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THE
MEANING
OF
NIGHT

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PART ONE

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THE
MEANING
OF
NIGHT

a Confession

MICHAEL COX

JOHN MURRAY

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PART THE FIRST

Death of a Stranger *October 1854*

What a skein of ruffled silk is the uncomposed man.
[Owen Felltham, *Resolves* (1623), ii, 'Of Resolution']

I:

Exordium*

After killing the red-haired man, I took myself off to Quinn's for an oyster supper.

It had been surprisingly – almost laughably – easy. I had followed him for some distance, after first observing him in Threadneedle-street. I cannot say why I decided it should be him, and not one of the others on whom my searching eye had alighted that evening. I had been walking for an hour or more in the vicinity with one purpose: to find someone to kill. Then I saw him, outside the entrance to the Bank, amongst a huddle of pedestrians waiting for the crossing-sweeper to do his work. Somehow he seemed to stand out from the crowd of identically dressed clerks and City men streaming forth from the premises. He stood regarding the milling scene around him, as if turning something over in his mind. I thought for a moment that he was about to retrace his steps; instead, he pulled on his gloves, moved away from the crossing point, and set off briskly. A few seconds later, I began to follow him.

We proceeded steadily westwards through the raw October cold

* [An introduction to a treatise or discourse. *Ed.*]

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and the thickening mist. At length he turned into a narrow court that cut through to the Strand, not much more than a passage, flanked on either side by high windowless walls. I glanced up at the discoloured sign – ‘Cain-court’ – then hung back, to make sure the court was deserted.

My victim, all unsuspecting, continued on his way; but before he had time to reach the steps at the far end, I had caught up with him noiselessly and had sunk the blade of my knife deep into his neck.

I’d expected him to fall instantly forwards with the force of the blow; but, curiously, he dropped to his knees, with a soft gasp, his arms by his side, his stick clattering to the floor, and remained in that position for some seconds, like an enraptured devotee before a shrine.

As I withdrew the blade, I moved forwards slightly. It was then I noticed for the first time that his hair, where it showed beneath his hat, was, like his neatly trimmed whiskers, a distinct shade of red. For a brief moment, before he gently collapsed sideways, he looked at me: not only looked at me, but – I swear – smiled, though in truth I now suppose it was the consequence of some involuntary spasm brought about by the withdrawal of the blade.

He lay, illuminated by a narrow shaft of pale yellow light flung out by the gas-lamp at the top of the passage steps, in a slowly widening pool of dark blood that contrasted oddly with the carrotty hue of his hair and whiskers. He was dead for sure.

I stood for a moment, looking about me. A sound, perhaps, somewhere behind me in the dark recesses of the court? Had I been observed? No; all was still. I dropped the knife down a grating, along with my gloves – an old pair, with no maker’s label – and walked smartly away, down the dimly lit steps, and into the enfolding, anonymous bustle of the Strand.

Now I knew I could do it; but it gave me no pleasure. The poor fellow had done me no harm. Luck had simply been against him –

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and the colour of his hair, which, I now saw, had been his fatal distinction. His way that night, inauspiciously coinciding with mine in Threadneedle-street, had made him the unwitting object of my irrevocable intention to kill someone; but had it not been him, it must have been someone else.

Until the very moment in which the blow had been struck, I had not known for sure that I was capable of such a terrible act, and it was absolutely necessary to put the matter beyond all doubt. For the dispatching of the red-haired man was in the nature of a trial, or experiment, to prove to myself that I could indeed take another human life, and escape the consequences. When I next raised my hand in anger, it must be with the same swift and sure determination; but this time it would be directed, not at a stranger, but at the man I call my enemy.

And I must not fail.

The first word I ever heard used to describe myself was: resourceful.

It was said by Tom Grexby, my dear old schoolmaster, to my mother. They were standing beneath the ancient chestnut tree that shaded the little path that led up to our house. I was tucked away out of view above them, nestled snugly in a cradle of branches I called my crow's-nest. From here I could look out across the cliff-top to the sea beyond, dreaming for long hours of sailing away one day to find out what lay beyond the great arc of the horizon.

On this particular day – hot, still, and silent – I watched my mother as she walked down the path towards the gate, a little lace parasol laid against her shoulder. Tom was panting up the hill from the church as she reached the gate. I had not long commenced under his tutelage, and supposed my mother had seen him from the house and had come out expressly to speak to him about my progress.

‘He is’, I heard him say, in reply to her enquiry, ‘a most resourceful young man.’

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Later, I asked her what ‘resourceful’ meant.

‘It means you know how to get things done,’ she said, and I felt pleased that this appeared to be a quality approved of in the adult world.

‘Was papa resourceful?’ I asked.

She did not reply, but instead told me to run along and play, as she must return to her work.

When I was very young, I was often told – gently but firmly – by my mother to ‘run along’, and consequently spent many hours amusing myself. In summer, I would dream amongst the branches of the chestnut tree or, accompanied by Beth, our maid-of-all-work, explore along the shore-line beneath the cliff; in winter, wrapped up in an old tartan shawl on the window-seat in my bedroom, I would dream over Wanley’s *Wonders of the Little World*,* *Gulliver’s Travels*, or *Pilgrim’s Progress* (for which I cherished an inordinate fondness and fascination) until my head ached, looking out betimes across the drear waters, and wondering how far beyond the horizon, and in which direction, lay the Country of the Houyhnhnms, or the City of Destruction, and whether it would be possible to take a packet from Weymouth to see them for myself. Why the City of Destruction should have sounded so enticing to me, I cannot imagine, for I was terrified by Christian’s premonition that the city was about to be burned with fire from heaven, and often imagined that the same fate might befall our little village. I was also haunted throughout my childhood, though again I could not say why, by the Pilgrim’s words to Evangelist: ‘*I am condemned to die, and after that*

* [Nathaniel Wanley (1634–80). The book was first published in 1678. The subtitle reads: ‘A general history of man: In six books. Wherein by many thousands of examples is shewed what man hath been from the first ages of the world to these times ... Collected from the writings of the most approved historians, philosophers, physicians, philologists and others’. *Ed.*]

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to come to judgment; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.' Puzzling though they were, I knew the words expressed a terrible truth, and I would repeat them to myself over and again, like some occult incantation, as I lay in my cradle of branches or in my bed, or as I wandered the windy shore beneath the cliff-top.

