puppet in the game. But you are interrupting me, my dear chap. Don’t you remember at your trial that two credible witnesses—barristers I believe—testified to seeing you coming from Pennington’s chambers?”

“Of course I do. I knew both of them.”

“Very well, then. Now we can get on. Do you remember one of those witnesses being asked a certain question? Your counsel inquired what they happened to be doing there in the dark. Now, that question was inspired. The reply was that they were waiting to meet a gentleman called Marne who was just on his way to the Argentine. Do you remember that?”

“Come to think of it, I do,” Mallison said.

“Well, doesn’t it convey something to you now? Don’t you see that Marne had the greatest interest in getting you out of the way? Oh, he laid his trap carefully enough, and, knowing what we know, it was Allison who was coming away from Pennington’s chambers, not you. And now, another question. Why was Allison imported into the business at all? Why, because he was your own image, and consequently your acquaintances would be quite ready to swear that they saw you on that eventful night.”

“I am still more or less in a state of fog,” Mallison confessed. “Why did Allison do this? And why didn’t he come forward at my trial?”

“Well, I can answer that easy enough,” Gilette smiled. “Allison was utterly ignorant of the fact that he was playing a part in a drama, and he couldn’t come forward at the trial for the simple reason that on the very night Pennington was attacked he was on his way to Liverpool with Marne, en route for the Argentine. He told you so himself tonight. He told you that Marne had more or less promised him a job, and that he had jumped at the opportunity. So here we have the attack upon Pennington brought right home to you, and, almost before you were in goal, your twin brother, who was the cause of all the trouble, was already out of England. Oh, Marne could afford to leave it at that. Of course, when I say Marne, I mean Barros. My private opinion is that he either attacked Pennington himself, or got somebody else to do it. He would have had plenty of time after Pennington’s servant was lured away by that false telephone message to go and see his brother. Of course, the servant’s evidence went dead against you, but you can see for yourself that it opened up a wide field of conjecture. My idea is that Barros, for some reason or another, was just as anxious to get Pennington out of the way as he was to have you under lock and key. And if Pennington ever really recovers, then I shall be surprised if he hasn’t an extraordinary story to tell.”

“It’s all very bewildering,” Mallison said. “But how did you discover that I had a twin brother?”

“Well, more or less, I evolved him out of my inner consciousness,” Gilette laughed. “You see, I was already working on my film story, which as I have already told you was inspired by a dramatic meeting I had with your grandfather in the Argentine. It was a great adventure leading up to the most surprising results. I don’t want to go into detail now as to how I came in contact with the old gentleman, but the surroundings were so striking that I determined to found my film drama upon them. And then I realised that Don Argo Marne was your

grandfather and the man who had renounced his only daughter. There was the material to go on with. And when I came home and discovered that you were up to your neck in trouble and that Barros, masquerading as Marne was at the bottom of it, I began to ask myself questions. I began to wonder why everybody was identifying you right and left when you were somewhere else at the critical moment. Of course, I believed you, and I was looking about for a solution. Then I suddenly recollected some gossip I had heard in the village here many years ago. It came to my ears from an old woman called Kershaw who was the widow of a fisherman."

"Quite right," Mallison said. "Old Kershaw was the traditional oldest inhabitant.

"That's the man," Gilette went on "Well, the story was something to the effect that your mother had a second child. Of course, I didn't believe it, and I put it down to the wanderings of a woman in her dotage. But It came back into my mind again, and then I began to ask questions. I assumed, for the moment, that somewhere in the world was a twin brother of yours, because I knew you were innocent, and I knew that those witnesses firmly believed that they had identified you that night in the region of Pennington's chambers. And so the conviction gradually grew upon me that my theory was right. I determined for the time being at any rate to act as if this brother of yours existed. How near I was right you know."

"You were absolutely right," Mallison declared. "But why all this mystery about my brother Stephen?"

"Ah, there we are on more debatable ground. Now, I know from questions that I have put to my uncle Sir Marston Manley, that when your father died he left your mother absolutely penniless, nor would she accept a copper from my uncle though he was a great friend of hers, and offered to pay for your education. And yet your mother lived very comfortably till she died, in a very nice house here, and she gave you the advantage of a public school and university career. Without being impertinent, I should like to know very much where the money came from."

"I never gave it a thought," Mallison said.

"Naturally you wouldn't. But one way and another your mother must have had a thousand a year at least. And now we will carry that ingenious theory of mine a step further. Don't forget that the twin brother evolved by me in the course of my investigations has materialised, though I am bound to confess that I was fairly staggered when he turned up to-night. So was Barros for that matter. But we needn't bother about that for the present. Now, my idea is this. Just after your father died and before you were born, your mother, in her distress and anxiety for her child's future, made one last appeal to her father. She wrote him a letter that probably moved him to action. I may be utterly wrong, mind you, but I think that Don Argo Marne was touched by that letter, and that he made his only child an offer. On condition that the coming child was handed over to him, and all claims renounced, he agreed to make his daughter an allowance. Probably she refused him at first, but when the time came, she put aside all her own sacred and motherly feelings for the sake of the child. She probably wrote her father to that effect and he replied that he would send some confidential messenger for the child, who was to be his heir in future. Mind you, all this is theory, but I don't think to

the end you will find it far wrong. But, theory or not it makes mighty good drama and will be stronger stuff still if things turn out as I anticipate."

"Well, go on," Mallison said impatiently. "Never mind your film story for the present."

"I am sorry," Gilette apologised. "Now, when the messenger came to take that child away, he didn't come down to Merston, but received the infant in London from that old nurse of yours, who, I think is still alive."

"She is," Mallison said. "And, what's more, she is not more than a mile away from where we are sitting."

"By Jove. I had forgotten that," Gilette cried. "I must be a fool. Well, we shall see presently what this woman, Elsie Dorida, has to say about the matter. But there I go, interrupting myself again. Now look here, when you were born your mother was favoured with twins. And she and that old nurse of yours decided to suppress that fact, so far as the old gentleman in the Argentine was concerned. It is quite likely that old Dr. Grant was in the secret. It was just the sort of story to appeal to that benevolent old boy, and, besides it was no business of his in any case. You see how easily the secret could be kept. Only your mother's old nurse, acting in that capacity and the doctor in the secret. There would be no trouble in keeping the fact from the village, because no one had been told anything about the proud father in the background in the Argentine. No, Elsie Dorida nursed her mistress and nobody guessed that there were two children under your mother's roof. At the end of a month, one of them was smuggled to London, and handed over to your grandfather's agent, who, for a thousand, was Barros. At any rate Barros never took the child to the Argentine. He probably gave some worthy couple a handsome sum of money to adopt the boy and then returned home to tell his master that the infant was dead. It was just the sort of thing he would do, because even in those days, he had fully made up his mind to obtain possession of your grand-father's fortune. I may be wrong on this particular point, but, all the same. I am prepared to gamble on it that I am right. However, we shall come to that presently. We have established the fact that Stephen Allison is your twin brother, and that his so called parents were poor people though highly respectable. He told you so himself this evening. He told you how his father was an inventor who had made money when it was too late and had died shortly afterwards."

"That's right," Mallison cried. "When he went out to the Argentine with Barros he was entirely dependent upon his profession for a living. He didn't exactly say so, but he inferred that Barros had more or less deserted him in Buenos Aires, and left him to his own resources."

"Yes, and mark the cunning of it," Gilette pointed out. "He had got your brother Stephen very carefully out of the way, thousands of miles from home, with very little chance of getting back, having no means. Barros would naturally conclude that it would be many years before Stephen Allison could get back home again, and by that time things might have gone all in the rascal's favour. But he didn't reckon upon Stephen coming into a fortune, and you could see for yourself what a state he was in to-night when Allison turned up. And so there you are. So far, the drama has gone even more smoothly than I had expected. But we are a long way from the end of it yet, and I can see danger ahead. That man will stick at nothing

if he realises that he is discovered, and that's why I hinted to you just now that Allison is in danger."

"What, do you mean that Barros would murder him?"

"I do," Gilette said with much gravity. "Don't forget that Chilstone Castle is practically mediaeval. A man might be thrown into one of the vaults there and die of starvation without the faintest chance of anybody hearing him call for help. Yes, we shall have to keep our eyes open so far as Stephen Allison is concerned. I am exceedingly sorry now that we left him behind us. Quite apart from any motives of humanity, that man is going to prove one of our most important witnesses."

Chapter XX

Paving The Way.

Mallison was beginning to see more or less clearly into the heart of a mystery that had rendered him almost insane whenever he had dwelt upon it in the dreary prison house out there on the desolate moor. Many a weary hour had he spent going over the case as presented by the prosecution at his trial, but usually he had abandoned that line of thought, because madness lay that way. But here was something that he never would have dreamt of. He looked at Gilette with more than admiration in his eyes. For, obviously, here was a man who was made for far better things than dabbling in short stories, and frittering away his time making more or less dramatic pictures for the proletariat. He mentioned something of this in a half-confused sort of way, but Gilette merely smiled.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "One must do something. I get tired of the usual round of sports and amusements, such as we fortunate chaps indulge in, and, as I have already told you, I am not the great dramatist I took myself to be. I might have gone in for politics, of course, but it's rather a dirty game, and, as far as I can see, betraying one's friends is the only safe way to secure personal advancement. Perhaps I should have been better employed as a private detective."

"But this is rather higher than detective work," Mallison said. "What I admire is the way in which you have combined amusement with real analysis of motive. And I can quite see now that you have been right all the time. But we have a long way to go yet, unless I am altogether mistaken."

"Of course we have," Gilette agreed. "But I think the way is pretty clear now, and if we don't do anything foolish we shall lay Barros by the heels yet. We'll force the story of the conspiracy out of him, and you shall come into your own, if I have anything to do with it. As I said just now, the only thing that worries me is Allison. He is in considerable personal danger, and for the moment I don't see quite how I can interfere. We must wait, as far as he is concerned."

"But why the peril?" Mallison asked.

"Ah, my dear chap, I thought you didn't quite see it. Don't you see that Allison was the unconscious instrument through which your trouble was brought about? If there had been no Allison, you would be a free man today. Now, listen to the

story as I see it. Just for a moment, it is necessary to put myself in Barros' place. I want you to see that I am Barros, and that I am playing a deep game to get all my employer's money into my possession, and clear off with it, without leaving any trace behind. At the same time my employer has a daughter and a grandson, or two grandsons. If you like to put it in that way. Of course, I could forge a will leaving everything to myself, but forging is rather a dangerous game, because, though you may not know it, every man's will requires two witnesses and those witnesses must sign the document not only in the presence of the testator, but in the presence of each other, all being present at the same time."

"Is that a fact?" Mallison asked.

"My dear chap it's not only a fact, but it's law all the civilised world over. It was the custom in the times of the Romans, and most of our laws are based on that model. But I don't want to give you a lecture on that sort of thing. What I mean to get at is that a forged will necessitates two accomplices, because you can't very well do without them, and Barros is far too clever a scoundrel to take other men into his confidence, and risk the chance of being blackmailed all his life. So I think that we can rule out the forged will. That being so, then Barros's only chance would be to get Don Argo Marne out of the way, which is a euphemism for murdering him, and again, I don't think Barros is the man to take that sort of risk. My belief is that he is still wavering between two ideas. He knows that the old gentleman is leading the life of a recluse somewhere in the back of the country, with mind more or less unhinged. He has all your grandfather's affairs in his hands, and that is how he could come over here buying castles and posing as a Spanish grandee. He is waiting on events. If your grandfather dies or when your grandfather dies, Barros will probably wind up the estate himself and get off with all the money. But for that, he has so to arrange it that you and your brother know nothing whatever of what is going on. Why, my dear fellow, you never had the slightest notion that you might, one of these days, inherit a great estate.

"Yes, that's perfectly true," Mallison murmured.

"Very well, then. You were in ignorance of that fact, as Barros well knew. But to make assurance doubly sure, it is necessary to get you out of the way permanently, to drive you out of the country with every chance that you never return, and this he nearly achieved."

"But my brother? What about him?"

"Yes, but don't you see that this brother of yours has no idea as to his parentage? He has been brought up as Allison all his life, and as Allison he would have gone on living but for the fact that I am an unsuccessful writer of plays who has turned to the cinema for self-expression. Allison was taken away when he was a month old by Barros, and handed over to a respectable couple, who probably adopted him for a considerable sum of money, on the understanding that no questions were to be asked, and that your brother Stephen was not to be told the story of his birth. Therefore, exit Stephen Allison, leaving Barros to deal with you."

"But he didn't know I existed," Mallison argued. "If your story is correct, Barros was deliberately deceived by my mother and my old nurse, and an elderly family doctor who is now dead. How are you going to get over that?"

"Oh, I dare say it seems difficult," Gilette went on. "Let's put it in another way. At the time you were born about six-and-twenty years ago, your grandfather was

presumably a big man in the full possession of his powers. There was little chance then of Barros succeeding in his nefarious schemes, but no doubt he had it in the back of his mind, and was patiently waiting his opportunity, however long it took him. He possessed the Don's entire confidence, and probably had the run of the old gentleman's correspondence. My theory is that when your mother wrote to her father telling him of your expected advent, Barros suppressed the letter. He would know, of course, that your father was dead, and he was desperately afraid that the thought of a grandchild might soften the old man's heart. Therefore, he suppressed that letter and took the first opportunity of coming to England with the offer that nearly broke your mother's heart. I mean the offer of taking you away, ostensibly to the Argentine, and making your mother an allowance during her lifetime. You see, manipulating your grandfather's estate, he could easily find the money for that. Well, let us suppose that he did it. He got rid of the child, under the impression that it was the only one, and he hid it in such a way that if the Don died, there was nobody apparently on the face of the earth in a position to claim his estate. Now, does all that sound logical to you?"

"I never heard a finer piece of reasoning," Mallison cried. "There cannot be the slightest doubt that you are absolutely right. But why did all this trouble come my way? If Barros had thought I was the only child—"

Up to a certain point, he undoubtedly did, Gilette interrupted. "In all probability, he laboured under that delusion for years, then the time came when he was expecting to reap the fruits of all his cunning and patience. He came to England to invest his ill-gotten gains here, and start life as an English country gentleman. He bought Chilstone to settle down here. But, of course, he had to be in London a great deal, knocking about in the city, settling a thousand and one things and, as a man of great wealth, to say nothing of a very presentable appearance, he began to be taken up in society. Knocking about amongst all sorts of people, he heard of Raymond Mallison, who was by way of being somewhat of a celebrity. And with all due regard to your modesty, old chap, you certainly are all that. Its very likely that somebody told him all about your past, and mentioned the fact that you were the son of the late Major Mallison of Merston, in Devonshire. Now, you can quite understand that such being the case, what a joke it must have been when our friend of Chilstone Castle found that out. Of course at first he wouldn't believe it, but after making a few inquiries he must have been forced to the conclusion that in some way he had been deceived. Almost at once, he must have started to go into the mystery, and have come to the conclusion that you were the man you claimed to be. You must see, of course, how all this would upset Barros's calculations. Then, after satisfying himself that you really are the son of Major and Mrs. Mallison, Barros started to get on the track of the child he had more or less abandoned over twenty-five years ago. That would not be at all a difficult matter, because, at that time, which is about 18 months ago, Allison's supposed parents were both alive. Barros probably approached them very cautiously, and in all probability under the pretence that he was anxious to know how the one-time infant was progressing."

"The Allisons," Gilette continued, "being unsuspicious and respectable people, and doubtless proud of their adopted son, would most certainly have been expansive. They would have told Barros all about Stephen's career, and Barros

would have lost no time in getting upon the young man's track. And once he found him, having first seen you, he would have been immediately struck by the amazing likeness between you. That must have staggered him, my boy. And Barros, being a brilliant scoundrel, would have had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that you and Stephen were twins. Indeed, he could have imagined nothing else. And if we allow this, which is quite fair, then it would not have taken him long to see exactly now he had been deceived, because we know that he scraped acquaintance with Stephen Allison, and took him out to the Argentine. Not that it mattered much about Stephen, who didn't know his own identity. But you, my dear chap, were a much more hefty proposition. Here were you, beyond all question the son of your parents, and if the Don died without a will, the heir to his vast property. Therefore it was necessary to get you out of the way by any possible means. On the night that Pennington was attacked, your brother Stephen was used to prove that you were in Pennington's chambers that evening, and it was Stephen's amazing likeness to you that was the cause of all the mischief. We shall know exactly how this trick was worked when we come to disclose the whole story to Stephen. But that the whole thing was elaborately stage-managed by Barros I don't doubt for a moment. And now, one more proof."

"What, another?" Mallison cried.

"Yes, another. Are you aware of the fact that Pennington's father was a well-known solicitor?"

"Of course," Mallison said. "Pennington was articled to him at one time, before he went to the Bar."

"Just so. Now, Pennington senior had a large practice in the City, and amongst his clients were many South Americans. Don Argo Marne, to my knowledge. I have been making a lot of inquiries, and I have found that the older Pennington did all your grandfather's business in England. It may have been a great deal, or it may have been little, but still the fact remains. Now, that being so, don't you think it just possible that Barros might have had some object in getting your friend Pennington out of the way? Sort of killing two birds with one stone."

"Upon my word," Mallison cried. "The way in which you have worked this thing out is simply wonderful. Every fact you have discovered points to one conclusion. But I am getting so tired that I can hardly follow what you are saying. After a bath and some breakfast and an hour or two in bed I shall be ready for anything you care to suggest."

With some sort of apology Gilette jumped to his feet. From a spring nearby he filled the indiarubber bath and placed it under the wheels of the caravan. By the time that Mallison emerged, invigorated and refreshed, Gilette had cooked an appetising breakfast of eggs and fish in a little stove heated by methylated spirit, and, when they had partaken of this and smoked a cigarette. Mallison announced that he was a different man.

"And now precisely what do you want me to do?" he asked. "Of course, I can't be seen like this."

"Oh, Trevor will fix you up all right," Gilette laughed. "We'll give you something neat and workmanlike in the way of a disguise, which will enable you to get about without fear of the consequences. You leave it to Trevor."

“And what about yourself?” Mallison asked. “How are you going to account for the fact that the man who called himself Martin last night has suddenly become the managing director of the ‘Long Trail Players?’ Last night your name was Martin, and you were an invited guest at Chilstone Castle. What has become of the man you kidnapped?”

“By Jove!” Gilette laughed. “I had forgotten all about him. You see, it was like this. A few days ago in the Cosmopolitan Club where I had followed Barros, I heard him ask a man called Martin to the show here. That’s why I called myself Martin, and when the man I impersonated came down here and stayed at the village hotel, I lured him on one side as he was walking to the castle, and under pretence of asking him a favour, I got him to drink, and—well—that is that. Of course, Trevor knew all about it, but I knew that I could trust him. My idea was to take Martin’s fancy dress, but I found it wasn’t big enough, and as I had nothing quite suitable amongst our wardrobe here I decided to borrow one from Sir Marston’s bungalow. For the rest, you know.”