I dreamed, too, of another place, equally fantastic and beyond possession, and yet – strangely – having the distinctness of somewhere experienced and remembered, like a taste that stays on the tongue. I would find myself standing before a great building, part castle and part palace, the home of some ancient race, as I thought, bristling with ornamented spires and battlemented turrets, and wondrous grey towers, topped with curious dome-like structures, that soared into the sky – so high that they seemed to pierce the very vault of heaven. And in my dreams it was always summer – perfect, endless summer, and there were white birds, and a great dark fish-pond surrounded by high walls. This magical place had no name, and no location, real or imagined. I had not found it described in any book, or in any story told to me. Who lived there – whether some king or caliph – I knew not. Yet I was sure that it existed somewhere on the earth, and that one day I would see it with my own eyes.

My mother was constantly working, for her literary efforts were our only means of support, my father having died before I was born. The picture that always comes to mind, when thinking of her, is of spindles of grey-flecked dark hair escaping from beneath her cap and falling over her cheek as she sat bent over the large square work-table that was set before the parlour window. There she would sit for hours at a time, sometimes well into the night, furiously scratching away. As soon as one tottering pile of paper was complete and dispatched to the publisher, she would immediately begin to lay down another. Her works (beginning with *Edith; or, The Last of the*

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Fitzalans, of 1826) are now quite unremembered – it would be disloyal to her memory if I say deservedly so; but in their day they enjoyed a certain vogue; at least they found sufficient readers for Mr Colburn* to continue accepting her productions (mostly issued anonymously, or sometimes under the *nom de plume* ‘A Lady of the West’) year in and year out until her death.

Yet though she worked so long, and so hard, she would always break off to be with me for a while, before I went to sleep. Sitting on the end of my bed, with a tired smile on her sweet elfin face, she would listen while I solemnly read out some favourite passage from my precious translation of Monsieur Galland’s *Les milles et une nuits*;† or she might tell me little stories she had made up, or perhaps recount memories of her own childhood in the West Country, which I especially loved to hear. Sometimes, on fine summer nights, we would walk, hand in hand, out onto the cliff-top to watch the sunset; and then we would stand together in silence, listening to the lonely cry of the gulls and the soft murmur of the waves below, and gaze out across the glowing waters to the mysterious far horizon.

‘Over there is France, Eddie,’ I remember her saying once. ‘It is a large and beautiful country.’

‘And are there Houyhnhnms there, mamma?’ I asked.

She gave a little laugh.

‘No, dear,’ she said. ‘Only people, like you and me.’

‘And have you been to France ever?’ was my next question.

‘I have been there once,’ came the reply. Then she gave a sigh. ‘And I shall never go there again.’

When I looked up at her, I saw to my astonishment that she was

* [Henry Colburn (d. 1852), the publisher and founder of the *Literary Gazette*. *Ed.*]

† [The earliest (anonymous) English translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* was published in 1706. *Ed.*]

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crying, which I had never seen her do before; but then she clapped her hands and, saying it was time I was in my bed, bundled me back into the house. At the bottom of the stairs, she kissed me, and told me I would always be her best boy. Then she turned away, leaving me on the bottom stair, and I watched her go back into the parlour, sit down at her work-table, and pick up her pen.

The memory of that evening was awakened many years later, and has ever since remained strong. I thought of it now, as I puffed slowly on my cigar in Quinn's, musing on the strange connectedness of things: on the thin, but unbreakable, threads of causality that linked – for they did so link – my mother labouring at her writing all those years ago with the red-haired man who now lay dead not half a mile away in Cain-court.

Walking down towards the river, I felt intoxicated by the thought that I had escaped discovery. But then, whilst paying my halfpenny to the toll-keeper on Waterloo Bridge, I noticed that my hands were shaking and that, despite my recent refreshment at Quinn's, my mouth was dry as tinder. Beneath a flickering gas-lamp, I leaned against the parapet for a moment, feeling suddenly dizzy. The fog lay heavy on the black water below, which lapped and slopped against the piers of the great echoing arches, making a most dismal music. Then, out of the swirling fog, a thin young woman appeared, carrying a baby. She stood for a few moments, obviously staring down into the blackness. I clearly saw the blank despair on her face, and instantly sensed that she was about to make a jump of it; but as I moved towards her, she looked at me wildly, clutched the child tightly to her breast, and ran off, leaving me to watch her poor phantom figure dissolve into the fog once more.* A life saved, I hoped, if only for a time; but something, perhaps, to set against

* [Waterloo Bridge was known as the 'Bridge of Sighs' because of the number of suicides who had leapt to their deaths from it. *Ed.*]

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what I had done that night.

You must understand that I am not a murderer by nature, only by temporary design. There was no need to repeat this experimental act of killing. I had proved what I had set out to prove: the capacity of my will to carry out such a deed. The blameless red-haired stranger had fulfilled his purpose, and I was ready for what now lay ahead.

I walked to the Surrey side of the bridge, turned round, and walked back again. Then, on a sudden impulse, as I passed back through the turnstile, I decided to take a turn back along the Strand instead of returning to my rooms. At the foot of the steps leading down from Cain-court, which I'd descended not two hours earlier, a crowd of people had gathered. I enquired of a flower-seller concerning the cause of the commotion.

'Murder, sir', she replied. 'A poor gentleman has been most viciously done to death. They say the head was almost severed from the body.'

'Good heavens!' says I, with every expression of sudden shock. 'What a world we live in! Is anyone apprehended?'

My informant was uncertain on this point. A Chinese sailor had been seen running from the court a little time before the body had been discovered; but others had said that a woman carrying a bloody axe had been found standing in a daze a few streets away and had been taken away by the officers.

I shook my head sadly, and continued on my way.

Of course it was most convenient that ignorant rumour was already weaving nets of obscurity and falsehood around the truth. For all I cared, either the Chinese sailor or the woman with the bloody axe, if indeed they existed, could swing for my deed and be damned. I was armoured against all suspicion. Certainly no one had observed me entering or leaving the dark and deserted court: I had been most particular on that point. The knife had been of a

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common type, purloined for the purpose from a hotel across the river in the Borough, where I had never been before, and to which I would never return again. My nameless victim had been entirely unknown to me: nothing but cold Fate connected us. My clothes appeared to be unmarked by his blood; and night, villainy's true friend, had thrown its accomplice's cloak over all.

By the time I reached Chancery-lane the clocks were striking eleven. Still feeling unwilling to return to my own solitary bed, I swung northwards, to Blithe Lodge, St John's Wood, with the intention of paying my compliments to Miss Isabella Gallini, of blessed memory.

Ah, Bella. Bellissima Bella. She welcomed me in her customary way at the door of the respectable tree-fronted villa, cupping my face in her long-fingered, many-ringed hands and whispering, 'Eddie, darling Eddie, how wonderful', as she kissed me gently on both cheeks.