“But I thought you were afraid of Barros seeing you,” Mallison said. “If you met him in the Argentine—”

“Yes, so I did, but I don’t think he remembers me,” Gilette replied “Anyway, I am going to run the risk. If he does recognise me, he can’t possibly identify me with the famous amateur detective who is running him to earth, and last night, of course, he really believed I was Martin. Still, perhaps a slight change in my personal appearance will be necessary. I haven’t done with the castle yet, I am going to call upon Barros, quite in a friendly sort of way, as the managing director of the film company, and suggest that he allows us to take some more photographs in the older part of the castle. I’ll tell you presently what I am driving at with regard to this.”

“And Martin?” Mallison smiled. “What’s going to happen to him when he comes round again?”

“Oh, Martin be hanged,” Gilette said coolly. “He is quite the typical society ass, and, if necessary, I shall tell him something of the truth. As a matter of fact, we were at school together, though he doesn’t know the fact, and if I put it to him that there is a girl in the case, I think we shall find he is quite amenable to reason. It was a dashed impudent thing to do on my part in any case, but I don’t think we are going to have any trouble with Martin. I think I’ll step round to the tent where he is sleeping and see how he is getting on. You lie low here, and I’ll lock you in. It will never do for you to be seen until Trevor has done with you.”

With that, Gilette lighted another cigarette and strolled off, leaving Mallison to his own thoughts.

Chapter XXI

A Blind Witness.

It was characteristic of Gilette that directly he was outside the caravan and out of reach of Mallison he reverted at once to that easy inconsequent manner of his. He hummed a light air, there was the old reckless smile on his lips. On the night before he had done something rash and headstrong, and now he was going to find some way out of a mess that would have put any other man to confusion. And he was going to do it, too—of that he had not the smallest doubt. Where any other man would have been worried Gilette was secure in the knowledge that there was a way to be found. He had to get hold of the genuine Martin and convince him that the outrage of the night before was to his advantage, and an act of friendship, and a genuine philanthropy more than anything else. And sooth to say Gilette was looking forward to the task. All the world was more or less a stage, and he enjoyed playing a leading part.

He found Trevor awaiting him in the big tent where a good deal of the work went on.

Trevor was the ideal type of general manager who asked no unnecessary questions, and did his work soundly and well without prompting. Also he was accustomed to the vagaries of his eccentric and brilliant chief, knowing that he invariably had some sort of method in his madness. He was acquainted, of course, with the vagaries of the night before so far as the outrage on the guileless Martin was concerned, and he said nothing, knowing that sooner or later Gilette would confide in him.

"Well, here we are again," Gilette cried gaily. "And how does the interesting patient progress?"

"Well, he's just woke up, sir," Trevor said in his gravest manner. "And perhaps you had better see him."

"Well, to tell you the truth," Gilette went on. "I came over on purpose. You see, it's like this Trevor, as I have hinted to you before there is something more than an ordinary cinema story that we are developing here. I am not only the writer of it, but the god in the car, and the dinky little Sherlock Holmes who has set out to right a bit wrong. You know what happened last night, you know that under the name of an invited guest I managed to get into Chilstone Castle, and, not only that, to take those pictures as well. You will appreciate before long how those films tell on the story. And to do what I did I had to kidnap Mr. Martin, and take his place in my present effectual disguise. And when we dressed up Johnson as an old gentleman in exact copy of that photograph I gave you, it was not merely for effect. Now, then, lead me to the sufferer."

The sufferer in question was lying in a camp-bed in a corner of a tent, and apparently was doing his best to realise how he had got there, and in what circumstances. He looked rather a pathetic figure in his tumbled cavalier costume, but his somewhat glazed eye lightened as he caught sight of Gilette.

"Hello! hello!" he said breezily. "What's doing old top? And how the deuce did I get here?"

Gilette proceeded to explain. He removed a certain portion of his make up and revealed to his guest the features of the man who had been his host on the night before.

"What's it all mean?" Martin asked feebly.

“Don’t you remember, I met you on your way to the castle, and you were curious to know what we were doing here. Then I invited you into my caravan, and we shared a bottle together.”

“Yes, I remember all that,” the victim went on. “And I remember feeling deuced queer afterwards.”

“Perhaps I had better make a clean breast of it,” Gilette said. “I lured you into my caravan because I had a pressing reason for being present at Chilstone Castle last night, and I could not go, for the simple reason that I hadn’t been invited. So I took the liberty of drugging your champagne, and making you comfortable here, when I went off to keep my appointment. My idea was to borrow your costume, but then, you see, I am a much bigger man than you are, so I had to get what I wanted elsewhere.”

“Well,” Martin cried, “upon my word. You are a bit of a sport, you are. What ho, old son, what ho. And was the lady kind, and all that sort of thing?”

Gilette instantly fell in with his companion’s mood.

“I have nothing to complain of on that score,” he said. “It’s a pleasure to deal with a man like you, who can take a hint and doesn’t want to ask any unnecessary questions. I was afraid that you would make trouble.”

“Not I,” the congenial Martin chuckled. “I am a bit of a dog with the girls myself. My dear chap, if you’d told me last night, I’d have lent you my dress with pleasure.”

“Ah, but I wasn’t to know that,” Gilette said.

“Perhaps not, but it’s true all the same. As a matter of fact, I didn’t want to go to that bally dance at all. Marne asked me one day at luncheon in the Cosmopolitan Club, and I had to say yes, because my guv’nor, who is a big man in the city, has business dealings with Marne, and we didn’t want to offend him. So I chucked up a ripping foresome I had arranged at Sandwick for the week-end, and came down here instead. But look here, old man, is not this stunt of yours likely to be found out?”

“Oh, not at all,” Gilette said. “I told Marne that my name was Martin, and being pretty carefully made up, of course he believed me. He thinks that you were present last night, so that all you have to do is to say nothing, and there will be an end of the matter. Of course, if you like to take it fighting, then you will put me in a pretty tight place. But I am quite sure you’re not a man of that sort.”

“You bet I’m not,” Martin exclaimed. “Oh, I’m one of the lads right enough, and, unless I am greatly mistaken you’re another. Besides, you have intimated that there is a lady in the case, and, after that, there is no more to be said. Bet you a dollar I can guess the whole business in one. Here’s a jolly well set up chap like yourself, and a sportsman to his frogs, if I am any judge, on the one side, and a charming and beautiful girl on the other. Regular stage business, old fruit. Stern father, perhaps two stern fathers, and lovely woman who swears to be true. Love laughs at locksmiths, and all that sort of thing. Egad! I would have given a fiver to have been there to see it.”

All this was exactly as it should have been, and Gilette with a more or less conscious laugh, allotted the complacent and knowing Martin to labour under that delusion that he had seen right into the heart of the mystery.

So they parted presently, the best of friends. Martin going on to his hotel, pledged to absolute secrecy whilst Gilette retired to the caravan to explain to Mallison how well he had succeeded. Then Trevor came along, and an hour or so later, Mallison was changed into the semblance of a somewhat swarthy foreigner, with a little black moustache, and was introduced to the rest of the company under some fancy name as a stranger who was down there with a view to studying the methods of film photography and subsequently adopting it as a profession. After that, he lunched with a comparatively easy mind in the caravan, where Gilette unfolded his plans.

"You are right as rain now, my boy," the latter said. "Would you like to have a look at today's *Western Morning News?* It might interest you."

The paper was interesting enough, inasmuch as it contained an account of the tragic death of a convict in the neighbourhood of the Hangman's Rock the day before. The name of the unfortunate man was mentioned, but in such a way as to convey intelligence to his intimate friends only. Moreover, it seemed from what the reporters could gather, that there was no doubt in the minds of the authorities that the unfortunate occurrence had been an accident, and, in the circumstances, it had been deemed a waste of time to search for the body.

"And there you are," Gilette said. "Raymond Mallison is dead, and in a few days will be forgotten. His name will be taken off the prison books, and nobody will give him another thought. There will be no search, or hue and cry, nor anything of that sort, and, meanwhile, you are safe here so long as you stick to your disguise. Barros will see that report, of course, and he will be all the easier in his mind for it. He will naturally conclude that his big obstacle is removed, and, knowing that Allison has no idea of his proper identity, will regard him as more or less harmless. There is just the possibility, however, that he has already taken steps to get Allison out of the way, but I shall have something to say to that. I am going up to the castle later on, in my proper person but very slightly made up, and I am going to ask Barros to allow me to take some more pictures in the older part of the building. This will give me the opportunity that I want. Meanwhile, we have other things to think about. Now, what I suggest is this. I am going to take you to Mrs. Bond's house and introduce you to her as a friend of mine. Of course, the girls know who you are, and I want you to make some excuse for taking Peggy Ferriss on one side and telling her the whole of the story. You see, we must establish my theory definitely before I go any further. I think it would be just as well if Peggy sees your old nurse and lets her know that her secret is discovered. There is no need even to mention the fact that you have escaped, at least, not for the present, but I do want Peggy to find out if we are right in our supposition that a trick was played upon Barros all those years ago. Now what do you say?"

"I am entirely in your hands," Mallison replied. "We will go up to the house as soon as you like."

It was just about tea time when those two made their way to the charming little cottage on the cliff where Mrs. Bond had taken up her quarters, and presently they were seated at the tea-table with the elderly lady and the girls, admiring the splendid view of the sea and the moorland, and chatting much as if there was no shadow of tragedy lurking in the background. Mrs. Bond was by way of being an invalid, and excused herself presently when Gilette suggested that they should

explore the garden and the delightful little bay that lay just beyond. And so it came about that Gilette and Hetty Bond went off in one direction whilst Mallison lay out there on the cliffs with Peggy by his side, discussing the extraordinary story that Mallison had to tell.

"It's most amazing," Peggy said. "And the delightful part of the whole thing is that you are safe."

"Well, I suppose I am in a way," Mallison said. "But, you see, it can't go on. I can't pass all my life living on my friends, and pretending that I am a foreigner over here, intent on learning the cinema business. I must be cleared, Peggy I must be in a position to go back to my own profession and resume my broken career. And this can't be done until Barros has been brought to justice. We have a long way to go yet, and even if we could convict Barros of a conspiracy it doesn't altogether clear my good name. We have to find out exactly how it was done and why. Of course we know, but I can never hold up my head again until the whole story is told in public. And don't forget the class of man we have to deal with. Barros is an amazingly clever man, with courage and imagination, and he will fight us to the last. If I come out in the open and defy him, then I shall have to go back to Slagmoor, and you know what that would be for me. But everybody can help. You can!"

"I," Peggy cried "My dear boy, I would gladly, if I could, but what use is a girl in a case like this?"

"A great deal," Mallison smiled. "To begin with, we have to find out from that old nurse of mine if it is true that five-and twenty years or so ago my mother gave birth to twins. As a matter of fact we do know it, but when this business comes into a Court of Justice the thing will have to be proved. There is one person alive who can prove it, and that is my nurse, Elsie Dorida. You know her probably?"

"Oh, I know her very well indeed," Peggy said. "But I didn't know she was your nurse. She lives in the little cottage down yonder in the bay, and entirely looks after herself. She is very old now, hardly ever getting out of doors, and she is nearly blind. I found her out the second day we were here, when Hetty and I were having a picnic tea on the beach, and I went into the cottage to borrow a kettle. She and I are quite good friends. She is like an old Spanish picture, with her brown face and white hair, and that attractive sort of mantilla she wears on her head. I have been to see her several times. On wet afternoons I go down there and read to her. She always seems so grateful."

"Well, that's so much to the good," Mallison said. "I suppose she never mentions me, by any chance?"

"I have never heard her. You see, she has come to the time of life when people begin to live in their youth. Of course I know that she was a servant of a lady who lived here for a good many years, and I know that she has seen a great deal of trouble, because she told me so. But what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go down and see her now," Mallison said. "I'll wait here till you come back. Introduce my mother's name, speak of me. Try and get her to talk, and let her know that you have some inkling of the secret."

Without waiting further Peggy walked down the cliff path leading to the cottage, at the door of which the old woman was seated with some piece of work in her hand. She welcomed Peggy cordially, and presently, led on by some apparently

chance remark, began to talk of the past in the garrulous way which is common amongst very old people, especially when they have an interested listener. She spoke of the days when she had first come to England with her beloved mistress, and told Peggy freely enough the story of Mallison's mother's courtship. It was a narrative that took some time to tell, and Peggy waited patiently for her opportunity.

"Have you told me everything?" she asked presently.

The old woman looked up shrewdly, with something like a spasm of fear on her brown and wrinkled face.

"What do you mean by that, cara," she asked.

"Oh, I am not speaking out of idle curiosity," Peggy said. "You see, I happen to know a great deal about the story of yours. Sir Marston Manley is a very old friend of ours, and he knew Major Mallison and your mistress intimately. It was through him that I came to know Mr. Mallison."

"Ah, you knew my boy?" the old woman cried. "One of the best and finest in the world. And now he is in trouble through no fault of his own, I swear."

"That's true enough," Peggy said quietly. "I know that, because he is very dear to me. But did it never occur to you. Elsie, that you might have been the cause of all his trouble? I don't mean designedly, I mean by accident. I want you to tell me all about the story of Raymond's twin brother."

The old woman jumped to her feet as if something had struck her, and then dropped back in her chair, trembling violently.

"You don't wish him any harm?" she wailed.

"Didn't I tell you that Raymond Mallison is very dear to me, Elsie," Peggy went on. "Some day I am going to marry him, and because his name must be cleared first, I am here to ask you to tell me the truth. Whatever you tell me will be sacred. But you must speak, Elsie, you must, indeed."

A tear rolled down the old woman's cheek.

"It's come at last," she murmured. "Come, as I always knew that it would. After all these years my sins have found me out. Now you sit down, cara, and listen to my tale. And I'll tell you the truth if I die for it."

Chapter XXII

The Nurse's Story.

"We should be better inside, perhaps," Peggy suggested.

The old woman rose and groped her way into the neat little cottage, where everything was in its place, and the whole room shone like the proverbial new pin. There were bits of furniture here and there, and brasses that any connoisseur might have envied. Peggy looked round with an approving smile.

"Sit down, dear young lady," Elsie Dorida said in the soft southern accent of hers, "sit down, and more than welcome. And so you are going to marry that dear boy of mine. It was a sad, sad day for me when all that trouble befel him. And they

lied when they said that my boy ever injured anybody. Ah, it was well that my dear mistress died before this trouble came. Some day the truth will be told, and I shall see him again."

"Some of us are very near to the truth now," Peggy hinted a little boldly. "Raymond has his enemies, nurse, though he never did anybody harm. But that doesn't seem to matter much where certain people are concerned. There are men in the world who would do anything for money, and Raymond is the victim of one of them, and that is why I want you to tell me the whole story."

"Is he well, dear lady?" the woman asked eagerly. "Is he as happy as he can be? You hear from him sometimes? And to think that you are going to marry my boy one of these days!"

Just for a moment Peggy hesitated as to whether or not she should tell the whole story. But this woman was old, and rather inclined to wander in her mind at times; therefore perhaps it was necessary to preserve a certain measure of reticence.

"He is well," she replied. "And as happy as you can expect him to be. If you will help me, Elsie, and say nothing to anybody as to my visit, then all may be well yet. But, first of all, I want you to tell me your story."

"Oh, I'll tell it fast enough," the aged woman said. "To begin with, I came to England many years ago with my mistress on a visit to an aunt of hers who lived in Cheltenham. She was a very old and dignified lady who lived a quiet life, seeing hardly anyone except a few whom she considered worthy of her friendship. Very proud Spanish woman she was, with royal blood in her veins. I don't remember now how it was that the major came to meet her, but I do know that it was love at the first sight. They didn't take me into their confidence because they were afraid, perhaps, of getting me into trouble, but one day my mistress had gone, saying that she had married Major Mallison, and that we were not to worry about her any more, but she wanted me, and I went, and for two years after that my mistress was the happiest woman on earth."

"It was a real love match?" Peggy asked.

"Ah, my dear lady," Elsie went on. "One of those matches they tell you about that are made in heaven. They were devoted to one another, those two, and never happy apart. You see, the major was a poor man, with no idea of the value of money, so he came down here to this beautiful quiet spot, hoping perhaps, for his wife's sake, that Don Argo Marne might some day repent. But he never did; he never wrote, and from that day my mistress had no further communication with him. It was a terrible grief to her, but she had the best husband in the world, and the time came when she was expecting another joy. And then the blow fell."

"You mean Major Mallison's death, I suppose?"

"Ah, it was terrible," the old nurse sighed. "I remember it as if it were only yesterday. He went off on his horse, like the handsome, gallant gentleman he was, with a kiss for his wife and a word for me, and in two hours they brought him back dead. And when my dear mistress was capable of getting about again she wrote to her father and implored his forgiveness for the sake of the child that was coming to her. She told Don Argo Marne that she was practically penniless, but even then no reply came from him. He sent a message by a confidential servant to the effect that if my mistress would give up the child when a month old to the

messenger who would be sent then the Don would make my mistress an allowance of a hundred pounds a month so long as she lived. But even then he would not promise anything on behalf of the child. You can imagine how we felt about it."

"You wrote and refused, of course."

"Ah, that was what my mistress intended to do, but she put it off until the child was born—"

"The two children, you mean," Peggy prompted.

"The two children, ah yes, but I don't know, my dear lady, how you came to find that out. Still, you have made that discovery, and I promised I would tell you the whole truth. The scheme was mine. When the twins were born I was alone in the house with my mistress, for she could not afford any further help. I believe that the doctor was going to send a nurse, but these things happen unexpectedly, and when the whole thing was over, and I held those two boys in my arms, the great idea came to me. I could show my mistress how one of the twins could be well taken care of, and how she could retain the other and bring him up as a gentleman. And when the doctor came I told him what I proposed to do, and, because he knew the whole family story, he consented to keep the thing a secret. He was a very old man himself, and he died soon afterwards. Then, a month later, the messenger wrote from London, and I took one of the boys up and handed, him over to Don Argo's messenger."

"Yes," Peggy said thoughtfully. "It tallies exactly with what I have heard. But you need not be afraid. Elsie, the secret is in good hands. Now, I want you to tell me what Don Argo's messenger was like."

"It is twenty-six years ago," Elsie smiled sadly. "But I will do my best. He gave no name, only produced a letter by which I should see that he was the man I expected to meet. He was very tall and dark, with a benevolent sort of face, and something like one of the priests of my own Catholic Church."

Peggy nodded approvingly. This sounded very like what Barros might have been five and-twenty years ago.