'Is all quiet?' I asked.

'Perfectly. The last one went an hour ago, Charlie is asleep, and Mrs D. has not yet returned. We have the house to ourselves.'

Upstairs I lay back on her bed watching her disrobe, as I'd done so many times before. I knew every inch of her body, every warm and secret place. Yet watching the last piece of clothing fall to the floor, and seeing her standing proudly before me, was like experiencing her for the first time in all her untasted glory.

'Say it,' she said.

I frowned in pretended ignorance.

'Say what?'

'You know very well, you tease. Say it.'

She walked towards me, her hair now released and flowing over her shoulders and down her back. Then, reaching the bed, she once again clasped my face in her hands and let that dark torrent of tresses tumble around me.

'Oh, my America,' I declaimed theatrically, 'my New-Found

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land!)*

‘Oh, Eddie,’ she cooed delightedly, ‘it does so thrill me when you say that! Am I really your America?’

‘My America and more. You are my world.’

At which she threw herself upon me with a will and kissed me so hard I could scarcely breathe.

The establishment of which Bella was the leading light was several cuts above the usual introducing house, so much so that it was known to the *cognoscenti* simply as ‘The Academy’, the definite article proclaiming that it was set it apart from all other rival establishments and alluding proudly to the superiority of its inmates, and of the services they offered. It was run along the lines of a highly select club – a Boodle’s or White’s of the flesh[†] – and catered for the amorous needs of the most discerning patrons of means. Like its counterparts in St James’s, it had strict rules on admission and behaviour. No person was allowed entry to this choice coterie without the unequivocal recommendation of an existing member followed by a vote: blackballing was not infrequent, and if a recommendation proved wanting in any way, both applicant and proposer faced summary ejection, and sometimes worse.

Mrs Kitty Daley, known to the members as Mrs D., was the *entrepreneuse* of this celebrated and highly profitable Cyprian* resort. She went to great lengths to maintain standards of social

* [From John Donne, ‘Elegie XIX: Going to Bed’. *Ed.*]

[†] [Boodle’s, a gentleman’s club of a semi-political character at 28 St James’s Street; White’s (originally White’s Chocolate House, established towards the end of the seventeenth century), was another celebrated club-house at 37 and 38 St James’s Street. *Ed.*]

* [An adjective carrying the meaning of licentious or lewd, deriving from Cyprus, an island famed for the worship of Aphrodite. *Ed.*]

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decency: no swearing, profanity, or drunkenness was tolerated, and any disrespect towards, or ill-treatment of, the young ladies themselves was punished with the utmost severity. Not only would the perpetrator find himself immediately barred and exposed to public scandal; he would also receive a call from Mr Herbert Braithwaite, a former pugilist of distinction, who had his own highly effective way of making delinquent patrons understand the error of their ways.

Bella and her companions were thus a race apart from the doxies and dollymops who infest the Haymarket and its environs, and with whom I had long been familiar. Signor Prospero Gallini, Bella's father, the impoverished scion of a noble Italian family, having fallen on hard times, had fled his native creditors, in the year 1830, and made his way to England, where he set himself up as a fencing-master in London. He was now a widower, and an exile; but he was determined to give his only daughter every advantage that his limited means permitted, with the result that she could converse fluently in several European languages, played exceptionally well on the piano-forte, had a delightful singing voice, and was, in short, as accomplished as she was beautiful.

I had lodged briefly with Signor Gallini and his alluring daughter when I first came to London. After his death I maintained an occasional, but friendly, correspondence with Bella, feeling it was my duty to watch over her, in a brotherly sort of way, in gratitude for the kindness her father had shown to me. Signor Gallini had left her little enough, and it became necessary for her to leave the little house in Camberwell, to where her father had retired, and take employment as companion to a lady in St John's Wood, whose acquaintance we have already made. She had answered an advertisement for this position, which was Mrs D.'s way of recruiting new blood for her stable of thoroughbreds. Very few who applied found favour in Mrs D.'s discerning eye; but Bella instantly

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charmed her, and was not in the least shocked when the true nature of her employment was revealed to her. Although she began her career as the most junior citizen in The Academy's little state, she quickly rose through the ranks. She was exceptionally beautiful, talented, discreet, and as accommodating as any gentleman could wish. If there is such a thing as a vocation in this line of work, then Bella Gallini may be said to have possessed one.

Our intermittent correspondence continued for some years after she took up residence at Blythe Lodge. I would send a brief note every few months, to see how she was, and if she was in need of anything, and she would reply to say that she was going on very well, that her employer was kindness itself, and that she wanted for nothing. Then one day, in the early months of 1853, I happened to be in the vicinity of St John's Wood and thought I would call on her, to see for myself that all was well, and (I confess) to see if she was still as beautiful as I remembered her.

I was admitted to an elegant drawing-room, displaying both taste and means. The door opened; but it was not Bella. Two giggling young ladies, unaware that a visitor was within, burst into the room. On seeing me, they halted and looked me up and down, and then looked at each other. They were a most ravishing pair, one blonde, the other dark; and both had an unmistakable look about them. I had seen it a hundred times, though rarely in such sumptuous surroundings.

They begged my pardon (unnecessary, for I would have forgiven them any liberty they chose to take), and were about to withdraw when another figure appeared in the doorway.

She was every bit as beautiful as I remembered her; dressed to the highest point of fashion, coiffured and bejewelled, but still possessed of a natural grace of carriage, and displaying that warm and open expression with which she'd greeted me when I'd first come to her father's house. After her fair companions had departed,

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we walked out into the garden and talked away, like the old friends we were, until a female servant came across from the house to tell Bella that she had another visitor.

‘Will you call again?’ she asked. ‘I seem to have spoken only of myself, and would so like to hear more about what you have been doing with your life, and what your plans are for the future.’

I needed no further hint, and said I would come again the following day, if it was convenient.

Neither of us had said anything concerning the true character of Blithe Lodge: there was no need. She saw, by my look and tone of voice, that I was not in the least shocked or disgusted by what she had chosen to become; and for my part, I could see that – as she had told me so often – she wanted for nothing, and that the contentment at her lot that she professed was unfeigned.

I returned the next day, when I was introduced to Mrs D. herself; and the following week attended a soir ee, at which were assembled some of the most eminent and well-placed of the capital’s fast men. Gradually, my visits increased in frequency and soon brotherly solicitation began to transform into something more intimate. By special dispensation, I was not required to make any contribution to the domestic economy of the house. ‘You’re most welcome here any time, my dear’ said Mrs D., with whom I had quickly become a great favourite, ‘just as long Bella ain’t distracted from her professional duties.’

Mrs D. being a widow with no dependants, it had long been settled that Bella, who had become like a daughter to her, would in the course of time assume the reins of power in this thriving carnal kingdom. On this account, I’d call her my little heiress, and she’d smile contentedly as I pictured to her the days of ease that lay ahead once the inevitable mortal release of Mrs D., now in her sixty-first year, delivered the succession into her hands.

‘I don’t like to think of it too much,’ she said, as we lay together

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in the dark, talking of Mrs D.'s impending retirement, 'seeing how fond I am of Kitty, and how kind she's always been to me. But, you know, I can't help feeling – well, a little satisfied at the prospect, though I'm sure I don't deserve it.'

I rebuked her gently for her scruples, telling her that it was folly – and worse – to believe that we do not merit our good fortune, especially if it is ours by right. She kissed me and pulled me close; but I felt suddenly abandoned and alone. For was I not also an heir, and to a far greater kingdom than hers? Yet *my* inheritance had been taken from me, and could never now be reclaimed. This was hard enough to bear; but, through a considered act of betrayal, I had sustained an even greater loss, which had left me bereft of all hope of recovery. It is trite to speak of a broken heart. Hearts are not broken; they continue to beat, the blood still courses, even in the bitter after-days of betrayal. But something *is* broken when pain beyond words is suffered; some connection that formerly existed with light and hope and bright mornings is severed, and can never be restored.

I longed to throw off the habit of deceit, and this smiling mask of carelessness I wore to conceal the rage that foamed and boiled beneath. But I could not tell Bella the truth about myself, or why I had been driven to kill a stranger that night in Cain-court; for if I did, I might lose her too, and then I would have nothing. For she was the one sweet constant in my life, and she, too, had been betrayed, though she did not know it. One day, perhaps, when all these troubles were memories, I would confess to her as I am now confessing to you, my unknown reader. Till then, she must not know who I really was, and what had been taken from me.

But one person knows what I cannot yet tell Bella. And soon he will also come to know how resourceful I can be.

2:

Nominatim*

I had slept fitfully, aware of the soft, warm mass of Bella's body curled up against mine as I drifted in and out of wakefulness. Though pricked by occasional anxieties, I remained confident that no one could connect me to my victim, and that I had completed my experiment in murder undetected. Having consciously subdued all thought of the man I had killed *as* a man, I found I had attained to a kind of indifference to the enormity of the act I had so recently committed. I was guilty, and yet I experienced no feeling of guilt. It was true that, when I allowed my eyes to close, images of the red-haired stranger would rise up before me; yet even in this twilight state, between sleeping and waking, when conscience may often call up horrors from the depths of our being, I continued to feel no revulsion at what I had done. Later, it also struck me as odd that my mind did not keep returning to the fatal moment itself, when the knife had entered the yielding flesh of my victim. Instead, I would see myself following the man along a dark and deserted thoroughfare. From time to time we would emerge into a ring of sickly yellow light thrown out from an open door set in a tall

* ['By name'. *Ed.*]

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windowless building. Then we would proceed once more into darkness. Time and again, when uncertain sleep came, I would find myself in this perpetual procession through dark and nameless streets. Not once did I see his face: his back was always towards me as we walked slowly from one oasis of jaundiced light to another. Then, just before daybreak, as I fell back once more into half-sleep, I saw him again.

We were in a small skiff, which he was rowing lazily down a placid river on a silent, heat-heavy afternoon. I lay in the rear of the vessel, my eyes fixed on the muscles of his back as they flexed beneath his coat with each pull on the oars. Incongruously, on such a day, his clothes were those in which he had died on that cold October evening, including his muffler and tall black hat. As we entered a narrow channel, he let the oars rest on the surface of the water, turned to face me, and smiled.

But it was not the face of my anonymous victim. It was the face of Phoebus Rainsford Daunt, the man whose life I was studying so assiduously to extinguish.

Leaving Bella asleep, and placing, as I always did on such occasions, a gentle kiss on her flushed cheek by way of good-bye, I made my way to my rooms. The sky was beginning to lighten over the waking city, and the sounds of Great Leviathan stirring were all about me: the rattle of milk cans; a moaning drove of bullocks being driven through the empty street; the early cries of 'Fresh watercress!' as I approached Farringdon-market. As the church clocks strike six, I stop at a coffee-stall near the market entrance to warm my hands, for it is a sharp morning; the man looks at me indignantly, but I face him down, and he retires mumbling deprecations.

On reaching Temple Bar I considered strolling over once again to the scene of my late encounter with the red-haired man, to satisfy myself that all was well; instead I chose breakfast and a change of linen. At the corner of Temple-street, Whitefriars, I mounted the

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narrow flight of dark stairs that led up from the street to the top floor of the house in which I lodged, from there entering a long, wainscotted sitting-room under the eaves.

I lived alone, my only visitor being the woman, Mrs Grainger, who came from time to time to undertake some modest domestic chores. My work-table was littered with papers and note-books; a once handsome, but now faded, Turkey carpet covered most of the floor, and about the room were scattered several items of furniture brought from my mother's house in Dorset. From this apartment a door led off, first to a narrow bedroom lit by a small skylight, and then, beyond, to an even smaller space – really no more than a closet – that served as both wardrobe and wash-room.

The face that greeted me in the little cracked mirror that stood on a shelf above the wash-stand in this cubicle did not seem, to my objective gaze, to be the face of a cold-blooded murderer. The eyes looked back genially, and with calm intensity. Here was a face to trust, to confide in; yet I had despatched another human being with almost as little thought as I might crush an insect. Was I, then, some dissimulating devil in human form? No. I was but a man, a good man at heart, if the truth be told, driven to set right the wrong that had been done to me, absolved – even of murder – by the implacable fatalities to which my life has been subject. You think there is no such thing as Fate? That we have free will under some benign Creator God? You are wrong. We are each destined to play out whatever part has been assigned to us by a determining power we can neither implore nor placate. To me, this power is the Iron Master, forever forging the chains that bind us to actions we *must* take, and to outcomes we *must* then suffer. My destiny, I believed, was to take back what was rightfully mine, whatever the consequences. But I had mistaken the Iron Master's will.

I peered a little closer into the mirror. A long lean face, with large, heavy-lidded dark eyes; olive-coloured skin; a nose perhaps a

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little skewed, but still finely shaped; a mouth that carried the merest hint of a smile, even in repose; black hair swept back from the forehead, innocent of macassar and abundant at the sides, but, I confess, receding fast, and greying a little at the temples. Fine mustachios. Very fine. Take me all in all, I believe I stood before the world as a moderately handsome fellow.