"He was very kind and sympathetic," Elsie went on. "He deplored Don Argo's attitude, and assured me he would do his best to soften his master. He told me that he had engaged a nurse for the child, and that they were returning to the Argentine in the course of a week. Then I came back here, and told my mistress what I had done, and after that we settled down to the quiet life until my dearest lady died. We felt sure that our secret was safe, because we heard nothing to the contrary, and the money from the Argentine came regularly once a month. And now you tell me all that has been found out. Well, I am not sorry; I am a very old woman, and my punishment can't last long."

"There will be no punishment," Peggy said gently. "I told you that the secret is in safe hands, and so it is. Nobody knows anything about this except Raymond's friends, and they hope that what you have just told me is going to help him to establish his innocence. You have never seen that messenger since?"

"Never," Elsie cried, "What if I tell you he is in this neighbourhood at the present moment? Could you recognise him?"

"Ah, that I couldn't," the old woman said. "It is so long ago, and besides, I am very nearly blind. He might have been here for years for all I know, but I think I could recognise his voice. It was rather a peculiar voice, deep, and what you

English call vibrating. But I have never seen him, though it is possible he might have seen me."

Peggy rose presently and took her leave, having first impressed Elsie with the necessity of saying nothing about this to anyone, in whatever circumstances. With a promise to call again on the following morning, she walked up the cliff path, where she found Mallison awaiting her, together with Hetty Bond and Roy Gilette, who appeared to be a little more serious than usual.

"Well," Mallison asked. "How did you get on?"

"Quite well," Peggy said. "It is just as you think, Roy; that theory of yours tallies exactly with what she said. There is not the slightest doubt that Raymond's twin brother was handed over to Barros twenty-six years ago, and, of course, immediately he turned the child over to the Allisons. He told Elsie that he was going to take the child to the Argentine, but that, no doubt, was a lie. He did not do anything of the kind. And, so far as I can gather, Don Argo Marne has never been told that he has grandchildren. It is more than likely that Barros opened the letter and laid his plans accordingly. But whether that is so or not, Raymond's mother received the promised allowance every month until she died."

"That's right," Gilette cried. "And as soon as she died the allowance stopped, leaving Barros with the comfortable assurance that he had got Mrs. Mallison's one child out of the way, so that there was no obstacle then between him and the Don's fortune. It must have been an unpleasant surprise for him when he came to London eighteen months ago to run against Professor Raymond Mallison and find that beyond a doubt he was the son of Major and Mrs. Mallison, late of Merston, in the county of Devonshire. But we need not go into all that at present. It is rather nattering to me to find that my theory has been confirmed down to the minutest detail. But we are a long way from being through yet."

"Yes, I can see that,", Mallison said thoughtfully. "It occurs to me to be rather sinister that, though Barros has found out the trick played upon him by Elsie Dorida, he has never been near her. Of course he knows she is here, and exactly where to find her, but, up to now, he has given her a wide berth. I should not be at all surprised if he hasn't got some scheme in the back of his mind for getting her out of the way."

"I am pretty sure of it," Gilette said. "And there is another thing. I met one of the servants from the castle just now, and gave him some trifling message for Allison. He told me that Mr. Allison was gone. He wasn't quite sure how, but he was under the impression that somebody had sent a car for him, and that he had left hurriedly before breakfast. Knowing what we know, I don't believe a single word of it. I tell you, Mallison, your twin brother is in danger. I don't say that anything tragic has happened to him as yet, but he has been got out of the way, and I shouldn't be at all surprised to learn that he is a prisoner in one of those vaults under the old portion of the castle."

"I believe you are right," Mallison cried eagerly. "If so, this is where I come in. When I was a boy, and the family who sold the castle to Barros was away on the Continent almost permanently, I explored every one of those vaults."

"Didn't they do a lot of smuggling in the old days?" Gilette asked.

"Yes, that's right. They were as lawless as the Border barons used to be. Why, I can show you a way from a cave under the castle by which you can explore every

inch of those vaults and get into the castle itself. I even know where the duplicate keys are kept, and I don't believe that there is anybody else remembers their existence, unless, perhaps, it might be one of the old servants. But perhaps you girls know, you've been down here some time. Are there any of the old servants still attached to the place?"

"I am sure there are not," Hetty said. "When Mr. Barros took over the castle he dismissed the two or three old servants that remained, and there was a good deal of talk about it."

"Ah, that's good," Gilette cried. "This is where we come in again. I can foresee a good many more exciting incidents for my film play before the story is finished. Now, look here, Mallison, what do you say to walking along the sands at the foot of the cliffs and rummaging about amongst those vaults, on the off-chance of finding that unfortunate Allison? The tide won't be in for some hours yet, and whether we are successful or not we ought to pick up a good deal of useful information. It's rather a score to know that we are in a position to drop in upon Barros any time of the day or night without the formality of knocking at the front door."

"Yes, that's rather a good idea," Mallison said. "It is perfectly safe, too. Nobody over walks along the sands past the foot of the castle, because the tide is very treacherous, and just inside the ledge of rocks is a big quicksand that has a most evil reputation. Even the fishermen avoid it, though, of course, in the old smuggling days they had to take risks."

They sat there on the edge of the cliff for some little time discussing their plans, and waiting for the tide to recede a little further, after which there would be a good three hours of daylight in which to explore those curious old vaults and dungeons under the old portion of the castle where they had been for the best part of eight hundred years. They were still talking about this when Hetty Bond laid her hand upon Gilette's arm, and called his attention to a tall, muscular figure crossing the moor from the direction of the castle, and evidently bent upon reaching the beach by a narrow footpath that lay parallel with the cart track by which Peggy had reached the old nurse's cottage.

"Who is that?" she asked. "Am I mistaken, or does it happen to be Mr. Barros?"

"By Jove, you've got it," Gilette cried. "That's Barros right enough, and evidently he is not particularly anxious to be seen. Now, I wonder where he's going."

It was probably as Gilette stated, for Barros was creeping along in a furtive sort of way, glancing over his shoulder from time to time as if fearful that he was being followed, until he passed at length over the edge of the cliff, and, striding down the narrow path, made his way towards the little house from which Peggy had recently come.

"He could be going nowhere else," she said. "That path only leads to the cottage and the beach, and there is no way round to the bay under the Castle that I know of."

Gilette jumped to his feet.

"Let's follow the brute," he cried.

"Don't you think you had better leave that to me?" Peggy suggested. "You see, I often go and call upon Elsie. Everyone in the village knows that I take her little delicacies, and that I am there nearly every day. I might be able to walk quietly down and listen to what is going on, and if I have the bad luck to be discovered, I

can walk into the cottage boldly enough without that man suspecting why I am there. You see, he doesn't know there is any particular connection between you two men and us girls, except that we are friends, and, as far as Roy is concerned he doesn't know him at all."

"I am not so sure," Gilette said. "However, it's worth taking the risk, and now that Barros is safely out of the way. Mallison and myself will have a fine opportunity of overhauling those dungeons. I think the sooner we get to work the better. Now, Peggy, my child, keep your courage up, and remember that for the time being, at any rate, you are playing the part of leading lady in an episode of my great film drama. I am only too sorry that I can't have the camera down here, but in the circumstances I am afraid we must dispense with that."

"All right," Peggy laughed. "I am not a bit afraid. Hetty, you stay here till I come back."

Chapter XXIII

Under the Castle.

Whilst Peggy stole quietly along the cliff path in the direction of Elsie's cottage with a view to hearing something of the reason for Barros's visit there Gilette and Mallison climbed down to the beach on the side nearest to the castle and from thence along a spit of sand fringed by a mass of towering rocks that culminated eventually in the great rampart of granite upon which Chilstone Castle itself stood. At first sight it looked as if the way was barred by these rugged masses of stone rising high overhead; but a gap at one point served Mallison with a possibility of squeezing through and reaching another ledge of sand beyond. Here the cliffs seemed to shoot up in a smooth wall for three or four hundred feet and so far as Gilette could see they had come to an end of their journey. He pointed this out to Mallison who merely smiled as he glanced upwards.

"Oh, not at all," he said, "This is just where I come in. I don't believe there is even one of the fishermen who knows the way, and I should never have found it out if old Humphrey Carver had not confided in me. In one of his expansive moments."

"Never heard of the man," Gilette said. "Perhaps not, but Humphrey was a sort of confidential servant of the head of the family. You have forgotten, I suppose, that the ancient race who owned the castle for centuries hardly ever saw it for the last twenty years. They were so poor that they had to live for the most part abroad, and the one man who looked after the castle was Carver. He was a queer old chap, and hardly ever spoke to anyone though for some reason or another he took a considerable fancy to me. You can imagine how the old castle used to fascinate me in those days, and when Carver gave me the run of the place I was delighted. Then, one day, he showed me all over the vaults and dungeons, and where the duplicate set of keys were kept."

"Do you know where they are now?" Gilette asked eagerly.

“Certainly I do, unless they have been removed,” Mallison said. “And I should think that is very unlikely. It’s any money that they are in exactly the same place where Carver left them. He died about two years ago, in time to save himself from what he would have considered to be the disgrace of seeing strangers here. But we shall see presently. You stoop down and let me stand on your shoulders, and I will show you something.”

Gilette did as suggested, and, climbing on his back, Mallison reached up to what appeared to be the smooth face of the rock, but which was a pocket, into which he jumped, then he hauled up Gilette, and in front of them lay some rough steps cut in the live rock, up which they went for some distance before the steps began to descend again into an absolutely natural harbour, where, Mallison explained, quite a good-sized ship could ride in safety, absolutely under the walls of the castle.

“By Jove!” Gilette cried. “I never expected this. But go on, my boy, I am evidently safe in your hands.”

“Now you see how the smuggling was done. The boats used to come in here late at night, and lie absolutely hidden in this natural cove whilst the stuff was unloaded. But come along, I’ve a lot to show you yet.”

Mallison pressed on across the wide expanse of sand, until he came to the flat face of the cliff where, apparently, further progress was impossible, but, pushing aside a heavy curtain of seaweed, he disclosed a flight of steps leading into a natural cavern which was lighted by a ragged hole in the roof. In a little hiding place at the far end of the cave he fumbled about for a moment, and then triumphantly produced a bunch of rusty keys.

“Ah, here they are,” he exclaimed, “I thought they would not be far off. There are four of them altogether. And now we shall see what we shall see.”

With that, Mallison reached out in the semidarkness, and Gilette could hear a key working creakily in a lock. Then a small iron door was thrown open, disclosing a flagged passage beyond, which was lighted overhead by circular pieces of thick ground glass, which had been rendered opaque in the course of time by the passage of thousands of feet in the basement of the castle overhead.

“There, what do you think of that?” Mallison asked.

“Very exciting,” Gilette said. “Quite an Arabian Nights flavour about it. But, look here, my boy, didn’t that key turn rather easily in the lock? If it hasn’t been used all these years, how did it come to work so smoothly?”

So saying, Gilette took a matchbox from his pocket, and, striking a light, examined the lock carefully.

“Look at it,” he cried. “It’s been recently oiled. Of course, there is a duplicate set of keys.”

“Well, I have just told you so,” Mallison said.

“Ah, that isn’t exactly what I mean. I mean that the person who has the duplicate keys has used them quite recently, or this lock wouldn’t be so beautifully oiled.”

“Yes, they are probably in Barros’s possession. Has it never occurred to you that Barros had some powerful reason for burying himself in this remote part of the world? It’s hardly the spot that a rich man would choose after retiring from

business, if he had any ambition for social advancement. You see, there isn't another big house within twenty miles."

"Yes, I think you are right," Gilette said. "He is going to make some use of these vaults. It was the vaults that attracted him, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, that twin brother of yours is lying not very far off."

"But it was not for his sake that Barros took the castle," Mallison suggested. "We know perfectly well from what we have seen ourselves that Stephen Allison's appearance here was a most unpleasant surprise for Barros. He might have been got out of the way as you suggest, but I feel pretty sure that when Barros bought this place Allison was not in his mind at all."

"You are right there," Gilette said drily. "He was thinking about a different person altogether. And, by Gad! I believe I have got it. I was a fool not to think if it before."

"Well, what is it you've got?" Mallison demanded, "Oh, never mind about that for the moment, but I feel pretty sure that I've got it. Now, I wonder how Barros, a Spaniard, ever found out all about the vaults here. From what you say, the only man who really knew died two years ago. Didn't I hear something to the effect that the late owner of the castle was of Spanish descent? Wasn't it stated that the family was really founded about the time of the Spanish Armada?"

"Yes, that's right enough," Mallison explained. "They were comparatively poor till, then, but there is a story to the effect that one of King's Philip's richest galleons went ashore here, and that her captain, who was saved, subsequently married the daughter of the house. The treasures saved from the galleon brought enough to put the old house on its feet again. Look here, Gilette, is it too wild a theory to suggest that Don Argo Marne was a relative of the Spanish captain, who all those years ago, married the heiress of Chilstone Castle?"

"No, I don't think it is," Gilette said thoughtfully. "In fact, something of the sort was in my mind when I spoke just now. It's just as likely that our Spaniard had friends with him over here, and they might have been ancestors of Don Argo Marne. If that were so, then there is no reason at all why the Don should not have known all about the vaults under Chilstone Castle. If he did, then there is no reason why Barros should not have been as wise. I begin to see a step or two further."

"Well, the fact remains that Barros does know," Mallison said. "And now let us push on a bit."

The wide-flagged passage, more or less efficiently lighted from overhead disclosed a big panelled doorway divided in the centre, much after the fashion of an entrance to a church. It was richly ornamented with brass fittings, now tarnished with age, and the salt sea air, but even here again it was plain enough that the locks had been recently overhauled. With some difficulty Mallison opened the heavy door with one of the keys, and, headed by Gilette, stepped inside.

It was a large room with a carved stone ceiling. In the centre of which was a sort of skylight of the same thick opaque glass that obtained in the corridor. But here was a difference. Here was a fine room carefully swept and garnished and furnished on a magnificent scale with thick carpets on the floor, and even a few paintings hanging on the stone walls. Beyond it was another room in which a modern bedstead had been erected, the same being covered with spotless sheets

and an up to date eiderdown, evidently in preparation for some favoured occupant. Save for the dim light and the faint suggestion of a prison house those strange quarters lacked nothing in the way of comfort and luxury.

"Now, what do you make of this?" Mallison asked. "I have been over these vaults scores of times, but hitherto I have always found them as bare as the back of your hand. There was not so much as a stick of furniture the last time I was here."

"Its certainly very strange," Gilette said. "But I have quite a fair idea of what it all means. Its no use speculating as to what is going to happen—what we have got to do is to keep our eyes open and be here when it does happen. We are on the verge of stirring events, and I can see a lot more drama for that famous picture of mine. But what we came here for this afternoon more especially was to find Allison. He's not here evidently, and it is quite plain to me that all this wealth and luxury is not intended for so obscure a person. We shall find much bigger game here when the time comes. Come along and let us have a look in the other rooms."

Two of the remaining three chambers were absolutely devoid of anything in the way of furniture, but on the floor outside the fourth was the end of a cigarette which had been trampled flat under someone's boot heel.

Gilette indicated it with a significant smile as Mallison proceeded to open the door.

And there they found what they were looking for. Lying in a corner of the vault on a heap of clean straw was Allison, apparently wrapped in a deep sleep. He was still in evening dress, which appeared to be exceedingly dishevelled, as if he had been picked up and carried there, which probably was the case. Gilette bent over him rather anxiously, and laid a hand on his pulse.

"He's all right, so far," he exclaimed presently. "He is not dead, and, so far as I can see, has suffered no damage. I should say that he has been very heavily drugged."

Apparently Gilette was not very far from the mark, for it took him and Mallison quite a little time before they could induce the unfortunate man to open his eyes, and this they only succeeded in doing after they had dragged him to his feet and led him a score of times round the room. Then he looked up languidly and spoke in a far-away sort of voice.

"What's the matter?" he asked in the tones of one far gone in intoxication. "What are you doing to me? Why can't you let me go to sleep?"

Again they walked Allison round and round the room until at length he began to have some dim idea that something out of the common had happened to him.

"Look here," he said. "Who are you chaps and what are you doing in my bedroom? Hello, where's my bedroom gone to? You must be playing some infernal practical joke on me."

"Hardly that," Gilette explained "Where do you think you are, Mr. Allison?"

"Well, I thought I was in a bedroom at Chilstone Castle," Allison said drowsily. "But I seem to have been walking in my sleep, and to have struck the deepest dungeon below the castle keep. Queer thing is I do walk in my sleep sometimes. Yes, that's what I have been up to, and they've sent you fellows to find me. Jolly good of you, I'm sure!"

"You had better sit down a minute or two," Gilette suggested, "and listen carefully to what I have to say."

“Well, I’ll try and do that,” Allison said with a faint smile. “But my head is jolly queer. I don’t remember drinking anything in particular last night, though, I feel confounded like it, unless I’ve been drugged.”

“You have,” Gilette said curtly. “You have.”

“Oh, the Dickens I have! Whom by!”

“Don’t you think we had better get outside into the open air’?” Mallison suggested. “If we take our friend where he can bathe his head and face with some fresh sea water, I think he will be all the better for it.”

“That’s a jolly good idea,” Allison said. “Come on boys, I don’t know who you are, but you seem to be most deucedly friendly. Look here,” he went on as if moved by a sudden thought. “Has this little stunt got anything to do with our friend Marne? Of course you don’t know anything about it, but when I turned up here last night—or it might have been any other night, for the matter of that—he seemed struck all of a heap. First of all, he pretended he had never seen me before, and then he changed his note. Perhaps he wants to get rid of me for some reason.”

“You are not very far wrong,” Gilette said dryly. “But come along, and we’ll do our best to explain the position of affairs when you have had a dash of cold sea water.”

They made their way into the open where the fresh air and the cool touch of water on Allison’s face brought about a wonderful change. He wiped his dripping face and turned to his companions with an eye that was clear enough now.

“I am quite all right again,” he said. “And now perhaps you will be good enough to explain. I remember going to bed last night, or rather early this morning, after a final drink with my host, and then I seemed to dream. I dreamt that I was dragged out of bed, and carried in somebody’s arms down a long flight of steps, after which I don’t remember any more. Do you mean to say that that actually happened?”

“How else did you got here?” Gilette asked.

“Oh, ask me an easy one. I want you chaps to explain, and I’ll be quite content to listen.”

Gilette proceeded to enlighten Allison on a number of matters, having first pledged him to secrecy. It was a long time before the interested listener began to get a really intelligent grip upon the situation. He turned wonderingly from one to the other, waiting until Gilette had finished his story.

“And even now I haven’t got it all,” he said. “I don’t even know who you chaps are.”

Gilette whispered a few words in Mallison’s ear, and the latter commenced to remove the best part of his disguise. Then he turned to Allison and looked him straight in the face. Allison started back with a cry of surprise.

“What on earth does all this mean?” he demanded. “I feel like a man who is regarding himself in a looking-glass. I don’t know whether you are a relation of mine or not, sir, but the likeness between us two is amazing, and if your name isn’t Allison then all I can say is it ought to be.”

“All the same it isn’t,” Mallison smiled. “It’s Mallison, and, if you know the truth, your name is Mallison too. My dear fellow, you are my twin brother, and with your help we are going to right a wrong which has clouded my life for the last two years. No, you needn’t say it—the man you call Marne is at the bottom of the whole thing, and it is Marne that we have to bring to justice.”

Chapter XXIV

For Big Stakes.

Peggy had guessed correctly enough when she concluded that Barros was on his way to the little cottage at the bottom of the cliff, and she would have divined something of his errand if she could have caught a glimpse of his face as he strode down the hill until at length he came to his destination.

For here was not the Barros that she knew, not the man with features marked by smiling benevolence, and that calm good nature which outwardly, at any rate, was one of his outstanding characteristics. His face was heavy and scowling now, his dark eyes full of brooding suspicion. For, sooth to say, Julien Barros was frightened—for the first time in his life he was up against unseen forces, and he was all the more alarmed because he had not the remotest idea of the direction from whence the blow had come. More than once he had endeavoured to persuade himself that there was no danger at all, and that he was becoming the victim of his own over-heated imagination. For many years he had been planning this thing; he had worked up to it with the greatest possible patience, and had discounted failure at every turn. And, until quite recently it had seemed to him that everything was going exactly as he had hoped. He had gone back over the time when, as a mere boy, he had entered the service of Don Argo Marne at a period when he had never entertained any hope of anything more than a responsible position in that proud old man's employ. And for many years he had been quite content to work in a subordinate capacity, nor indeed, had he begun to entertain the idea of turning that big fortune to his own use until the time came when Don Argo's only child came back from Paris, after leaving school.

She had been always kind and pleasant to him, as she was to everybody with whom she came in contact, and perhaps because of this Barros had permitted his ambition to take him a step too far. He had been vain enough to think that the kindly smile on the face of his young mistress and the friendly pressure of her hand were a little more than normal, and there had come a time when throwing all prudence to the winds, he had dared to speak freely of his hopes and fears.

But there had come a set back that Barros would remember to his dying day. He had thought that everything was in his favour, the beauty of the day, the absence of Don Argo, and his presence alone with the beautiful girl in the dining-room of the hacienda where he had been lunching with her. But almost before the words were cold on his lips, he realised his mistake. He saw that, to her, he was no more than a valued servant, and that she was as proud as her father.

He could see the dawning smile in the girl's eyes, and the expression of contempt as it crossed her face. She had risen coolly enough from the table, absolutely mistress of herself, and entirely dominating the situation.

"I think the best thing I can do is to forget what you have said," she murmured, with all the languid insolence of youth. "Yes, that would be the better plan."

“But, signorita,” Barros had protested. “Do you quite understand what I am asking?”

“Oh, quite,” the girl had replied. “There is no mistaking your meaning. You are doing me the honour of asking me to become your wife. Well, I suppose that is a compliment.”

“About the highest a man can pay a woman,” Barros had retorted with white lips. He was beginning to realise the seriousness of the situation, and what it was likely to mean to him if Stephanie Marne breathed a syllable of this to her proud old father.

“Yes, I suppose it is,” she had said, with that slow contemptuous smile still upon her lips. “But surely you forget the difference between us. Should my father ever so much as guess what you have said to me to-day, then I think you would realise the consequences. If you are wise you will say no more, and you can rely upon me to keep this matter a secret.”

With that, she had given him a gesture of dismissal, and with a black rage in his heart, he had gone back to his work realising that he had played for a high stake and failed. And yet his passion had been sincere and genuine enough, so sincere, indeed, that he had not stopped to think what might happen when the truth was revealed to his employer. But at any rate, that danger was averted. He knew full well that Stephanie would keep her word, but from that moment he had made up his mind to be avenged.

And so a year or two had passed in cold politeness on either side, and a constant watching for his opportunity on the part of Barros. That he was going to win one of these days he felt certain. Then came the visit of Stephanie to England, followed in due course by her letter to her father saying that she had married an Englishman, and asking his forgiveness. And here then was the opportunity to Barros’s hand.

He had been present at breakfast when his employer read the letter which meant the destruction of all his hopes. He had witnessed the expression of rage that followed, and in his own clever way had fed the flame. And when Don Argo Marne declared that henceforth he had no daughter, Barros had seen the golden opportunity clearly before him.

He had known, of course, all about the letter that Marne wrote his daughter, and he had quite daringly suppressed the series of replies that came at intervals from the other side of the world. He knew that he was safe in so doing, and he smiled to himself when the final letter came announcing the death of Stephanie’s husband and the prospective birth of a child. It was a good thing that that letter fell into his hands, he thought, because Don Argo recently had shown signs of penitence, and the knowledge that a grandchild was coming to him might have moved him to forgiveness. Barros carefully pondered over the matter for a time, and than decided on the bold step of a journey to England and obtaining possession of the infant. And this, in the course of time, he did, returning to the Argentine again and waiting patiently upon events.

He saw that his master was not the man he had been, and that more and more he was disposed to leave all his business in the hands of his subordinates. He gave up his house in Buenos Aires, and retired to a cottage in the heart of the country, where he lived the life of a hermit, seeing nobody, and even going to the

length of assuming a different name. And so, by gradual degrees, everything drifted into Barros's hands. He signed all the cheques, he managed all the property, he had even induced his employer to give him a power of attorney.

And then the time arrived when Stephanie Mallison died, and the news came to her father in due course. He read the letter through without a word, he destroyed it slowly and thoughtfully, and a moment later, lay paralysed at Barros's feet. But he did not die, as that scoundrel had hoped and expected, but lived on, a prematurely aged man, gradually recovering his speech and faculties, but absolutely indifferent to everything that was going on around him. So long as he had food and a roof over his head, the rest seemed to matter nothing. Here then, was Barros's opportunity. The Don had been forgotten by all his own friends, in fact, most people who knew him thought he was dead, therefore it was comparatively easy for Barros to realise practically everything, and spend long vacations in London. Not that he intended to abandon the old man altogether, for that would have been rather too dangerous. What he really had in the back of his mind will be seen presently.

Meanwhile, he was established down in Devonshire, the owner of a great place, and passing as Marne, which was not a very dangerous thing to do in the circumstances. A little later on, when he had taken certain steps which were now near completion, he would be able to defy detection.

And here, just at the moment when he seemed to have everything absolutely in his grasp, strange things were happening that shook him to the very soul. If he had been able to meet these sinister things, and grasp them boldly, he would have been more satisfied, but coming one after the other so easily and spontaneously they worried him and kept him awake at night wondering what was going to happen next.

Of course, he had long since found out the trick that had been played upon him when one of Mrs. Mallison's twin boys had been handed over to him by the old nurse. But he was going to see her now with a view to getting the truth out of her, so that he could be able to grapple with the danger that threatened.

He thrust his way into the cottage in that masterful manner of his and stood looking down at Elsie Dorida with thin lips compressed and a sneer on his face. She put aside the work she was attempting and faced the intruder.

"There is somebody here," she said. "I can hardly see you, but if you will tell me what you want—"

"Oh, I'll tell you that fast enough," Barros said. "But first of all, I want you to look back some five-and-twenty years. It is not the first time we have met."

Elsie Dorida folded her hands in her lap. Her face was calm and tranquil enough except that there was something of a fighting light in those faded old eyes of hers.

"I am very feeble," she said. "And it is only at certain times that I can see anybody. But after all these years my memory is as good as ever, and I recognise your voice. The last time we met was in London."

"Quite correct," Barros said. "You came up from here to leave a child in my care. It was the child of Major and Mrs. Mallison, and I represented my employer, Don Argo Marne."

Barros was conscious of the danger of such a remark, uttered within a mile of the old house where he was passing as Marne himself, but it seemed to him that this woman was entirely in his power; and, moreover, that her infirmity rendered her practically harmless. He was sure of his ground here.

"Well, go on," Elsie said, half-defiantly. "I am not going to deny it. I came to London with the boy you mention, and handed him over to you because that was part of the arrangement. My mistress was forced by her poverty to consent to something like a crime. But you know all that."

"Your dear mistress did a very sensible thing," Barros retorted. "She had mortally offended her father, and because of that, she was glad enough to hand the boy over to my care and take an income instead. But that is not everything. Why did you deceive me at the time? Why didn't you tell me that your mistress had given birth to twins? It was obtaining money by false presences, and you are as guilty as she was. I suppose you know you can be punished for it?"

"Eh, perhaps so," Elsie cried. "But if I had been punished a thousand times over I should have done the same thing again. It was a cold-blooded and brutal offer to make, and you ought to have been as much ashamed of it as the man who sent you. But perhaps he didn't send you."

"What do you mean by that?" Barros demanded.

Elsie rose to her feet and confronted him boldly.

"I am a lonely old woman," she said "And there are days when I don't see anybody, so I sit here and think all sorts of things. I go back into the past, and remember Don Argo Marne as a kind-hearted gentleman and one of the best masters that a woman ever had. And when I think of him as I knew him, then it seems almost impossible to me that he could behave as he did to his only child. Yes, there was a time when she could turn him round her little finger, when her lightest word was a law to him. Yes, and I was present when her mother died, and her father swore to cherish and love her always. Oh, I know he was disappointed, I know the grand match he had planned for my dear young mistress, and I can imagine what he said when he heard what she had done. But he was not the man to bear malice, or store up hatred in his heart, and that's what makes me think that there is treachery somewhere. To me, is he dead?"

Elsie, in her sudden outbreak of passion, flung this question at Barros as if it had been a weapon. He faltered and hesitated, hardly knowing what to reply. Peggy, outside the cottage door, and hidden behind a clump of bushes, was following every word with breathless attention. She could catch a dim glimpse of Barros's white set fate and the grim narrowing of his eyes.

"Does it matter much?" he asked. "But we will come to that presently. The story, woman, the story."

"I know you now for the scoundrel that you are," Elsie said with the same monotonous passion. "I might have guessed it at the time—I might have known that my old master would never have driven such a bargain. You came to me with a lie upon your lips five-and-twenty years ago, and, fool that I was, I listened to you as my dear mistress had done to save herself and the other boy from starvation. Ah, we might have known."

"Oh, then there was another boy after all?"

“I am not denying it. There was another boy or you would never have succeeded in that vile plot of yours. Just as if you didn’t know all about it. Still, if you want the story from my lips, you can have it. When those two boys were born I brought you one and the other stayed with his mother. I know it was you, because, after all these years I have not forgotten your voice. And I think I know something of the way in which that young mister of mine got into his trouble. You found me out. It was a long long time afterwards, but you did find out, and deliberately you used Mr. Raymond’s brother to get him into all that trouble. Ah, you think that because I am an old woman, nearly blind, that I cannot understand these things, but I do not forget that the two boys that I helped to bring into the world were the exact image of one another and so they grew up. But why do you stand there bullying an old woman like me? Why don’t you do the honest thing by my boy and—”

“Because he is dead,” Barros said brutally. “He had an accident and died in jail, at least, that’s what it came to. If you don’t believe me, I’ll get someone to read the ‘Western Morning News’ to you, and you will see it for yourself.”

Elsie threw up her hands and dropped back in her chair, rocking herself to and fro in a dumb grief that would have touched anybody but Barros to the core. But he merely turned his back contemptuously on the unhappy woman, and walked out of the house so abruptly that Peggy listening outside, had barely time to conceal herself before he passed.

Barros pushed his way up the cliff, still scowling and manifestly uneasy in his mind, though, to a certain extent, he had found the confirmation which he had lacked since the day when he had first encountered Mallison in London, and had learnt beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was the son of Major and Mrs. Mallison. So far at any rate the ground was clear. But there was yet a good deal to be done before Barros could reasonably regard himself as safe, and he was so engrossed upon this problem that he reached the castle and flung himself into his library only to become suddenly aware of the fact that two men were waiting him there.

One he had not seen before as far as he knew but the other was Stephen Allison, who looked up with a friendly smile as Barros entered. Then Barros staggered back with a stifled oath upon his lips and a blue tinge on his face that was not lost to the observing eyes of Roy Gilette.

“What is it you want?” Barros managed to say. “I—I had no idea, that visitors were awaiting me.”

Chapter XXV

A Telegram for Barros.

While Barros was visiting the old nurse a strange scene was being played down there in the vault under the castle. Allison was standing open mouthed gazing at the man opposite with a feeling that he was regarding himself in a dream or seeing

his own features in a looking glass. All he could do was to gaze helplessly from one to another of his companions and wait as patiently as he could for an explanation.

Gilette watching him, was enjoying the situation with that fine eye of his for dramatic effect. The story was moving fast enough now and he could see on the films an even more dramatic series of tableaux than he had expected. But meanwhile there were practical considerations to be thought of.

"Perhaps you had better tell him," Mallison said. "It is more or less your story, and it would be better if you told it entirely in your own way."

"Very well," Gilette said. "Look here, Allison—or perhaps I had better address you by your proper name of Mallison."

"But that is not my proper name," the other man exclaimed.

"Oh, yes it is. I am sure of the fact that you imagine yourself to be Stephen Allison, the son of an inventor of that name, who lived for many years in an obscure part of London. But to make matters quite plain, you are merely the adopted son of those good people and when they took you over it was on the understanding that you were to be known as Allison in future, and that the secret of your birth was to be concealed from you."

"But why?" Allison cried. "Why?"

With that Gilette plunged into the story. He told it in great detail, concealing nothing, and, when he was finished, he dwelt at length upon the great scheme which Barros had been patiently evolving all these years, and went on to tell his listener how essential to the plot it was that Raymond Mallison should be got out of the way. There were a great many questions to be asked and answered, but at the end of half an hour Stephen Mallison, to call him by his proper name, had a really intelligent grip upon the situation. He was quite ready to do anything in his power to help his new found brother to clear his name.

"A most amazing story," he said. "Though, strange as it seems, I am bound to believe it. But one thing I am perfectly certain about—those foster parents of mine were absolutely innocent of this wicked conspiracy."

"Of course they were," Gilette said. "Barros knew his business and picked his puppets carefully. He was evidently on the lookout for a really respectable childless couple who were anxious to adopt a boy, and perhaps raise a little money at the same time. I have made careful inquiries as regards this, and I agree with you that the Allisons were absolutely innocent, and I know that they were highly respected."

"They were more than good to me," Stephen Mallison said. "Many's the time that they found it difficult to pay my school fees, and I was a proud man when I managed to secure that Oxford scholarship. They were rather disappointed when I made up my mind to go on the stage, but I don't think I need go into that."

"Quite so," Gilette said. "And now if you don't mind, we will come to the time when you first came in contact with Julien Barros. Don't forget that it was Barros who handed you over, twenty-five years ago to Mr. and Mrs. Allison on the understanding that you were to be regarded as their son, and that, in so doing, he was quite sure in his mind at the time that he had got rid of the only legal representative of Don Argo Marne, with the exception of the Don's daughter who died in due course. Have you got that? Because it is rather important."

"Yes, so far that is perfectly plain."

"Very well then. After the lapse of many years when Mrs. Mallison is dead and the poor old Don is more or less in his second childhood, and practically buried in the back of beyond, Barros comes over here to settle matters up and prepare to start life as a country gentleman in the name of Marne. Then he gets a nasty shock. He runs up against my friend Raymond Mallison here, and discovers that he is undoubtedly the son of Major and Mrs. Mallison, of Merston in Devon. Having established that fact beyond question, Barros is bound to get to the bottom of it. He makes inquiries right and left and being a man of intellect arrives at the true solution of the mystery. He realises that a trick has been played upon him, and that Mrs. Mallison was the mother of twins. Once this is clear in his mind, he sees that he must get Raymond Mallison out of the way. Then a brilliant idea comes to him. Why not lay a trap for Raymond and use Stephen as a sort of bait. Do you follow me?"

"That's really clever of you," Stephen Mallison murmured.

"Oh, never mind about that. The fact remains that he did so. He hunted you out and made certain friendly overtures to which you naturally responded."

"He was indeed most friendly," Stephen said. "I was playing a small part at the time, and when he told me that he had influence in certain Argentine theatres, and offered to get me a first-class engagement out there. I naturally jumped it the chance. I did not expect in those days that I should ever inherit a penny from my father."

"What happened after that?" Gilette asked.

"Oh, we saw a good deal of one another, and I dined with him frequently. Then we fixed matters up, and he advanced me the money to pay my fare to the Argentine. I was to go along with him on a certain boat, and I did."

"Here, stop a moment," Gilette cried. "We are getting on a bit too fast. Can you remember the date on which you sailed from Liverpool, on the same boat with Barros?"

Stephen Mallison thought a moment or two, and presently his face lighted.

"Oh, yes," he said. "It was two years ago, as nearly as possible. No, it wasn't, how stupid I am. It was eighteen months ago, because—but there, it doesn't matter how I recollect it. I know that I went up to Liverpool with Barros by a late train on the Friday night, and we sailed the next morning."

"Ah, now we are getting at it," Gilette exclaimed. "Now I want you to cast your mind back particularly to the night on which you and Barros left England. Can you recollect what happened to you between 5 o'clock and 9 on that date? It was winter-time, remember, and a rather cold, wet night."

"Your memory seems to be rather better than mine," Stephen said. "Yes, when I come to think of it, it was a wet night, because I went into a shop in the Strand and bought myself a mackintosh. Barros wanted to see me about seven o'clock, or a little before and he made an appointment in an office in a place called Rutland's Inn, which, as far as I recollect, is a big building Southampton Row way, given over entirely to offices and chambers mostly occupied by barristers."

Gilette looked significantly at Raymond Mallison, who smiled meaningly in reply. They were getting warm now.

"Ah, that is just what I wanted to get at," Gilette said. "You kept that appointment, I suppose."

"Well, I attempted to," Stephen went on, "but the office where I was to meet Marne was closed, and after hammering for some time on the door I walked down the corridor into the street and telephoned to Barros at his hotel, at least, I telephoned to Marne, because that was the name under which I knew him. They told me at the hotel that he was dining out, and that his luggage had already gone on to the station, so that there was nothing for me but to pick up my own baggage and join Marne, or Barros, which I did. We sailed the next day."

"Yes, I know you did. Now, one more question, and I have pretty well finished. When you were coming along the corridor at Rutland Inn, after trying to get in that office, did you happen to meet a man who spoke to you?"

"Certainly I did," Stephen said with some surprise. "It was a man, apparently a gentleman's servant, who addressed me by some name I didn't know, but as I thought he had made a mistake, I said nothing and walked on. When I got in the road, two other men spoke to me, but as they were strangers to me, I treated them much in the same way."