But what was this? I moved my face closer to the grimy glass. There, on the very tip of my shirt collar, was a splash of dull red.

I stood for a moment, bending towards the mirror, gripped by a sudden fascinated fear. This voiceless, yet still eloquent, witness to the night's activities in Cain-court took me completely by surprise. Its pursuit of me seemed like a violation, and I quickly reviewed the dangerous possibilities it presented.

Had it been enough to betray me? Had one of the waiters in Quinn's noticed it when it had still been vivid and unequivocal, or the flower-seller when I had returned – foolishly, as it might now prove – to the scene of my crime? Had Bella observed it, despite the haste of passion? Any of these, on reading or hearing of the murder, might recall the presence of blood on my shirt, and suspicion might thence be aroused. I looked more closely at the incriminating relic of my experiment.

It was insignificant enough in itself, certainly, though it constituted a very world of meaning. Here was a remnant of the life-blood of the stranger I had happened upon in Threadneedle-street as he went about his business, all unknowing of what was to befall him. Had he been returning home to his wife and children after a day in the City, or on his way to join a company of friends for dinner? What was his name, and who would mourn him? How had he seen his life ending? (Not in a pool of gore in a public thoroughfare, I warrant.) Did he have parents still alive whose hearts would break at the terrible demise of their dear son? Like a soldier in battle, I had ignored such questions in the heat of action, as being

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irrelevant to the task in hand; but now, as I stared at the little spot of dried blood on my collar, I could not prevent them rushing insistently into my mind.

Were there other traces of the crime that I had failed to notice? I hastily took my great-coat from its peg and hurried into the sitting-room to spread it out on my work-table, grabbing an eye-glass from beneath a pile of papers as I did so.

By the strengthening light of morning, I pored over every inch of the garment, turning the material methodically, occasionally bringing a piece up close to my eye-glass, like a jeweller eagerly examining some object of great worth. Then I removed my jacket and trousers, then my waistcoat, shirt and cravat: all were subjected to the same frantic scrutiny. Finally, I inspected my hat and placed my boots on the table, washed now in pale sunlight. I went meticulously over the upper surfaces and soles of each boot with a dampened handkerchief, using slow circular movements and stopping every few seconds to see if the white linen had taken up any incriminating residue of blood.

Having satisfied myself that I could find no other physical traces that could link me to my victim, I returned to the wash-room, where I diligently soaked my shirt collar in cold water to remove the blood-stain. In a few minutes, washed, shaved, and combed, and with a clean shirt on my back, I prepared to face the day.

It is the twenty-fifth of October, 1854 – St Crispin's Day. Far away in the Crimea, though we in England do not yet know it, Lord Cardigan's heroic Light Brigade is charging the Russian guns at Balaclava. For me, the day passes quietly. In the morning, I occupy myself with the subject to which I have now devoted my whole being: the destruction of my enemy. Of him, you shall learn more – much more – in the course of these pages: for now, you must take it on trust that certain events had made it impossible that he should be allowed to live. The trial of my will that had its culmination last

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evening in Cain-court had demonstrated to my satisfaction that I was capable of doing what it was necessary to do; and the time was fast approaching when he and I would meet face to face for the last time. But until then, I must think, and plan, and wait.

In the afternoon I had a little business to attend to, and did not return to my rooms until late, with evening coming on. There was a copy of *The Times* on my work-table that had been left earlier by Mrs Grainger. I can see myself idly turning the pages of the newspaper until my attention is suddenly arrested by an announcement, and my heart begins to thump. Hands shaking slightly, I walk over to the window, for the light is fading fast, and begin to read:

*Last evening at about 6 o'clock . . .
Cain-court, Strand . . . Mr Lucas
Trendle, First Assistant to the Chief
Cashier of the Bank of England . . .
Stoke Newington . . . savagely done to
death . . . distinguished public servant
. . . Elm-lane Chapel . . . many
charitable works . . . horror of his
many friends . . . authorities confident
of success . . .*

He had been on his way to a meeting in Exeter Hall of some charitable enterprise dedicated to providing copies of the Holy Scripture and serviceable footwear to the Africans. I now recalled a throng of clerical gentlemen in subfusc gathered outside the grand Corinthian portico of the Hall as I'd passed down the Strand after leaving Cain-court. It was clear from the report that the police could

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discern no obvious motive to explain the crime, for nothing had been taken from the victim. I drank in the details of his respectable and blameless life; but only one thing held me, and holds me still. He was no longer the red-haired man. He had a name.

On first reading the report, I'd paced about the room somewhat in a sulk, unexpectedly vexed by this knowledge. I had wanted him to remain eternally immured in his former anonymity; now I could not prevent myself from picturing the possibilities of his revealed individuality. I began to find the confinement of my attic room intolerable. At last, I could stand no more. In these moods, I need to have the raw taste of London on my tongue.

With rain beginning to patter against the skylight of my little bedroom, I threw on my top-coat and ran down the stairs into the gathering night.

And a merciless rain it soon became, pouring in thick frothy streams from water-spouts and ledges, tumbling in vertical sheets from roofs and spires and parapets high above the teeming city, turning streets and thoroughfares into evil-smelling streams of filth and liquid refuse. I found my old companion, Willoughby Le Grice, lounging, as I knew he would be at this hour, at the Ship and Turtle in Leadenhall-street. Le Grice and I had been chums since our schooldays, though we were as different as could be. Whether he had ever read a book through in his life, I beg to doubt; he did not care for books, or music, or paintings – as I most certainly did; as for more advanced pursuits, I believe he considered philosophy to be actively pernicious, whilst the mention of metaphysics made him quite mad. Le Grice was a sportsman to his size-twelve boots: taller even than I; thick tow-coloured hair above a four-square manly gaze, the neck and shoulders of a young bull, and a luxuriant arc of curled hair above his top lip that made him look a very Caractacus. A true Briton, and a good man to have by you in a dangerous corner, though an innocent for all that. A strange pair, we must have made;

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but I could have wanted for no better friend.

We ate the grilled fowl (Indian style) for which the house was celebrated, washed down with gin-punch; then, ever biddable as he was on such occasions, Le Grice allowed me to take him across the river to the Victoria Theatre,* just in time for the nine o'clock performance.

There is no better place than the Victoria to watch the lower orders of the city taking their pleasure; to me, it is a constantly fascinating sight, like lifting a stone and observing the insect life beneath. Le Grice is not so charmed as I; but he keeps his counsel and sits back in his seat, a cheroot clenched grimly between his teeth, whilst I lean forward eagerly. Below our box, the coarse deal benches are packed to overflowing: costers, navvies, lightermen, hackney-coach drivers, coal-heavers, and every sort of disreputable female. A ferocious, sweating, stinking herd. Only the louder shouts of the pigstrotter woman and the porter men who patrol the aisles and stairways rise above the tumult of whistles and yells. Then, at last, the curtain rises, the master of ceremonies finally subdues the mob, and the performance – sublime in its vulgarity – begins.

Afterwards, out in the New Cut, the rain had begun to ease, leaving the streets awash with mud and debris brought down from roofs and gutters. Degraded humanity, with its attendant stench, was everywhere: congregating on corners, or squatting beneath dripping archways; sitting on doorsteps, hanging out of windows, or huddling in the mouths of alleyways. Faces, hideously painted by the satanic light of the lamps and flares and the glow of the baked-chestnut stoves that lit up the street stalls and public-houses, passed by us like a parade of the damned.

Just after midnight we dropped into Quinn's. I wished especially

* [Opened in 1818, and formerly called the Coburg, it was situated in Waterloo Bridge Road, Lambeth. *Ed.*]

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to go to Quinn's. On the excuse of attempting to locate a lost pocket-book, I sought out the waiter who had served me the previous evening: it soon became perfectly clear that he had no recollection of me; and so I returned, with a lighter heart, to Le Grice and we set about the consumption of oysters and champagne with a will. But eating oysters, Le Grice declared, only made him hungrier. He required meat and strong liquor, which, at this time of night, only Evans' could supply. And so, a little before midnight, we arrived in King-street, Covent Garden.

The parallel lines of tables, laid out like a college hall, were still packed with boisterous supper-goers. The air was cloudy with the smoke of cigars (pipes being prohibited) and heavy with the aroma of grog and roasted meat. Adding to the convivial din of conversation and laughter, a group of singers on the stage was lustily delivering a six-part glee, their strong and splendid voices rising in a resonant crescendo above the incessant clatter of plates and the rattle of cutlery. All about us, the tables were piled high with steaming sausages, sizzling cayenned kidneys, leathery baked potatoes, and dozens of glistening fried eggs, like so many miniature suns. We called for peppered chops and bitter beer, but no sooner had they arrived than Le Grice was persuaded by some of the other fellows to sing a comic song.

As Le Grice made his way tipsily towards the stage, to raucous applause, I slipped quietly away. The rain was falling with renewed intent; but London, brilliant and beautifully vile, and the undemanding company of dear old Le Grice, had done their work.

I was myself again.

3:

Praemonitus, Praemunitus*

The following day, Bella and I walked out in the Regent's Park. It was an unusually fine afternoon for October in London; and so, after looking at the elephants in the Zoological Gardens, we sat for some time by the ornamental water, talking and laughing in the pale autumn sunshine. Towards four o'clock, the air began to grow chill, and so we made our way back towards the gates that lead out into York-terrace.

Near the entrance to the gardens of the Toxophilite Society,[†] Bella stopped and turned to me.

'Kitty wishes me to go with her to Dieppe tomorrow.'

'Dieppe? Whatever for?'

'Dearest, I have told you before. It is where her mother was born, and she has determined to retire there. There is a house she has coveted this past year, and it is now for sale. She wishes me to go

* ['Forewarned, forearmed'. *Ed.*]

† [The society, founded by Sir Ashton Lever in 1781, was at the forefront of the revival of archery at the end of the eighteenth century. It obtained a lease from the Crown to establish its ground in the Inner Circle of Regent's Park in 1833. *Ed.*]

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with her to view it.’

‘And you will go?’

‘But of course.’ She laid a gloved finger gently across my cheek. ‘You don’t mind, do you, dear? Say you don’t – it will only be for a day or so.’

Now even though the thought of not having the comfort of her dear person near me at this time of crisis unsettled me badly, I told her I did not mind in the least; but this, of course, was exactly what I should *not* have said and I saw that she had taken exception to my feigned indifference, for she instantly removed her hand from my cheek and looked at me sternly.

‘Well, then’, she replied, ‘I may as well stay on in Dieppe a little longer, as Kitty wishes me to. I’m sure there will be gentlemen aplenty who will be glad to entertain me.’

Now it is curious but it had never before troubled me that Bella’s profession required her to be, shall we say, companionable to other fellows; what services she performed for Kitty Daley’s select circle of gentlemen had concerned me little. But my accommodating attitude, I already knew, had begun to irk her somewhat, and from time to time she had tried to arouse in me some spark of jealousy – which I believe ladies often interpret as a form of flattery. Her present attempt was transparent enough, but the truth was that it was unnecessary. I could no longer affect indifference: I *was* jealous of others enjoying that sweet body; and yet, once again, my foolish inability to admit what I truly felt for her made me say entirely the wrong thing.

‘You must do as you please,’ I told her, in a hard, careless tone. ‘I have no hold over you.’

‘Very well,’ said Bella, ‘I shall indeed please myself.’

With which she gathered up her skirts and walked angrily away.

Now this I could not allow, for I hated to see her upset and angry; and so I called after her.

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She turned. Her cheeks were reddened, and I saw clearly that I had hurt her.

I am not a monster. I could kill a stranger, but I could not bear to see Bella distressed, even though I had not treated her as she deserved. And so I folded her in my arms – it was growing dark, and we were alone on the stretch of path that led out of the park – and kissed her tenderly.

‘Oh, Eddie,’ she said, tears welling up in her eyes, ‘do you not like me any more?’

‘Like you?’ I cried. ‘Of course I like you. More than – more than I can say.’

‘Truly?’

‘Truly,’ I replied. I told her I hated myself for upsetting her so, that of course I would miss her while she was away, and that I would count the hours until she returned. It was the complete truth, but it brought forth a little laugh.

‘Now, now,’ she said in mock admonishment, ‘don’t come the poet with me, sir. An occasional thought in the course of the day will be quite sufficient.’

We kissed once more, but as she withdrew her lips from mine I saw again that look of seriousness in her eyes.

‘What is it, Bella?’ I asked. ‘Is something wrong?’

She hesitated for a moment. ‘No, not exactly wrong.’

‘You are not —’

‘No – by no means – no.’ She reached into her pocket. ‘I have received this. It came yesterday morning, after you left.’

She handed me a folded piece of paper.

‘I must go. Kitty is expecting me. I hope you will call when we are back.’