"Ah, here we have practically the whole story," Gilette cried. "Now, look here, Stephen—the man who met you in the corridor was Pennington's body servant. He took you for your brother, and that's why he swore at the trial that he met Raymond just outside his master's rooms on the night of the outrage. He was honest in saying that, because he thoroughly believed it, and so did Raymond's two other acquaintances whom you met outside. The whole thing was a put-up job, worked out by Barros to the minutest detail. He made it appear by overwhelming evidence that Raymond Mallison was seen practically coming out of Pennington's chambers on the night the latter was attacked. It was a bit of sheer luck for Barros that Raymond happened to be on bad terms with Pennington. It was also a bit of prime good fortune that you, Stephen, were handy to play the sort of Corsican brother business that Barros needed. He knew perfectly well that he would have you out of the country within a few hours, and that years before you returned again Raymond would be undergoing a long term of penal servitude. And now I think you perfectly understand what an infernal scoundrel Barros is."

"Yes, it's pretty plain now," Stephen said. "So far as I am concerned, I am ready to do anything you want."

Gilette's eyes lighted, up with a touch of mischief.

"Oh, I think I can see my way to the end now," he laughed. "But I should like to pull Barros's leg a bit first. Now, you come with me, Stephen. I happen to know that Barros is out on business at the present moment: we'll go up to the castle and you can change your clothes for something more in keeping with the time of day, and join me in the library. You had better go back to the caravan Raymond—you don't come on in this act. Look here, we will fix up some story for Barros, who, of course, will be delighted to see you after your adventure, Stephen, and if we don't have a pleasant half-hour or so I shall be greatly disappointed."

A little while later, Raymond Mallison was making his way back to the caravan while the other two climbed the cliff and walked through the grounds to the front door of the castle. They turned boldly in, without ringing the bell, and whilst Stephen Mallison managed to make his way to his bedroom unseen, Gilette strolled coolly into the library. And there they were comfortably seated when the door was thrown open and Barros strode in.

The moody frown upon his face gave way to a look of astonishment slightly tinged with fear when he saw Allison seated there with one who appeared to be a complete stranger.

"You here, Allison?" he gasped.

"Well, why not?" Allison asked coolly. "Do you know, Mr. Marne, I have had a most extraordinary adventure."

"An adventure," Barros stammered. "I—I don't understand. I was under the impression you had left the castle. You didn't come down to breakfast this morning, and when I made inquiries you were nowhere to be found. Of course I know that you actor people are a law unto yourselves, and it occurred to me that you had gone off on the spur of the moment without the formality of saying good-bye. But apparently—"

"Nothing of the kind," Stephen protested. "I tell you I have had an adventure. You see I sometimes walk in my sleep, and when I woke up this morning I found myself still in evening dress, lying on a heap of straw in what appeared to be a mediaeval dungeon. I couldn't make it out for a bit, and then I realised that by some extraordinary means or another I had found my way into the basement of the castle. Just for a minute I thought perhaps I had been made the victim of some outrage, but I realised that we were in the twentieth century, and put that thought out of my mind. Then I tried the door and found it open. That was not very long ago, and by great good luck I managed to get up to my bedroom without being seen by any of the servants. No wonder that you were anxious to know what had become of me."

To all this Barros listened more or less open-mouthed. He was wondering how or earth Stephen Mallison had managed to get clear of the prison house into which he had been deliberately cast, after being drugged. But, at any rate, here he was, and disposed to make light of an adventure which apparently he did not for a moment dream had come very near to being a desperate experience. And with this knowledge Barros began to pull himself together, and to face the situation coolly and deliberately.

"Well, it is certainly a very extraordinary story," he said, with a forced laugh. "I shall have to lock you in your bedroom during the rest of your stay evidently. But who is your friend?"

"Perhaps I had better explain," Gilette said. "I am one of the firm who are running the cinema company here. You were good enough to allow my people to take some photographs last night, and I propose, if you are willing, to trespass still further upon your good nature, Mr. Marne. Now, I wonder if you would allow us the run of your state rooms during the next two or three days, so that we can do a little more filming. We are working out a big story now, most of which takes place in an old castle, and it will save us a good deal of time and expense if you will consent to us coming here, say for a couple of hours every morning, for the next two or three days. Of course, If you are expecting some guests, that is another matter."

"Which rooms do you particularly want?" Barros asked.

It was on the tip of Gilette's tongue to say that it was the vaults and underground passages in which he was particularly interested, but he checked himself.

“Well, the big dining-room, for one,” he said. “And the picture gallery. We shall not be in the least in the way, and we should cause your servants no trouble.”

Barros was about to reply in a friendly way when the door of the library opened and a servant entered with a telegram on a tray, which he handed to Barros. The latter tore it open eagerly, and his face lighted up strangely as he read the few words contained in the message. Then he threw the telegram carelessly on the table and rose to his feet.

“I will get you to excuse me for a minute or two,” he said. “I must go and telephone. It may take me ten minutes or so to get through to Exeter, but I will be no longer than I can help.”

With that, Barros left the room, closing the door behind him. Without the slightest hesitation, Gilette walked across to the big table and picking up the telegram, took it from the envelope and coolly proceeded to master its contents.

It was only a short cablegram from Paris, conveying the information that the yacht Barros was expecting was lying in the harbour at Brest on the French coast, and that it would be just as well if he came over at once.

There was a peculiarly grim smile on Gilette’s lips and a determination in his manner as he turned away from the table and addressed himself to Stephen Mallison.

“Last act of the drama,” he said. “Perhaps you would like to come with me and see the end of the story.”

Chapter XXVI

Allison Comes In.

Stephen Allison, otherwise Mallison, looked eagerly at Gilette as he spoke. There was a sense of adventure and mystery in the air, and Mallison’s new-found brother was not the man to turn away from anything of that kind. Once he had grasped the true inwardness of things he was keen enough to strike a blow for his injured relative. And, again, he was burning with a sense of the indignity he had received at Barros’s hands. Here was a man who had done his best coldly and callously to deprive him of his name, and had not scrupled to place him in a position of dire peril. But for the accident of circumstance he, and not Raymond, might have served a term in Slagmoor. And beyond all this Stephen had his fair share of the spirit of adventure common to most Englishmen of his type.

“Oh, you can count upon me.” he said. “Especially if there is anything in the way of fun going on.”

“Well,” Gilette smiled. “It all depends upon what you call fun. If you don’t mind risking your life once more, then I can promise you something humorous. Look here, Stephen, if you don’t mind my calling you so. We are on the eve of great things. If everything goes well, not only is my picture complete to the last detail, but we shall force Barros to an issue at the same time. In other words, we have got him where we want him, and, unless I am cruelly mistaken, I have found out why

our ingenious friend has spent so much money in elaborately furnishing that vault. But I am not going to say anything about that yet. I should very much like to have my final set of pictures taken down there, with a picturesque character in the centre of the stage. Of course, this is all Greek to you, but do you remember at the dance, seeing an old man with a white beard mumming with the rest of my company?"

"Of course, I do," Stephen said. "And, as far as I remember, he seemed to worry Barros."

Gilette chuckled as if something amused him.

"By jove! he did that," he said. "That was one of my particularly good stunts. Well, you shall know all about that presently. Are you good enough for a short sea voyage?"

"I am good enough for anything," Stephen said recklessly. "And if it means helping out that unfortunate brother of mine, then I am ready to start in ten minutes."

"Ah, that's the spirit, by boy, that's the spirit. We will go. When Barros comes back, he is going to tell us that he is going away for a day or two, which means that he is crossing to France without delay to join a certain yacht which is lying in Bhest harbour at the present moment. Now, I happen to know what that yacht is doing, and what is Barros's interest in it. He is going to bring it here and land what he regards as an exceedingly precious cargo in the little bay almost under the windows of this room. We can't quite see the bay, but it is there, all the same. I shouldn't be at all surprised if Barros asks you to go with him: in fact, I shall be rather disturbed if he doesn't."

"But why on earth should he ask me?"

"Why, for the simple reason he wants to get rid of you," Gilette said coolly. "But for the grace of God, you would have been a dead man within a week if we hadn't found you. It was thanks to your brother's knowledge of the castle that we got on the right track, after I had been told, quite casually, that you had left here this morning. And this time Barros has failed, and, at the present moment, he doesn't know whether it is because things went wrong or because some of us have anticipated him. But you are in the way, my boy. He thinks that Raymond is dead, and in the back of his mind, he has a pretty grim idea that you have got to follow him shortly. You see, you bear such an extraordinary likeness to your brother that, so long as you cumber the earth, people are certain to ask questions. That is why it is imperative that you should cease to exist, but, all the same, if Barros asks you to accompany him to France, I want you to say yes."

"Certainly I will. Anything I can do to help I will do willingly. But—"

"Yes, I know all about that," Gilette interrupted. "I shan't be far off—in fact, I shall be by your elbow most of the time. But all that we can arrange. You must be on that yacht and in a position to respond directly I give you the signal. When you and Barros leave here in his car on the way to pick up the train at the junction, I shall be close behind, and I shall be in the train all the way to Brest. I shall actually see you going on board the yacht, but you won't see me, at least, not in my proper person. You keep your eye open for a nautical person in a yachting cap and a double-breasted reefer with brass buttons. I shall look about 60 years old, with a red face, and something exceedingly neat in the way of grey side-whiskers.

Suppose we say my name is Gordon. That will be me, and if you see me at pretty close quarters, as you probably will, then, take no notice of me whatever."

What more Gilette was likely to say to Stephen Mallison was interrupted at that moment by the return of Barros. He came in jauntily enough with an easy smile on his lips and a suggestion of the utmost friendship, but Gilette could see that he was breathless and excited, like a man who realises that something out of the common is going to happen.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, "but I have been detained on the telephone. That takes some time, as you know, especially in these cross-country lines. You were saying just now that you wanted to take some more pictures of the interior of the castle. I shall be delighted, but unfortunately I shall be away myself, as I have to leave for London in the course of the next three hours. I am afraid that business may take me to Paris, where I shall probably have to remain over next week. But I don't see why this should interfere with your arrangements. You can do as you like."

"That is exceedingly kind of you, Mr Marne," Gilette replied "Perhaps, before you go, you will be good enough to leave instructions with your servants that we are to have the freedom of the house. I suppose you don't mind us going everywhere? I mean especially as regards the older parts of the castle. I believe there are some really historic vaults here."

"Nothing of the kind, sir, nothing of the kind," Barros said hastily. "I know people talk a great deal about smuggling in the old days and all that sort of thing, but there is nothing in it. There are some underground passages and I believe one cell that was used in mediaeval times, but beyond that, I can assure you there is nothing."

Gilette winked solemnly at Stephen.

"Now that's very disappointing," he said. "I have evidently been misled by local gossip, and I had promised myself, with any luck, to get a lot of drama out of your underground dungeons. Still, after all you say, I won't think any more about it. Your fine reception rooms will be quite sufficient."

"And those are quite at your disposal," Barros said in his most amiable manner. "Allison, I wonder if you have anything particular to do just now?"

"I am absolutely at a loose-end," Stephen said. "But why do you ask?"

"Oh, well," Barros said, carelessly. "I thought perhaps you would like to come with me. If you like to remain here till I return you are perfectly welcome, but you will find it rather dull, so what do you say to a yachting cruise for a few days?"

"Ah, that would suit me down to the ground," Stephen cried. "Do I understand you are starting this evening?"

"In three hours," Barros explained. "We catch the mail train by car at Merston junction."

"Right-ho," Stephen said. "But, before we go, I shall have time to have a look over this gentleman's establishment. It won't take me long. As an actor, I am rather interested in cinema work, and more than half inclined to take it up myself. So I should like to spend an hour there."

To this there was no possible objection, and a few minutes later Gilette and his companion left the castle together. A quarter of an hour later they were seated in Gilette's caravan, discussing the affairs of the morning over a cigarette and a

whisky and soda. Raymond Mallison, who joined them presently, was naturally curious to know what had happened in the castle.

"It was rather a queer experience," Gilette chuckled. "My word, you should have seen Barros's face when he came into the library and saw your brother sitting there as if nothing had happened. Our friend came very near to giving himself away, but I think that we set his suspicions at rest. There is not the slightest doubt that he drugged Stephen, and, single-handed, when all the servants were in bed, managed to carry him down to the cell where we found him. He was evidently under the impression that, by some strange mischance, he omitted to lock the door of the cell behind him. And when Stephen told him that he was in the habit of walking in his sleep he seemed to be quite ready to accept that explanation. At any rate, he said nothing."

"You see, that happens to be true," Stephen said. "I do occasionally walk in my sleep."

"Well, never mind that," Gilette went on. "We have got you out of a very tight place, and at the present moment Barros believes you suspect nothing. It is just possible that he was testing you when he made the offer to take you with him on the sea trip. The ready way in which you responded must have satisfied him that you were absolutely unsuspicious. You did that very well, my boy, but I can tell you that your real danger is only just beginning."

"But what does it all mean?" Raymond asked. "Whom does this yacht belong to, and why do you expect it come here?"

"Ah, that is part of the story," Gilette said. "You don't expect me to tell my readers halfway through the narrative what is going to happen at the end. I leave them to go carefully through the manuscript and find that out for themselves. At any rate, it is all part of my super film, and you will see the denouement for yourself if you keep your eyes open. More than that, you are both leading actors in the story. But this I can tell you—the yacht is coming here."

"Coming here?" Raymond cried.

"Yes, here. In the little bay just off that bit of sand, where you showed me the entrance to the cave, and thence to the castle. Don't you remember telling me that quite a big vessel could lie off there in perfect safety and not be seen from inland?"

"That's perfectly true," Raymond replied. "A yacht or a small steamer could come in till its bows were almost touching the foundations of the castle, and lie there in perfect safety without being seen from the shore. It could come in in the dark in charge of somebody who knew the coast—say one of the old fishermen here—and get away again without anybody being the wiser. But I don't see the object of it."

"Well, you may not, but I do," Gilette said. "There might be something exceedingly valuable on that yacht, something that Barros wanted to bring here without anybody knowing. And now I'll just give you a hint. Suppose that yacht came from the Argentine! She would put in at Brest for stores and coal, and then come along here to discharge her cargo. Suppose she was a yacht hired for a few months from some Argentine millionaire with a crew of Spaniards on board. When she had finished her commission, she could return whence she came, and it is long odds that none of that crew would ever visit this part of the world again. Now, does that teach you anything?"

"Nothing whatever," Raymond said. "It merely excites my curiosity, though I cannot for the life of me see the necessity for all this amazing secrecy."

"No?" Gilette smiled. "Well, we will let it go at that. You will understand before long, and so far as Stephen is concerned, he is going to play quite a big part in the proceedings. As for you, Raymond, the best thing you can do is to lie low here, like old Brer Fox, and like the Tar Baby say 'nuffin'."

Chapter XXVII

On the Way.

As Barros swung up the path leading from the cottage to the top of the cliff, and disappeared across the moorland in the direction of the castle, Peggy emerged cautiously from her hiding-place and walked into the cottage. She found Elsie sitting there, rocking herself to and fro in an agony of relief, with the tears rolling down her aged eyes. So engrossed was she in her trouble that Peggy spoke more than once before the stricken woman, appeared to recognise her.

"Ah, I am sorry you came now, my dearie," she said. "You have come at a sore time for me; aye, and as sore a time for you as for me, because I have just heard some terribly bad news."

"It is not true," Peggy, cried. "It isn't true; I have been listening and have heard every word that wicked man said. You need not trouble to explain, because I know all about it. The man who calls himself Marne is at the bottom of all our troubles."

"Calls himself Marne?" Elsie cried. "He is not Marne. He is not my old master."

"No, I suppose not," Peggy said in some confusion. "But you see, he calls himself Marne here—"

"He doesn't dare," Elsie cried. "My dear, that is the man I handed over the child to many years ago. I don't know what his name is, but it isn't Marne; oh, no, it isn't Marne. In those days when I was younger and could see as well as you can, I took him for a good man who was doing his best to help his mistress. But now I know him to be a bad and wicked man, who, for some vile end of his own, is bringing bitter trouble on us all. Ah, if I could only see, if I could only see."

With that she commenced rocking herself to and fro again, so that Peggy had to wait patiently until the keen edge of the old woman's grief had dimmed.

"Let me see for you," she said gently. "Elsie, I am going to tell you a secret. What that man told you is not true. He thinks it is, and he has every reason to hope that it is, but his news was false. Raymond is not dead."

"Not dead?" the old woman cried, jumping to her feet in her excitement. "Not dead? Are you sure?"

"Quite certain. Let me whisper to you. Raymond is alive, and I was talking to him only half an hour ago. He is waiting for me now, at the top of the cliff."

"Carrissima, I don't understand," the old woman said helplessly. "They put that dear boy of mine into gaol; they locked him up for something that he never did. Oh, yes, and they read the paper out to me at the time, but I never believed it,

never. And that man told me he was dead. He told me that there had been an accident, and that the boy had fallen into the sea."

"He didn't," Peggy said. "He escaped. They thought he had slipped over the edge of the cliff by the Hangman Rock, but he was getting away. You see, he knew the place so well that it was not difficult for him to convince the authorities that he had fallen into the water, and, because of that, they did not search for him, but gave him up as dead. He is in good hands, Elsie. He has been hidden by friends devoted to his interests, and with them he will stay until his good name is cleared. Perhaps to-morrow you shall see him for yourself."

Elsie looked up with a smile on her face that glorified it and changed her into a different being.

"Ah, that would be a happy day for me," she said. "The happiest day since my beloved mistress died. But you can rely upon me, not one word of this will I say to a soul. And that man! Can you tell me who he is, my dear?"

"Well, no one seems to quite know," Peggy said, "except perhaps Mr. Gilette. And he declines to say anything. But did you ever hear of a man called Barros?"

"Barros, Barros!" the old woman repeated. "Oh, yes. There was a man named Barros who used to manage the office in Buenos Aires. I never saw him, because he never came out to the hacienda when I was there. You see, in those days my own mother was alive, and I was allowed to go and see her whenever I pleased. Sometimes, when she was ill, it was for months at a time, and so it happened that I never saw the man called Barros."

"And yet it was he who came to see you in London," Peggy said. "He is the rogue in the play, Elsie. He is the man who came between your master and Raymond's mother—the creature who walked off with Raymond's twin-brother and handed him over to the people who brought him up as their own son. But I cannot tell you any more than this, nor can I stay any longer. I followed Barros to listen to what was going on here, and when I heard what he said about Raymond I couldn't resist the temptation of coming in and telling you the truth. And now you must be silent and patient. To-morrow morning I will try to come again."

With that, Peggy went her way to the top of the cliff, where Raymond Mallison awaited her. When she had told him all that had happened, they strolled back along the cliffs and presently Mallison went off in the direction of the caravan.

It was some time later that Gilette made his appearance at Mrs. Bond's house.

"I dare say you people think I am an awful beggar to talk," he said. "But I have a weakness for engineering things my own way, and, so far, I don't think I have been unsuccessful. Now, look here, Peggy; Stephen Mallison and I are going away for a few days, and I want you to keep your eyes open till I come back. You will be able to see Raymond as often as you like, and lest anything should go wrong, I will give you an address in London where you can telegraph me, and I will make arrangements for the wire to be forwarded. We shall be off in about half an hour now, and before we start I am going to tell you, in a few words—"

"That might mean a week," Hetty said mischievously.

"Oh, no, it won't, because I am in a hurry. I am going to tell you how it was that I managed out there in the Argentine to stumble on the germ of my cinema story—in other words, how I met Don Argo Marne."

"Well, that sounds interesting," Hetty said

“Well, you know how interested I have always been in theatrical matters. When I realised that I was no good as a playwright, I turned my attention to the cinema. My idea was to form a company and take it out to the Argentine, because I was told that the climatic conditions were so good. But when I got out there the first time, I was so intrigued with the place that I set out by myself with a gun or two and a native servant to explore the back blocks. And then I had my adventure. We got in trouble over some floods, and my servant was drowned. I had nothing left except the clothes I stood up in, and just enough provisions to last me for three days. I wandered about for a week on the verge of starvation with my garments in rags, and an atrocious beard that made me look twenty years older. I want you to understand that I was in the very deuce of a situation, ravenously hungry, and as weak as a rat. Just as I was giving up hope altogether, one evening when darkness was falling I saw a light in the distance. When I struck the house I found it to be a tumbledown old place which must have been a fair residence at one time, but was little better than a wreck. I discovered an old gentleman with a long white beard and a thin, worn face, who appeared to me to be more or less out of his senses. But he was a gentleman beyond the shadow of a doubt, and he gave me the best he had. There was no such thing as a razor on the premises, so that during the next fortnight I developed into something between a hobo and the boy’s idea of a pirate. But that old chap was very good to me, and, from what I could make out, he had seen better times. He told me that he was alone in the world, having lost his daughter some years before, in fact, he rambled on in a most incoherent way. The funny part of it was that he had quite forgotten his own name, and I should never have discovered it but for finding some old photographs amongst a lot of lumber, and in one of these I could see a resemblance to the old gentleman. One of these photographs was in an envelope addressed to Don Argo Marne, and, by following this up and asking a few leading questions, I elicited the fact that Argo Marne was the name of my host.”

“My grandfather,” Raymond exclaimed.

“Assuredly, my friend, assuredly. And then I remembered that a casual acquaintance I had met in Buenos Aires had told me a good deal about an eccentric old Don named Argo Marne who, though exceedingly rich, lived the life of a hermit somewhere in the wild part of the country. And, mind you, I should have thought nothing about this, and have probably left the old man without giving him a second consideration, if Barros had not turned up one morning.”

“What, the Barros we know?” Peggy asked.

“The Barros we know, certainly. Now, despite the beggar’s philanthropic appearance I took a dislike to him from the first. There was something about the chap that ruffled me the wrong way. He came apparently out of nowhere, with some documents for the old man to sign and he bullied the old boy shamefully. Mind you, I heard that by accident. I was coming back one day after trying to shoot something, and I blundered on those two, taking Barros quite by surprise, for he had not the least idea that his employer was entertaining visitors. You can imagine what I looked like, dirty and unshaved, with a beard six or seven inches long. Anyway, Barros was very much upset at seeing me, and he lost no time in carting me back to Buenos Aires. Perhaps he thought he had got rid of me altogether, but I had heard quite enough to tell me what was going on, and that

was the germ of my film story. You can imagine my feelings later on when I saw Barros in London and learned that he was at the bottom of the vile plot to ruin Raymond Mallison. You remember, I went out to the Argentine on purpose to go into the matter, and there my worst suspicions were confirmed. And now you know all about it."

"What is Mr. Marne like?" Peggy asked.

"Well, you have seen my conception of him," Gilette smiled. "You saw that mysterious old actor at the castle, didn't you? He was made up under my instructions as Marne himself. And I suppose you noticed the effect of his appearance upon Barros?"

"But why this mummery?" Hetty asked.

"Ah," Gilette smiled. "You have forgotten your Shakespeare, my child. Don't you remember what Hamlet said, 'The play's the thing wherein to catch the conscience of the king.' And I flatter myself that I have caught the conscience of Barros all right. Isn't it time we were moving, Stephen?"

Chapter XXVIII

Following the Trail.

Julien Barros had gone off quite easy in his mind, leaving the telegram on the library table without the slightest fear that his visitors would so much as glance at it. Even if either of them showed that vulgar curiosity the message would tell them nothing. And yet with it all he was not quite satisfied. Many strange and disturbing things had been happening during the last few hours, and though these might have been no more than mere coincidences, they were somewhat disturbing to a man who was taking criminal chances.

For he was playing for a mighty big stake—a stake so vast that it made him tremble when he woke up in the middle of the night and began to think about it. Within the next week or two he was either going to be an influential country gentleman, with a fine status in his adopted land, or to find himself disgraced and discredited, and with the prospect of spending the better part of his declining years in prison.

But at any rate it was too late to draw back now, and indeed Barros had no intention of doing anything of the kind. He had gathered all the threads together, and had deposited his ill-gotten gains where they were within easy reach, and it seemed to him that he had covered up his tracks effectually. All the same, the sudden reappearance of the man whom he knew as Stephen Allison had come as a great shock to him. Just at the moment, too, when he was beginning to bask in his now-found prosperity. It was a nasty coincidence, but then perhaps it was no more than a coincidence, after all. He had certainly told Allison, out there in the Argentine, exactly what he was going to do, and had even named the estate that he was purchasing. He remembered quite well giving Allison a pressing invitation to come down to see him in Devonshire if at any time the latter was in England

again, at the same time being pretty sure that he was saying good-bye to the man he had deliberately lured to the other side of the world. Allison might possibly achieve success on the stage, but it is a very precarious profession, and there was a strong possibility that the young man, having served his purpose, was on the other side of the world for good. There had been no prospect at that time of his coming into money, and when he had made his dramatic appearance at Chilstone Castle Barros had been seriously disturbed. It was a bit of great good fortune to hear that Raymond Mallison had met his end so dramatically, but that catastrophe had been counterbalanced by the unwelcome advent of his twin brother. And, this having happened, a good many questions would be asked. People who knew Mallison would meet Allison, and comment upon the amazing likeness between the two, and this might mean disaster at any moment.

And so Barros had deliberately made up his mind to get Allison out of the way. He was a cold-blooded scoundrel enough, but somehow he shrank from actual murder, but having taken Chilstone Castle designedly and for a set purpose of his own, in which those secret underground passages were to form a part, he could, at any rate, place Allison in a position where he would die slowly of starvation without anybody being the wiser. There had been a certain amount of purpose in the way in which Barros had dismissed the one or two old servants who had been left to look after Chilstone directly he had mastered the secret of the vaults. And here it may be said in passing, that Gilette has been perfectly right when he suggested that Barros had received all the information he wanted as to Chilstone Castle from his unfortunate employer in the days when the latter had been fully in possession of his faculties, because Don Argo Marne was a descendant of the Spaniard who had married Chilstone, and the secrets of the castle were, to a certain extent, a tradition of the family.

And now the time had come to act, and act promptly. The telegram called for that, therefore, when Barros had finished with the telephone, he returned to the library in a friendly mood, and listened with toleration to what Gilette had to say, and once the young men had departed, he crossed the room and opened the door of a cupboard in which ostensibly he kept his cigars. Inside the cupboard he touched a spring, and the floor immediately slid away, disclosing a steep flight of stone stairs, leading into the vaults.

“Now, I wonder if anybody else besides me knows this,” he muttered. “I expect not. The secret has been well kept, and it may come in useful yet. Allison would be surprised if he knew how easy it was for me last night to get him out of the way. But still, I must have been very careless with the lock of that door unless indeed, it so happened—”

He broke off abruptly, and a frown knitted his brows.

“But that’s impossible,” he resumed. “Nobody could possible know. I must have forgotten to turn the key in the door. At any rate, I must move now.”

With that, he put everything else out of his mind, and began to make preparations for his journey. He was getting a bit anxious about Allison when towards evening the young man returned and apologised for his absence.

“I am awfully sorry,” he said, “but you have no idea how interesting this cinema business is. Upon my word, if I hadn’t been lucky enough to come in for a lot of money, I should be inclined to have a cut at it myself. No, thanks, I won’t want

anything to eat. Well, what time do we start? It won't take me above a quarter of an hour to get all my traps together."

Barros responded, somewhat grimly, that he was very glad to hear it. The car would be ready in about half an hour, and it would take him about as long again to reach the junction. Barros smiled as he said this, but in the back of his mind was a murderous resolve that before the week was out this guest of his would cease to trouble him any further. So, half an hour later, they were on their way to the little station where the western express stopped to take in water.

There was no one in the station except a man who stood beside the tiny book-stall, evidently bent upon finding something to occupy his time on the journey. As Barros was taking the tickets Allison strode along the platform just as the man by the book-stall had completed his purchases. Then he turned and favoured Allison with a solemn wink. He was a somewhat stout-looking person, wearing a pair of spotless flannel trousers and a double-breasted blue reefer-jacket with brass buttons. A yachting cap was set jauntily on the side of his grey head, his plump, ruddy features exuded good-humour, and on each side of his face was a wisp of white whiskers. He looked the part of a middle-aged yachting man to the very life. Allison turned on one side, and pretended to be examining the contents of the bookshelf.

"Well, upon my word, that's great," he said, without so much as looking at Gilette. "I thought I was pretty good at make-up, but you've got me absolutely sitting—"

"Yes, pretty neat isn't it?" Gilette murmured back. "Now, look here, old buck, you are in considerable danger. I wouldn't tell you so if I didn't believe you were a good-plucked 'un, but the fact remains. I shan't be far off, and if you want me, I'll let you know later on where I am to be found. Has Barros asked you to come back here with him?"

"I believe that is the idea," Stephen said.

"Oh, indeed? But he doesn't mean it, my boy; he doesn't mean you to come back at all. He's going to leave you on the other side to the equivalent of a coroner and a jury. So keep your eyes open, and all will be right yet."

There was no time for any more, for, at that moment. Barros emerged from the booking office and strolled down the platform. He prepared to be on excellent terms with himself, for he put his hand under Stephen's arm and led him away. He gave just one cursory glance at the nautical gentleman by the book-stall, but obviously the stranger conveyed nothing to him, and immediately afterwards the train steamed into the station.

They dined on board presently, and about midnight reached London, where they put up at an hotel for the night. Gilette had apparently disappeared, for Allison saw no more of him till late the following afternoon at Charing Cross Station, when he and Barros were taking train for Dover. It was much the same on board the boat, and Gilette was not seen again until Calais was reached and passed and the local train was on its way, to Granville. It was here Barros began to disclose his plans.

"I think I told you that my yacht was at Brest," he said. "But that is not quite correct. She is lying a few miles away in a little natural harbour at a place called La Hogue. We shall take a car out to her presently. She is a fine boat, and one of

the best that ever sailed. I think perhaps we had better spend a day or two having a look at the neighbourhood, though perhaps after dinner you might like to have a glance at the boat. We can easily get a car from here."

"That would be very pleasant," Stephen said politely.

"Well, we'll run out later on and spend an hour of so on board before coming back here for the night. Meanwhile I'll ask you to amuse yourself for a time, because there is an old business acquaintance of mine in this neighbourhood, and I should rather like to look him up. A man like myself is never quite clear of commercial ties, and my friend is rather interested in a mining speculation in which I have a holding."

"Oh, that's all right," Stephen said. "I have no doubt I can manage to amuse myself mucking about this quaint old town for an hour or two. I suppose you will be back by dinner time?"

Barros said "Yes," and went off a moment or two later, as if he were seeking the residential end of the town. Then, making sure he was not being followed, he turned abruptly towards the fishing village, and, walking along the narrow streets with the air of a man who is absolutely at home, he came presently to a mean, unsavoury thoroughfare, into which he dived furtively, until he reached a shady looking estaminet that lay back from the road, as if desirous of hiding itself.

Once inside he accosted a one-eyed old dame with an exceedingly dirty face, and mentioned a certain name. Immediately the old woman conducted him up a flight of crazy stairs, and ushered him into a small room at the back of the house, where a man with ragged moustache and a furtive dark eye awaited him.

"Well," Barros demanded. "Well!"

"It is all right, senor," the other man said. "Everything has gone well, and nothing has been forgotten."

"You are quite sure of the crew," Barros demanded.

"The crew I picked myself," the other man said. "They were the rakings of the port. And, according to your instructions, there is not a European amongst them. Lascars and Dagoes for the most part, who would do anything for money, and no questions asked. I had to pay them highly—"

Barros waved the suggestion aside impatiently. He looked keenly at his companion, as if trying to read the other's innermost thoughts. He paced up and down the room for a long time, immersed in his own reflections, until at length he turned once more to his companion and lighted a cigarette.

"Tell me, Carlos," he asked. "What do the crew think they are doing? And what of the officers?"

Carlos showed his yellow teeth in a grin.

"Of the officers the less said the better, senor," he smiled. "They are good sailors, but, for the most part, were glad enough to turn their backs upon Buenos Aires. Because, mark you, a little absence from their native land would do them more good than harm. And, as for the rest, they think that they are on some smuggling expedition. I have told them those big cases are full of arms."

"That's good," Barros said approvingly. "And the old man I spoke to you about? The strange old man who was to be brought down to the coast by your brother Jose?"

“He also is on board, senor,” Carlos replied. “A harmless old man, to whom I have given a cabin all to himself, as you desired. So long as we give him his food, he asks no questions. Quite a nice old gentleman, senor.”

Chapter XXIX

„An Accident“.

Something in this last remark of the man called Carlos, seemed to afford Barros deep satisfaction, for he smiled almost benevolently and seemed, just at that moment, to have become once more the bland philanthropist for which most people took him. He laid an approving hand on his companion’s shoulder.

“That’s good. Carlos, that’s very good,” he said. “If all goes well, you shall have the handsome reward I promised you. It is a great relief to me to know that the old gentleman is safe. I have not known a moment’s peace over him till the present. You see, his life was in danger out there. I suppose you haven’t the slightest idea who he really is?”

“Not I,” Carlos said almost roughly. “It’s nothing to do with me, senor. I am a man of the world with my living to get, and I am ready to do anything for money. Your agent comes to me and says somewhere out in the Argentine is an old man whose life is in danger. He has done something wrong. He has come in contact with the law. He has perhaps taken another man’s life. I am told where to find him. I find him hidden away from civilisation in an old house miles away from anybody else, and my instructions are plain. I am to bring him away from there, down to Buenos Aires, and smuggle him on board a yacht. And when I tell the old gentleman that he is going to England, he smiles at me and makes no trouble at all.”

“And he was glad to come, eh?” Barros asked.

“He was, senor. Behold, he was like a child who has been promised the moon. He laughs and weeps, and he comes with us, disguised as an old woman, and when he sees the yacht he sheds the tears of old age, and tells me that he is going to England to see his daughter once more. He babbles all about grandchildren, and a lot more that I do not understand. So we put him on board the yacht, and we keep him in his state room, where he has been ever since, seeing nobody but me.”

“Ah, that’s good,” Barros exclaimed. “You have evidently followed my instructions faithfully; and the crew, are they under the impression that you have a woman passenger?”

“The crew? bah!” Carlos said contemptuously. “They know nothing, and care less. They think that our passenger is some old servant who has been spoilt by an indulgent master. Behold, they are not curious, senor; so long as they have plenty to eat and drink, it is all the same to them.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Barros said. “I want those men to have a good time, and, as to the old gentleman, that is merely a whim of mine. When I have restored him to

his friends in England, I shall not give him another thought. In a day or two, when we have cruised round these waters long enough to disarm suspicion on the part of the authorities, we will take the yacht back to its destination, and get my agent there to pay off the crew. At the same time, you will receive the thousand pounds I promised you, and in due course, I shall want you again."

"You won't have to ask me twice, senor." Carlos grinned. "At the price I am always at your service. Nor am I fool enough to ask a lot of impertinent questions."

"Oh, I know I can rely upon you," Barros lied easily. "Now, I want to go on the yacht to-night in such a way as I shall not be seen. It is a fad of mine. What I want you to do is this. Get back to the Espagnolia at once, and give every man on board shore-leave till tomorrow morning, with, say, a couple of days' pay. I shall board her myself, taking a boat from here on purpose. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, senor: I will do what you command. I will even go off and see to it at once."

With that Barros turned away, and leaving the house, went back to the hotel, where he found Stephen awaiting him. It was a very genial and pleasant Barros who sat for the next hour or more at the dinner table, until presently the darkness began to fall and the lights twinkled out, one by one along the little quayside and in the cottages that fringed the coast. It was nearly 10 o'clock before Barros suggested a stroll and a cigar along the lonely stretch of beach.

"Oh, anything you like," Stephen said. "But didn't you suggest, just a little time ago, that we should go on board the yacht? I am quite anxious to see her. I had a look at her not long before I came in, and I was very much struck by her beauty and those graceful lines of hers."

Barros gave a gesture of annoyance.

"I am very sorry," he cried. "I had forgotten all about it. Still, there is no reason why we shouldn't go and have a look round even now. We might pick up a boatman on the beach who would take us out for a consideration, late as it is. Come along, let's make a start."

But there was no boatman on the beach, it being rather late for that primitive village and Barros was profuse in his apologies. But there was plenty of small craft tied up to the little wooden quay, and Barros paused before one of these presently, as if a sudden idea had occurred to him.

"If we can't get anyone to take us, I suggest that we borrow a boat," he said. "We'll just cut out to the Espagnolia in one of these boats, and leave the money on a seat when we come back. I don't suppose the owner would mind, and, at any rate, it will be something in the way of an adventure."

It was on the tip of Stephen's tongue to suggest the desirability of hailing the yacht that lay just about a mile at sea, but it occurred to him that perhaps this would not suit Barros's arrangements, and he felt a sort of comfortable assurance that Gilette was not very far off, it seemed to him that his eyes could discern the outline of a small boat some hundred yards or so off the quay, but this might have been nothing more than imagination, and he dismissed it from his mind.

Five minutes later, Barros was sculling him over the quiet starlit sea, in the direction of the yacht. They came at length to the ladder and presently stood on the white decks. Barros gave a hail in his native language, but no response came. He called out again and again without effect.

“Now, what the devil’s the meaning of this?” he asked angrily. “It looks to me like a game that the mice play when the cat is out of the way. These people evidently didn’t expect me to-night, and they are away on holiday. Somebody is likely to hear of this to-morrow. By Jove! the boat’s away. I must have fastened it very carelessly.”

As Barros spoke, he pointed to the water some fifty yards away, to where their boat had drifted. An he said, he must have fastened it insecurely, and now it was dancing with the incoming tide in the direction of the shore.