I watched her walk away, waiting until she was out of sight before I unfolded and read what she had handed to me.

It was a short note, written in a small neat hand:

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*I write to you as a true friend.
Beware of Edward Glapthorn. He is not
what he seems. As you value your
happiness, you would do well to sever all
connexion with him immediately. I know
of what I speak. Take heed.*

The note was signed 'Veritas' and was addressed simply to 'Miss Gallini', with no direction, suggesting it had been delivered by hand.

Here was a thing, and I own that it knocked me back for a moment or two. I read the note again; but as the light was now nearly gone, I decided to go straight back to Temple-street and take stock.

I was, no doubt, in a somewhat nervous state, for as I was proceeding past the Diorama, in Park-square, I thought I felt a soft tap on my shoulder. But when I turned round, there was no one to be seen. The street was deserted, except for a single carriage making its way back through the fading light towards the Park. This would not do. I grasped my stick with determination and walked on.

Back in my rooms, I lit the lamp and spread the note out on my table.

The hand had something familiar about it – some trace of memory seemed to cling to it; but, try as I might, I could not bring its associations to mind.

I investigated the paper closely with my glass, held it up to the light, even sniffed it. Then I examined every character in turn, pondered the choice and order of the words, and why the author had underlined the name Edward Glapthorn. I studied the

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flourishes of the signature, and sought to tease out what lay behind the choice of the pseudonym ‘Veritas’. As I write this, I am amazed by my obtuseness, by my inability immediately to grasp the truth; but there it is. The deed I had so lately committed in Cain-court had, no doubt, produced confusion of mind, and dulled my usually acute powers of perception; and in those dark autumn weeks, convulsed by the most terrible of betrayals, and in fear of my own life, I was already in the grip of a kind of madness and could not see what was plainly before my eyes, and what will, in due course, be laid before yours. The consequence was that I spent an hour or more trying – with mounting frustration – to force the note to yield up its secret; but it defeated me. Except in this one thing: I knew, with utter conviction, that, though addressed to Bella, it had been meant *for me*. And so it proved.

Who? Who knew? Though I had never killed before, I was well used to living on the night-side of things. As I shall later relate, my work had hardened me to violence and danger, and I had trained myself in all the arts of the paid spy. I had therefore taken every precaution, deployed all my acquired skills, to ensure that my victim and I had entered Cain-court unobserved; but now it was clear, beyond a doubt, that I had slipped up. Someone had followed us. *Someone had seen us*.

I paced the room, pounding my knuckles against my head, trying to recall every second of those fateful minutes.

I could remember glancing back towards the entrance to the court, soon after striking the fatal blow, and again as I’d slid the knife down the grating. Memory could give me back nothing to indicate that I’d been observed. Except . . . Yes: the slightest of sounds, though no sign of movement. A rat, I’d thought at the time. But was it possible that someone had been silently watching my victim and me from the deep shadows that lay in the angles of the walls?

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This thought now instantly took hold, and then led to another. How had the presumed observer identified me? The answer must be that he already knew me. Perhaps he had been watching my movements for some time and had followed me in my peregrinations that night, and then tracked me to Blithe Lodge. But why, with the information he possessed, had he not already denounced me to the authorities? Why had he written to Bella in such a fashion?

I could discern only one motive: blackmail. With that conclusion came a kind of relief. I knew how to deal with such a situation. All I required was to gain some quick advantage over my pursuer. Then I would have him. Yet it was not altogether clear to me how such an advantage could be obtained; and still I could not understand why the blackmailer had revealed his hand to Bella first. Perhaps he merely wished to torment me a little before administering the *coup de grâce*.

He – it must be a man, and an educated one – was clever. I was prepared to grant him that. The note had been subtly conceived. To Bella, who knew nothing of what had happened in Cain-court, it hinted at dark possibilities that might alarm any woman, even a demi-mondaine: ‘*He is not what he seems . . .*’. Women instantly distrust the unspecific, and their imaginations soon begin to transform hints and suggestions into solid fact. What would Bella’s fancy conjure up from these vague but troubling insinuations? Nothing to my advantage, certainly, and much to her disquiet. But to me, the note sent a different message: a threat to reveal to Bella what I had done if I did not come to an accommodation. This was the cleverness of it: it was intended to put us individually on the rack; and by mischievously sowing doubt and alarm in the innocent Bella, it inflicted a double punishment on me.

I returned to my table and picked up the note again. This time I held it up to the light of my lamp and went carefully over every inch with my eye-glass, searching furiously for some clue to the identity

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of the sender, something that would set *me* on *his* trail. I was on the point of giving up in angry frustration when I noticed a row of small holes pricked into the paper, just below the signature.

On closer examination, I saw that these had been deliberately arranged in groups, separated by spaces. It did not take long to discern the simplest of codes: each group of holes represented a number, which in turn stood for a letter. With little trouble I deciphered the message: *ez/vi/vi*. Reaching for my bible, I quickly found the verse from Ezekiel to which the message referred:

An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come.

Here was a serious setback to my plans. Something I could not have anticipated, but to the resolution of which I must now divert some of my energy. *Watcheth*, I perceived, was a word the sender particularly intended me to take to heart. I could do nothing, for the time being, to set aside whatever fears the note had raised in Bella; but I felt sure that I would receive a further communication before long, and this, I hoped, would afford me some opportunity to begin turning the tables on the blackmailer.

I sat up for half an hour or so before the fire smoking a cigar, then went to bed in a state of suppressed anxiety. Images came crowding in upon me: the dying smile of Lucas Trendle, elephants, Bella laughing in the autumn sunshine, a carriage making its way up a deserted street.

Then, when sleep eventually took hold, came a dream, which haunts me still.

I am walking through an unimaginably vast subterranean chamber; the echoes of my footsteps recede into endless depths of shadow on either side of what seems like an aisle or nave of titanic stone columns. In my hand is a candle, which burns with a steady

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flame, revealing an open space beyond the columns. Into this space, the boundaries of which are indiscernible, I now pass.

I walk on for some time, feeling a vast and oppressive emptiness pushing in all around me. I stop, and the reverberating echoes of my footsteps slowly die away in a sickening *diminuendo* into the surrounding immensity. The candle's flame reveals only darkness: limitless, entire; but then, suddenly, I know I am not alone, and a choking terror begins to take hold. There is something fearsome here, invisible but present. All is silence; I have heard no sound of footsteps other than my own; and yet I know danger is near. Then, with inconceivable horror, I feel a gentle tap on my shoulder and warm breath on my cheek and hear the faint hiss of exhaled air. Someone – some thing – standing just behind me softly blows out the candle. I drop the extinguished flame, and collapse in utter helplessness and revulsion.