“It’s my own cursed fault,” he said. “I shall be lucky if I don’t have to pay for that boat. And here we are, tied up on board till to-morrow morning certain. Fancy my master going off like this with the whole of the crew, and not leaving so much as a cat on board! If anything happened to the yacht, I should be a good twenty thousand pounds the poorer. Well, we must make the best of it. We shall find comfortable sleeping quarters, and plenty to eat and drink on board.”

Stephen made some light remark, though he was feeling far from easy in his mind. He was not deceived for a moment by the casual way in which Barros spoke, because he knew, in the face of recent knowledge, that the whole thing was a plot to get him on board alone, in the power of the man to whose interests it was to put him out of the way. But, so long as Stephen knew this, and Barros did not suspect his knowledge, then there was no great harm done. He mentally measured his physique against Barros’s and decided that he had by no means the worst of the argument, moreover, there was just the chance that Gilette was concealed somewhere on board.

“Well, it might be a great deal worse,” he said carelessly. “But don’t you think you had better ascertain for certain as to whether or not there is somebody on board? By Jove! there is. I can hear someone singing down below.”

Barros recognised the broken, crooning voice of the man whom he had treated so badly, and, excusing himself for a moment, hastened down below and sought out Marne in his state-room.

It was some time before he came back, having satisfied himself that everything was all right, and that he had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. He would know what to do with that unhappy old man once he had safely smuggled him within the walls of Chilstone Castle. When he came back on deck, he saw Stephen leaning over the side looking down into the waves. Very softly, in tip-toe, he crept across the deck and dealt Stephen a murderous blow on the back of the head that half-stunned him, so that he fell, dazed and helpless at Barros’s feet. A moment later, and he was thrown over the side and into the water.

It seemed to him that he lay on his back, perfectly helpless, until some unseen hand grasped him by the collar and lifted up his head. He was too utterly confused to understand what that meant, but, at the end of a minute or two, he saw the burning end of a cigar, and heard Barros speak.

“So much for him,” the would-be murderer muttered. “He is out of the way at last,” and with that, Barros retired from the rail and disappeared.

“Here, hold up,” a voice said in Stephen’s ear, a voice that he recognised as Gilette’s “It’s lucky for you that my boat was lying under the quarter of the yacht, waiting on events. Here, gently, gently. Let me pull you on board. Now, that’s better. Feeling all right again? Good. Have a pull at this flask… now then, you row

back to the shore, and tie this boat up somewhere to the quay and get back to your hotel, and change into some dry clothes. Say you had an accident, or something of that kind, slipped off the quay, if you like. Tell the people at the hotel that Barros is remaining on board till the morning, anything to keep them quiet."

"And you?" Stephen asked, feeling quite himself now, and all the better for the brandy. "What are you going to do?"

"I am going on board," Gilette said coolly. "Oh, I shall be all right, I've got something in my pocket that will insure me the respect of our friend Barros. Now, off you go, and pick up that other boat. Don't you worry about me, because I am going to have quite an enjoyable time."

And with that, Gilette went up the ladder like a cat, and crept cautiously on to the deck of the yacht.

Chapter XXX

The Man with the Grey Beard.

Gilette glanced along the deck with the air and manner of a man who is absolutely sure of his ground. He was not taking any risks, and indeed, he had rehearsed the coming drama carefully, and with a quite intelligent idea of what precisely was going to happen. The hour of the great denouement was at hand. And yet he was on the verge of something like a blunder.

There was no sign of Barros: he had gone down below feeling satisfied that all was well, and that he had got rid of Stephen Mallison in such a manner as would leave him free of suspicion, and that no awkward questions would be asked. In the dead of the night, on a calm sea and far away from the presence of witnesses he had put Stephen Mallison beyond reach of cross-examination and the power of speech. Nobody in La Hogue had any kind of interest in the young Englishman, and if any questions were asked it would be only necessary to say that he had gone as casually as he had come, indeed it was possible to suggest that he was only a chance acquaintance.

And there he was now, at the bottom of the sea, beyond the power of doing any further harm. Nobody had seen the deed done, indeed, nobody had even seen him and Stephen Mallison leaving the hotel together, and moreover, the business of the stolen boat was also a profound secret. Probably it would be found sooner or later, and the authorities would come to the conclusion that Mallison had gone off for a midnight excursion on the spur of the moment, and had met with a fatal accident.

Therefore it was that Barros could make his way below with an easy mind, and not so much as the shaking of a muscle. He knew, more over, that he was alone on the yacht, save for one harmless person. Gilette had reckoned upon the other man slackening his precautions accordingly. But Gilette would know perfectly well how to act when the time came.

But there was one thing he had strangely overlooked. He had followed Barros and his victim down to the beach with a fairly good idea in the back of his mind as

to what was going to happen, and he had managed to get away with a boat himself before the other two had started. Therefore by the time they reached the yacht, he was snugly hidden under the counter, waiting for the tragedy which he had forseen. And now that it had happened and he had been on the spot to prevent stark murder, he had entirely forgotten the fact that, sooner or later he must leave the yacht and here he was, sending off Stephen Mallison in the only boat.

It was very still and quiet there, so still, indeed, that the slightest whisper carried far.

"Here, wait a minute," he said. "I had almost forgotten. Go after your own boat, change into it, tow mine back here and tie it up to the ladder. Otherwise I shall have to stay here all night."

He waited till the thing was done, and then, quite coolly and collectedly, crept down the companionway, until he stood outside one of the state-rooms, the door of which was open. So sure of his ground was Barros, that he had not even taken the precaution of closing the door. Standing at the bottom of the ladder, and holding his head at an oblique angle, Gilette had a perfect view of the room he was watching. He saw that it was furnished in the most luxurious manner, and he saw what interested him still more—an old man with a thin white face and a grey beard, almost the exact counterpart of the old fellow whose appearance amongst the cinema actors had so startled and alarmed Barros on the night of the dance.

The old man sat there on a settee, looking up mildly into the eyes of his companion.

"Well," Barros said. "Well? here we are at last, and now I hope you are satisfied."

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," the other said, speaking in Spanish, which Gilette fairly well understood. "I am on my way to the new home you have made for me. It is better, perhaps, though I don't understand why there should be all this mystery."

"Well, you will in time," Barros said impatiently. "You seem to have forgotten. Don't you remember how ill you have been?"

"I am not mad," the old man cried. "I never have been mad. It is my troubles that have vexed me, the loss of my child, who went away without saying a word to her old father, and never wrote him a single line to tell him where she was."

This was a new angle for the man standing on the stairway, and he did not fail to make a note of it.

"What did you expect?" Barros went on, with the air of one humouring a child. "You can't expect children to stay with their parents always. Take your own case, for instance. When you got married, did you consult your father about it?"

"Ah, that was a different matter altogether," the old man murmured. "Dolores was the daughter of my father's greatest friend. We were brought up together, next door to one another, and it was always understood that some day we should marry, and join the family estates. I was always ready, because we were lovers from our childhood. But my own daughter—"

"Well, what about her? I told you before that she married an English gentleman, whom she fell in love with when she went to stay with her aunt in Cheltenham, and she did not write to you because she knew that you had a great match arranged for her, and that you would never forgive her. And you never did."

“Its a lie,” the old man shrieked. “It’s a lie. An infamous falsehood, to say that I ever forgot that dear girl of mine. She might have known, Barros, she might have known.”

The speaker rocked himself to and fro in an agony of grief and remorse, under the cold eyes of Barros, who regarded him as if he had been some strange and rather superfluous animal.

“Well, there you are,” he went on. “She didn’t write. And moreover, she took no notice of the letters that you sent her. I suppose she was too happy to think about anything else. But you will see her all in good time.”

Gilette listened, struggling with an insane desire to dash into the stateroom and take this cold-blooded liar by the throat. It was plain to him now that from the very first Barros had suppressed every one of Mrs. Mallison’s heartrending appeals to her father, and that, in replying to the first few of these, he had had to resort to flagrant forgery. And even now, the poor broken-down father was labouring under the delusion that his child was still alive. But Gilette had consolation in the knowledge that retribution was very near at hand.

“Well, it will be all explained before long,” Barros said impatiently. “I have been finding out a good many things lately, and I had to smuggle you over here like this, because people were saying, out yonder, that you were mad, and if I had not taken all this risk, they would have come along presently and put you into a lunatic asylum. In England things are different. You will he happy there, because you know something of the language.”

“Oh, I can speak it,” the old man said eagerly. “Years and years ago, when I was quite small, I was at school in England for a time. That was when we had the troubles out yonder, and my father had to leave his country for a while. And so you tell me that I am going to see my child again?”

“Patience, patience,” Barros said. “Even now, it is not so easy as you think. By this time, the people in the Argentine know that you have left the country, and they will try and get you back again. But they will fail.”

“Ah, yes,” the old man chuckled. “They will fail.”

“Because of me,” Barros said. “Because I have taken all the precautions necessary for secrecy. I have even had to adopt your name and pass as yourself. But down there in that old castle in Devonshire, no questions will be asked. You will remember all about the old castle that I am speaking of?”

“I remember,” Marne said eagerly. “I remember. It was near that castle that an ancestor of mine was wrecked, at the time of the Spanish Armada, and he married a daughter of a great English house, and endowed her with all the riches that he took from that galleon of his. Ah, yes, it was an old castle, with all sorts of secret chambers, and there I can hide in the daytime, and see my child at night. But there will be danger, Barros; there will be danger when I try to land.”

“Oh, you needn’t worry about that,” Barros said with contemptuous good humour. “We shall arrive off the castle in the dead of night, in the little harbour close by, and before the inhabitants are awake in the morning the yacht will be far out at sea. All you have got to do is to wait patiently until the time comes. Now, you just toddle off to bed, and get to sleep. If you behave yourself, there is nothing to be afraid of.”

The old man looked up with tears in his eyes.

“Ah, Barros,” he sighed. “You have been a good friend to me all those years, the best of servants, and you will not find me ungrateful. But you are sure that everything is arranged, you have managed the money all right.”

“Oh, I have managed the money all right,” Barros said with a certain grim dryness that made Gilette smile. “I have disposed of everything in the Argentine, and it is all invested in England. When we get to Chilstone Castle we will go through the accounts, and you will see how well I have managed everything.”

Very quietly, Gilette stole up the ladder and stood on the deck, waiting on events. But there was nothing to fear, for obviously Barros intended to remain on board the Espagniola until morning, for Gilette could hear him moving about in the of the cabins, and presently caught the scent of cigar smoke. He let himself very quietly down the ladder and pulled for the shore. There was not a soul to be seen on the quay as he tied up the boat, after which he strolled casually off in the direction of Stephen Mallison’s hotel, the door of which was not closed yet, and, walking into one of the public rooms, was pleased to see his friend sitting there smoking a cigarette, as if nothing had happened. He had changed his clothing, and was enjoying a bottle of wine which stood on the table in front of him.

“I suppose I have done right,” he said.

“Certainly you have,” Gilette replied. “Now, I want you to behave just as if nothing had happened. I left Barros on board the yacht, where it is quite evident he means to remain till the morning. And, what is more, I found exactly what I was after. The story is nearly, played out now, and my great regret is that we can’t have it worked out with the camera and the rest of the company set for the final tableau. But that will do later on, in the ordinary course of business.”

“But what do you want me to do?” Mallison asked.

“Well, precisely nothing, at least, for the moment. When Barros comes along to-morrow at lunch time, as he will in all probability, you must welcome him with a smile and behave exactly as if everything was quite comme il faut. Meet Barros with a smile, and hold out your hand to him. I expect he will be rather astonished when he finds that you are none the worse for last night’s adventure. You had better pretend that you had a sort of fainting fit, and fell off the yacht into the sea. Say that the cold water revived you to a certain extent, and that, in a half-dazed sort of way, you swam ashore. He will have to pretend to believe you, even if he doesn’t. I want to keep the blackguard on tenterhooks to the last possible moment. Carry the whole thing off as if it were a good joke, and as if you hadn’t the slightest idea what had really happened. Then I think at lunch time to-morrow I shall be able to show you some fun. Keep out of Barros’s way till lunch is ready, and then walk into the room quite casually. Go up to Barros and offer your hand to him. It will be a treat to watch his face when he sees you come in, and that treat will be mine, because I shall be there, and that’s about all, for the present. I think I will say good night now.”

“Here, where are you going?” Stephen cried, as Gilette turned away. “What’s your hurry?”

“I have an appointment,” Gilette said dryly, “though the other man does not know it. My dear chap, I have been following Barros all day, and I want a few words with the man I call his second in command. You had better go to bed, and

stay there till late to-morrow morning. I must be off now, because this appointment of mine is a matter of great importance."

Chapter XXXI

A Family Gathering.

There was nothing of the humorist about Gilette as he turned his back upon the hotel and strode rapidly along the silent deserted street in the direction of the older part of the village, where stood the dilapidated estaminet in which Barros had sought his creature Carlos earlier the same day. The little drinking shop was more or less a blaze of light, as Gilette turned into the public room on the right-hand side of the entrance, and, without wasting any time, crossed to a corner where Carlos was seated, drinking some thin native wine, in company with three men who obviously belonged to the crew of the Espagniola. Carlos looked up with a sort of uneasy scowl as he saw the Englishman standing there before him, and addressed him insolently.

"Do you want to speak to me?" he asked. "Surely you must, or you would not be standing there, listening."

"Most certainly I want to speak to you," Gilette said crisply. "Though I can assure you that there is no occasion for me to listen. In fact, it is just as well, my good fellow, that you speak my language, because my Spanish is nothing to boast about. But come outside."

"Why should I come outside?" Carlos demanded.

"Well, principally because I ask you. And if you don't I shall be under the painful necessity of dragging you by the scruff of the neck. If that fails, let me remind you that there are magistrates and police not very far off."

All this Gilette said with the cool contempt that was by no means wasted upon the Spaniard. He rose with a swaggering air, but he followed Gilette, nevertheless, until they stood outside in the fresh air.

"I thought you would come," Gilette said. "I have had to deal with men of your class before. Now, look here, my friend, you are engaged in a very hazardous occupation. In other words, you are helping a man named Barros, who is ostensibly the owner of the yacht Espagniola, to kidnap a wealthy old Argentine gentleman called Don Argo Marne, and make him a prisoner in an old castle off the coast of Devonshire. For this you are getting a thousand pounds. The crew of the yacht are under the impression that they are engaged in a gun-smuggling adventure, and, so long as they are well paid, and have plenty to eat and drink, I don't suppose they care much what they do. I should rather judge from what I saw of them just now that they are a pretty tough lot. But as they are ignorant of what is really going on, I have no concern with them, though, no doubt, if I had gone straight to the authorities in the first place, I could have had the whole lot of you laid by the heels in gaol this afternoon, and even as far as you are concerned, I am not disposed to be vindictive."

“I don’t know who you are,” Carlos said sullenly. “Or what business it is of yours, but if you think I am going to be bluffed in this fashion—”

“It’s no question of bluff at all,” Gilette said. “I am stating facts, as you are perfectly well aware. It’s rather hard that you should be done out of your money at the last moment, but men like you, who are engaged in criminal occupations, must take that sort of risk. You will never see your thousand pounds now, because the man who promised it you will find himself in gaol before many hours are over, and, unless you want to accompany him, I should advise you to be a bit more civil.”

“What is it you want?” Carlos asked sullenly.

“I want you to tell me the truth, and nothing else. I want you to tell me how you managed to smuggle Don Argo Marne out of the Argentine, and what you know about him. I may tell you that I am fairly well acquainted with his career, and I am quite aware of the fact that he is more or less irresponsible for his own actions. You might just as well make up your mind to face the inevitable and make a clear breast of it, not that your evidence is absolutely essential.”

“And if I do tell the truth, Senor?”

“Oh, I am not going to make a bargain with you. There are no conditions. You can just please yourself as to whether you like to come forward as a witness against Barros, or, failing that, be tried on the same charge. I may possibly be disposed to help you afterwards, but I am making nothing in the way of a promise. And now it’s up to you to decide. If you refuse to say anything, then you will be in gaol inside an hour. I will give you five minutes to make up your mind.”

But the man called Carlos wanted no five minutes. His sullen attitude fell away from him like a garment, his manner became cringing, and, almost at once, he began to pour out a flow of words in his own language so fast that it was almost impossible to follow him.

“Here, stop,” Gilette cried. “Begin all over again and speak English, please.”

It took some time for Carlos to tell his tale, but by the time he had finished Gilette had all the missing details at his finger-tips. Most of these he had more than suspected, but here was confirmation down to the very last word, so that he would know exactly what to do when he had finished with this loquacious witness. He asked a few more questions, and, after that, professed himself to be quite satisfied.

“Ah, you have acted very wisely, my friend,” he said. “You are not going to get your money, but, on the other hand, you have had an exceedingly pleasant voyage, and lived on the fat of the land throughout. The crew will be paid, of course, but that will be Don Argo Marne’s business. Now, listen to me. I know why the whole crew of the yacht, together with the captain, have been allowed to spend the night on shore. But that’s another matter altogether. What time do you go back on board?”

“Just after breakfast, senor.”

“And what time do you sail?”

“Just after slack water,” Carlos explained. “That will be somewhere about three o’clock in the afternoon.”

“Yes, that tallies with what I heard,” Gilette said. “This afternoon you sail for the English coast, and Barros is going to accompany you on the voyage.”

“That is a fact, senor,” Carlos murmured.

“All of which is very unsatisfactory. Now, you and the crew go on board presently, just as if nothing had happened; and not a word of this pleasant conversation between us is to be mentioned to our friend Barros. In other words, you and the crew join the yacht and go about your business, getting ready to weigh anchor in the afternoon, and you had better see to it that Barros guesses nothing from your manner as to what is going on. As a matter of fact, I may tell you that you will not sail this afternoon, owing to circumstances over which you have no control. You will see Barros taken away from the deck of his own yacht by the authorities, and, if I were you, I should be as much surprised as anybody else. If you do as you are told, you will be all paid in the ordinary course of things, and, in all probability, it will not be necessary even to call you as a witness. And, after that, I need not detain you any longer.”

With that, Gilette strolled carelessly back to his hotel, which was not the one where Barros and Stephen Mallison had put up, and presently went to bed, perfectly well satisfied with what he had so far accomplished. He came down to breakfast in the morning and found, waiting by the side of his plate, a telegram which had arrived late the previous evening, the contents of which appeared to afford him profound satisfaction, for he chuckled to himself as he read the message and put it in his pocket. Then he proceeded to write a note, which he handed over to the clerk in the office, with instructions to the effect that somebody would call for it presently, and that it was to be handed to him at once. Then towards one o’clock he strolled down the road and entered the hotel where, in the dining-room, he found Stephen Mallison impatiently waiting him.

“I thought you never were coming,” the latter said. “I have a table for three here—”

“Better have it laid for four,” Gilette said casually.

“Four?” Stephen cried. “Who is the fourth?”

“Ah, that you will see all in due course. You seem to forget that I am one of those born dramatists who cannot possibly do anything without the spectacular touch. I venture to say that you will be pretty much surprised when you see who the fourth is. But, Lord bless you, my dear chap, your surprise will be nothing compared with that of Barros when he comes along. But, by the way, where is he? I was half afraid that I should get here too late, and I wouldn’t have missed that for anything.”

“Oh, he’s coming right enough,” Mallison chuckled. “He sent a message to say he would be here at one o’clock and hoped that I would lunch with him. Pretty cool hand, what?”

“Oh, that was decidedly clever of him,” Gilette said. “He hoped to come in presently and find that you had been away all night, and he would have been mightily concerned as far as outward appearances went as to what had become of you. Well, I think we can allay his anxiety as far as that is concerned.”

“Yes, I think we can,” Mallison said dryly. “But how did you get on last night?”

“I had the time of my life,” Gilette declared. “I got right down to the bottom of the mystery. We are going to confront Barros here presently, and, when I have finished talking to him, the police will step in and take charge. I have everything

arranged, every bit of evidence is ready, and, in fact, we are only waiting now for the game to come along."

Gilette had hardly finished speaking before Barros swaggered into the room. He came along towards the table at the top, with that bland smile of his which froze into a sort of horror as he saw Stephen Mallison, seated side by side with Gilette, who was no longer in yachting garb, but sat there in his own person, with a dry smile on his face.

"Hello," Gilette cried. "Hello, you see, we are waiting for you. Come along and make the party complete."

In a dazed sort of way, Barros dragged himself across the room and dropped heavily into his chair. He had almost recovered himself, and was framing a few words to say, when suddenly another figure came across the room and sat down silently in the chair opposite to the one into which Barros had fallen.

"Now we are complete," Gilette said gaily. "Mr. Barros, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Raymond Mallison."

Chapter XXXII

Gilette's Hour.

Barros pulled up his chair in a dull mechanical sort of way with a sensation as if he had suddenly lost the use of his legs. For the first time in his life perhaps this strong man was acquainted with fear. He had at the same time lost nothing of his benign aspect so that other people in the sunny dining-room saw nothing of the drama that was moving under their eyes. Moreover, the table chosen by Stephen Mallison was rather remote from the rest and in a secluded corner, so that Gilette could play the game that he had more or less invented with impunity.

Barros sat there gasping like a fish suddenly jerked out of its native element, looking from one to the other as if trying to grasp what it all meant. He knew, of course, that his plans had all gone wrong in some amazing, maddening fashion, he knew that he was face to face with one man whom he had practically murdered the night before, and that the victim of his other cunning conspiracy had come back from the grave, so to speak, to confront him. This was bad enough in all conscience, but there was worse to come.

The other man for instance—who was he, and what was he doing here? What connection could there possibly be between the great conspiracy and a man who was merely connected with a cinema company? And yet as Barros allowed his mind to revert back to the night of the dance he was not so sure. Things had happened then which in the light of the present situation were something more than mere coincidences. Barros was going to fight, but he knew surely enough that his hour had come.

He could read that much in the lurking devil of grim mischief that danced in Gilette's eyes. Here was the man who was the master of the situation and who

obviously knew it. Barros would have given a good deal to know who Gilette really was, and what interest he had in the proceedings.

"This is rather unusual," he said.

"Of course it is," Gilette laughed. "Otherwise, I should not be here. But even you, my dear sir, with all your intellect and courage, are not entirely devoid of curiosity, and perhaps it would be just as well if I explained to you who I am."

"I am waiting to hear," Barros said defiantly.

"Then I will tell you. My name is Gilette, and I am a man with considerable means, who, up to a certain time, deluded himself with the idea that he was meant for a successful dramatist. But that, alas, was one of the amiable delusions of youth. When I got over that trouble I decided to take up cinema work. But that you already know, and let me tell you in passing how grateful I am to you for giving my company the opportunity of taking those films at Chilstone Castle a day or two ago. By this time I hope my people have a series of excellent pictures, taken in the vaults of the castle."

"Ah," Barros cried. "But please go on."

"Well," Gilette resumed. "To begin at the beginning, I am the man who took the liberty of intruding on your hospitality on the night in question, in the guise of a convict. I called myself Martin, but that is a detail. Mr. Martin was the unconscious instrument for the necessary introduction, and, as to the convict suit, I borrowed that from my friend here, Mr. Raymond Mallison. I think that you know Mr. Raymond Mallison?"

"We have never met before," Barros said guardedly.

"Well, perhaps not, speaking in the strict sense of the word. But surely you are not going to tell me that Mr. Mallison's existence is a matter of indifference to you?"

"I don't know who he is," Barros said truculently.

"Oh, come, my dear sir, be reasonable. Of course, I don't wish to force you to speak, because the proper authorities are much more capable of doing this than I am, but, in the language of your class in our country, the game is up, Mr. Barros. If you like to get up and leave this table at the present moment, you are perfectly free to do so, and I shall make no attempt to stop you. But I don't think you will do that."

Barros glared at the speaker, but, as Gilette had anticipated, made no effort to move.

"Ah, I thought you would be amenable to reason," Gilette said. "And you naturally want to know how it is that, an escaped convict who is supposed to be dead is sitting at the same table with you at the present moment, and you are greatly puzzled to know why Mr. Stephen Mallison is here with his brother, when, only a few hours ago, you took steps to get him out of the way—in other words, you tried to murder him."

Barros glanced uneasily about the room, but the other diners there were in happy ignorance of what was going on at that little table in the window, and Gilette was taking care to speak in a voice that did not carry far.

"Oh, this is monstrous." Barros protested.

"Ah, so I thought last night," Gilette said cheerfully. "When I discovered that the whole of the crew of your yacht were on shore last night, and that you meant to

lure Mr. Stephen Mallison out there, I made up my mind to join you. Well, I didn't quite do that, but when you landed on board the yacht I was close by the ladder in a boat, and when you assaulted Mr. Mallison and threw him overboard, I was there to pick him up. Now, don't deny it, because I saw the whole thing done, and I heard what you muttered to yourself when you threw your cigar-end into the sea. And as to Mr. Raymond Mallison, I ran against him absolutely by accident on the night of your dance. He had escaped that very morning in his convict garb, and was hiding in Sir Marston Manley's bungalow at Merston, where I found him. You know Sir Marston Manley by name, of course."

"Everybody does," Barros muttered.

"Yes, I suppose they do. Well, Mr. Mallison escaped, because he knew the coast well, and, when he jumped off Hangman's Rock, he knew exactly what he was doing. You see, Don Argo Marne's daughter was great friends with Sir Marston Manley, and he took a keen interest in her son. But, unlike you, he was not aware of the fact that Mrs. Mallison had two boys."

As Gilette spoke, he waved his hand comprehensively in the direction of the two Mallisons.

"That was rather a dramatic surprise," he went on. "But if you will just look at my two friends, Mr. Barros, you will see for yourself that what I say is correct. A more amazing likeness between two people never existed. It must have been a great shock to you when you came to England about two years ago, to find how you had been deceived by the late Mrs. Mallison and her old nurse, who is known to us as Elsie Dorida."

Barros drew a long deep breath. In every word that Gilette was saying in that light, mocking voice of his, he was beginning to realise that the whole truth was known. With a motion of his hand he signalled Gilette to proceed.

"I am encouraged," the latter went on. "When a man begins telling a story, it is very pleasing to find that he is not boring his audience, and I am quite sure, Mr. Barros, that I am not boring you. You came to England about two years ago, with the intention of straightening out Don Argo Marne's affairs. I put it that way, because I don't want to hurt your feelings, though, as a matter of fact, your idea was to settle down here as a country gentleman, live on the proceeds of your ingenuity, by which, of course, I mean the Don's fortune. You had managed to get Mr. Stephen Mallison altogether out of the way, but when you came to London you found that there was another Richmond in the field. By that, of course, I mean Stephen's twin brother Raymond. It must have been a bit of a shock to you when you first saw him and learnt on undeniable authority that he was the son of the late Major and Mrs. Mallison. So long as he was above ground, then, there was always the chance of your being found out, and in that, cold-blooded way of yours you made up your mind to remove Mallison. But you are not getting on with your lunch, Mr. Barros. Do try another glass of this excellent claret."

Barros submitted to be helped. He lifted the glass to his lips, and drained it feverishly.

"And now comes another extraordinary coincidence," Gilette went on in the same light tone. "Some years ego, Don Argo Marne had certain big interests in this country, which were the subject of litigation, and, in the course of legal proceedings, he had occasion to employ an English solicitor called Pennington.

Almost before the trouble was settled, Mr. Pennington died, and his son Walter Pennington, became his executor. There was a considerable sum of money in a certain bank, and that money you made up your mind to get hold of. But Walter Pennington was suspicious, he questioned the signature of a certain power of attorney, which you said Don Argo Marne had given you. He was going to write out to the Argentine and get this matter put right, in fact, he told you quite plainly what he was going to do before he parted with that trust sum. Now, all this was very awkward for you, Mr. Barros, and all the more so because you were quite aware of the fact that Pennington and my friend Raymond Mallison were very friendly. Any chance word might have exploded the whole mine. So your idea was to get rid of them both at the same time. Chance played into your hand when a dispute arose between Pennington and Mallison, and they were no longer on speaking terms."

"You seem to be very sure of your ground," Barros sneered. "But I don't want to interrupt you."

"That is very good of you," Gilette said. "Anyway, you had made up your mind, and you proceeded to act. You hit upon an ingenious idea for using the extraordinary likeness between the two Mallisons. It was no difficult matter to find the boy whom you had handed over to the Allisons some years ago, and become friendly with him. He didn't know in the least who he was, and his ignorance was all in your favour. You found out all about Raymond Mallison's movements, and, by the ingenious use of the telephone, you got Raymond Mallison out of the way on a certain night, at the same time that you lured Pennington's servant from his master's chambers by the same method. And here, I come to conjecture. I suggest that it was you who went to Pennington's rooms when he was quite alone there, and tried to murder him. Probably you thought you had succeeded, or perhaps you were interrupted, but anyway, you failed, but, to a certain extent, you were successful, because Pennington's injuries were quite sufficient to render it impossible for him to get any evidence. He is much better lately, as I ascertained just before I left London, and, if he goes on progressing as he is doing now, he will make quite a useful witness by the time we are ready for you."

"That's all very well as far as it goes," Barros replied. "But you have no proof what you are saying."

"Not yet, but I shall have," Gilette went on. "At any rate, I have ample proof of the fact that you grossly deceived Don Argo Marne, and deliberately suppressed every letter that his daughter wrote him about the time of her marriage. You forged his handwriting in the only reply that ever came to Merston, and it was your own idea that a certain allowance should be paid to Mrs. Mallison on condition that she handed over her son. You came to England and took possession of him yourself. He was handed over to you by Elsie Dorida, who may not be able to recognise you now, though she knows your voice. Why, you went to see her the day before you crossed over here, and I may tell you that every word you said to her was overheard. For years you paid Mrs. Mallison that allowance out of your employer's money, and there would have been an end of your rascality perhaps if you had not discovered the fact that Mrs. Mallison had twin sons. That has been your undoing, and for that you are going to suffer."

"How?" Barros demanded. "How? Where is your proof of all this?"

“Well, upon my word, you are a pretty rascal,” Gilette laughed. “Here is Mr. Stephen Allison ready to tell us how you fixed up a sort of bogus appointment for him, under the same roof as Pennington resided on the night of the outrage. And the same evening you set out for Liverpool, en route for the Argentine, taking with you the man who would have been only too glad to have given evidence in his brother’s favour had he only known that such a relation existed. But you are trifling with me. Just for one moment cast your mind back a year or two. Do you remember a man in the Argentine who had an adventure within a mile or two of spot where you had hidden Don Argo Marne?”

Chapter XXXIII

The Last Word.

Barros shook his head, but it was plain that Gilette had shaken him at last. Once more he emptied his glass, and then turned, like an animal at bay, upon his tormentor.

“I don’t recollect anything,” he said hoarsely.

“Oh, very well, in that case I must refresh your memory. I am speaking about a man, who turned up, half-starving, at the broken-down house where Don Argo Marne was living. You saw him, in fact you were only too pleased to get him down country and see the last of him. He was a man with a ragged beard and a wardrobe in the last stages of decay. But, all the same, he happened to be me, Mr. Barros, and that is where I got on the track of all the trouble. When I found out what was happening on this side of the world, and after I had practically seen my friend, Raymond Mallison, condemned for a crime he had never committed, I returned to the Argentine and made further inquiries. I knew, of course, that Don Argo Marne was in his second childhood, and that you were doing what you liked with his property. I was at your elbow a score of times, though you did not know it. And when you had realised everything and had set up as a country gentleman in England, it seemed to me that it was time to act. I knew, of course, that you couldn’t leave the Don out in the Argentine; that was too dangerous. There were many people who remembered him and if he had been found all sorts of unpleasant questions would have been asked. So you decided to bring him to England, and keep him more or less of a prisoner in that old castle of yours, and you have him on board your yacht at the present moment.”

“You have been strangely misinformed,” Barros said.

“Indeed, I haven’t.” Gilette smiled. “I was on board the yacht last night and was actually outside the door of the poor old gentleman’s stateroom when you were telling him all those lies, and encouraging him in the belief that he was going to see his daughter once more. You were going to convey him quietly to Chilstone Castle and land him in the dead of night at a time when no one knew what was taking place, and, next morning, the yacht would have vanished. Of course, this is

all a story I am telling you, and perhaps one of these days, if you are interested in pictures, you may see it on the film. Meanwhile—"

"Yes, meanwhile," Barros challenged.

"Oh, meanwhile, you are in a position to do just as you like. I have finished, unless you have further questions to ask, and if you have quite done with your lunch—"

Barros rose from his seat, and without another word strode out of the room. He would have been easier in his mind, perhaps, if the others had tried to detain him, but they seemed to be so sure of their ground that Barros was more uneasy and disturbed than he would have been otherwise. Flight was the thing that was at the back of his mind. These people had given him his chance, and he was going to make the most of it.

"Is that all?" Raymond Mallison asked, when at length Barros had gone. "Is he going to be allowed to get off as quickly as all that."

"He is not going to get off at all," Gilette said dryly. "The rest is in the hands of the police. When we meet Barros again, it will be in a Court of Justice where the whole story will come out and your innocence will be established publicly. We can't afford to have the matter settled in any other way. It must be in all the papers, so that in the future no scandal-monger will be able to shake his head and say that there was something in it after all. We had better get back to England as soon as possible, and I am afraid, Raymond, that you will have to go down to Slagmoor and give yourself up to the authorities there. It will only be for a few days, but there is no other way out of it."

Meanwhile, Barros strode moodily along the street, until he came presently to the beach, where he took a boat and was ferried out to the yacht. So far as he could see, the crew were all on board now, and, as the tide served, it would be no difficult matter to get away in the course of half an hour, before which it would be impossible for Gilette and his friends to take any action. But almost as soon as Barros had set foot upon the deck of the yacht an official-looking person in uniform stepped up to him, and laid a hand up his shoulder.

"Monsieur Julien Barros, n'est ce pas?" the man asked.

"Y-yes," Barros stammered. "That is me. Ah."

"Ah, then, I shall have to detain you. There are several charges, monsieur, and you will come with me on shore. You will remain in the prison here until the authorities in London have sent over their witnesses. If there is no case you will be discharged, and if, unfortunately, there is the necessary evidence, then you will be extradited to England."

All this was very correct and polite, but there was a cold intensity behind it that chilled Barros to the very soul. He looked around him for some means of escape, but abandoned the idea when he saw that the officer was by no means alone.

"Very well," he said resignedly, "I will go with you. But first there is an old gentleman on board—"

"Ah, Don Argo Marne," the officer said. "He has already gone on shore. You may make your mind easy as far as he is concerned, for he will be well looked after."

Within an hour of Barros being safely landed behind the door of the little local prison, Gilette and his companions were on their way to England. It was late on the following afternoon before they arrived at Merston, in company with Sir

Marston Manley, who had heard the whole of the story, and who had already approached the Home Secretary on the telephone with a view to making things easier for Raymond Mallison, until such a time as Barros reached England and stood in the dock. It was an amazing case, but in the circumstances the Government official could not see his way to go outside the ordinary routine, and he strongly advised that Mallison should go back to Slagmoor and give himself up without any further delay.

All this was very irregular, he told Sir Marston over the telephone, and went on to say that if he did his duty he would have to advise Scotland Yard, who would have taken steps to re-arrest Raymond Mallison at once. But if the latter would go back as soon as possible he would hold his hand.

Then they came at length to Merston, where the whole story was told to Mrs. Bond and the amazed girls after which Raymond strolled out into the garden with Peggy, and presently went down the cliff in the direction of old Elsie's cottage.

"I must go and see her," he said. "I want her to know that nothing has happened to me, and that in a short time I shall be free again. Then I suppose I had better hire a car from the hotel and go back to Slagmoor."

"Must you really?" Peggy asked. "Are you bound to do this? It seems horrible that you should have to go to that dreadful place once more."

"It won't be for long," Raymond urged. "A week, or perhaps a fortnight, at the outside. And then I shall be free to come back to you here, and we shall have nothing to fear in the future. You see, my dear girl, the more this is talked about the better it will be for us. We want to have the whole story told at length in all the papers. I must be able to face the world without the possibility of anyone being in a position to hint that everything is not as it appears. And this must be done for our sake as much as mine."

"I suppose it must," Peggy sighed "I don't want you to think that I am selfish enough to consider nobody but myself. And what about that poor old man?"

"Oh, he has not been forgotten," Raymond explained. "'We brought him back to England with us. You see, they don't want him as a witness out in France, so he came to London, and Sir Marston placed him in a nursing home. He was a long time understanding who I was, and that my mother was no longer alive, but when he finally grasped it he broke down and cried like a child, accusing himself of all sorts of things. And curiously enough after that, he seemed to be ever so much better. Very old and feeble, of course, but quite clear in his mind. He and I had a long talk together, though I had some difficulty in making myself understood. But I think that when he has been carefully looked after for a month or so he will be comparatively all right again. I told him all about you, and what had happened over Chilstone Castle, and when I said good-bye to him, he was quite eager to see the place. You see, it's his own property, bought with his own money, and he thinks he should like to spend the rest of his life down here, and he hopes that we shall get married before long, and live down here, whenever we can spare the time from my work in London. Now, let's go and have a few minutes with Elsie, before I go back to Slagmoor. Don't look like that, Peggy—it only means a short time."

"Oh, I will try and be brave," Peggy said, wiping away her tears. "It's very foolish of me, when I ought to be the happiest girl in the world."

She forced a smile to her lips, as Mallison placed his arm around her and drew her close to his side.

"That's better," he whispered. "We have had a hard and cruel time, but I think that it has proved us both, and we shall be all the happier in the future for it."

Peggy smiled up into his face, with no shadow in her eyes now, and she could see no shadow, either, in the future as she gazed up across the shining summer sea.