I awoke three or four times from this nightmare in a sweat, my heart thumping, clutching at tangled sheets. Finally, at first light, I arose with a dry mouth and a ferocious headache. As soon as I entered my sitting-room I saw it: a rectangle of white paper, slipped under the door as I slept.

It was a black-bordered card, written in the same hand as the note that had been sent to Bella. It seemed to confirm all my fears.

*Mr Edward Glapthorn is cordially
invited to the interment of Mr Lucas
Trendle, late of the Bank of England,
at 3 p.m. on the third of November,
1857, Abney Cemetery, Stoke Newington.*

'In the midst of life we are in death'

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The quotation from the Burial Service at first seemed merely apt; but, as I considered it further, the words began to call to mind some other time and place – a face, already receding into the shadows of memory; a place of sorrow; rain and solemn music. It puzzled me, and worried me, though I could not say why. Then I concluded that I was seeing significance where there was none, and threw the card aside.

Eight days. There was time to prepare myself. I did not expect any further communication; the blackmailer's next move would no doubt come – presumably in person – on the day of the funeral. And if not in person, then he would have to reveal something more of himself in another communication if he was to attain his objective; and that might allow me the advantage I was seeking. In the meantime I resolved to try and put all thought of this business out of my mind, as far as I could. I had other pressing matters to attend to. For the time of reckoning with my enemy, Phoebus Daunt, was nigh.

Ab incunabulis*

The evening after Bella returned from Dieppe, the second of November, 1854, I took her to dinner at the Clarendon Hotel.† Mrs D. had been enchanted by the house they had viewed and had stayed in France to begin arrangements for its purchase.

‘She means to retire there as soon as circumstances permit,’ said Bella, ‘which of course means that my own position will change sooner than anticipated.’

She did her best to maintain her old easiness of manner, but I could see the effort it was causing her. At length, she set aside all pretence.

‘You have read the note?’

I nodded.

‘What does it mean, Eddie? I must know the truth.’

‘The truth of what?’ I cried angrily. ‘The truth of a lie? The truth of some vague and baseless slander? There is no truth here, none, I can assure you.’

‘But who has sent me this?’

* [‘From the cradle’. *Ed.*]

† [In Bond Street. *Ed.*]

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‘Someone who wishes me harm for a reason I cannot imagine, someone whose resentment of me – or perhaps of you . . .’

She was taken aback by the suggestion.

‘Of me? What can you mean?’

‘Think, my love: is there any member of The Academy who might have a reason to cause you harm? Someone, perhaps, who has received a visit from Mr Braithwaite on your behalf?’ I asked the question knowing only too well that this matter had nothing to do with The Academy.

‘No, none.’ She thought for a moment. ‘Sir Meredith Gore – you remember? – was ejected some months ago, but I was not the only one to complain of him. He is presently travelling on the Continent, and is not expected to return for some time, so I do not think it can be him. Besides, what possible benefit could he gain from this? And do you know the gentleman?’

I had to concede that Sir Meredith and I had enjoyed no personal contact, other than a chance meeting on the stairs at Blithe Lodge one evening; but, persisting to lay this false trail, I pointed out that it would be perfectly possible for him to invent some calumny against me without personal knowledge, to gain revenge on her for his expulsion.

‘No, no,’ said Bella, shaking her head vigorously, ‘it’s too implausible – impossible. No, it cannot be Sir Meredith.’ She paused as the waiter came up with more champagne.

‘You say’, she continued, toying with the stem of her glass, ‘that the implied accusations are baseless. But how can I be sure? There must, after all, be some reason why the note was written to me. I know that your father died before you were born, and that your mother, whom you have told me you loved dearly, was an authoress; and you have spoken often of your years abroad. But are there things in your past – important things, perhaps – that you have deliberately withheld from me, to which the note may refer? If so, I beg you to

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tell me now.'

'I thought you were content to like me just as I am, the present here-and-now me,' I said sulkily.

'Circumstances have changed,' she replied, leaning back in her chair. 'When Kitty retires to Dieppe, I shall be required to take her place at The Academy, and that will allow me to give up my gentlemen.' She rested a steady gaze at me. 'It is important to me, Eddie, under these new circumstances, to know everything about the man I have fallen in love with.'

It was her first outright declaration of what she felt for me; the first time that the word love had been spoken. I could see that she was waiting for some reciprocal response. But how could I tell her what she wished to hear, when my heart still ached for another, whom I could never now possess?

'Do you have nothing to say?' she asked.

'Only that you are my dearest friend in the world, as I have often told you,' I replied, 'and that I cannot bear to see you distressed.'

'But do you like me – love me, even – merely as a friend?'

'*Merely* as a friend? Is that not enough?'

'Well, I see you are now starting to play the philosopher with me, so I suppose I have my answer.'

I reached out and took her hand.

'Bella, dearest, forgive me. If you wish to call my feelings for you "love", then so be it. I am more than content for you to do so. For myself, I am devoted to you as the dearest, sweetest friend a man could have. If this is love, then I love you. And if it is love to feel safe and comfortable in your presence, then I love you. And if it is love to know that I am never happier than when you take my face in my hands and kiss me, then I love you. And if . . .'

And so I went on, until I could obfuscate no more.

I smiled, in what I hoped was my most winning manner, and was rewarded by the sight of a faint animation of her lips.

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‘Then I suppose, Mr Edward Glapthorn, that your many ingenious definitions of love must suffice – for now.’ She removed her hand from mine as she spoke. ‘But for the sake of all we have been together, and for all we may be, you must set my mind at rest – completely at rest. The note —’

‘Is false.’ I looked at her steadily. ‘False as hell – written by someone who wishes to do me – us – harm, for some reason we cannot yet know. But we shall defeat them, dearest Bella. I promise you shall know all about me, and then they shall have no hold over us. We shall be safe.’

If only it could be so. She was, as I had sincerely maintained, my dearest friend in the world; and perhaps what I felt for her was a kind of love. But in order to spare her from hurt, and myself from the possibility of losing her, I could not tell her that I had just killed one man in preparation for killing another, or that I was not who I claimed to be, and that my heart would always be enslaved to another. But she deserved to know something more about me, to set her mind at rest until such time as I could unmask the blackmailer, and put the danger from us permanently. And then? Even when I had vanquished my enemy at last, and revenged myself for what he had done to me, could she ever replace what I had lost, dear to me though she was?

The Clarendon was a respectable hotel, and we had no luggage; but the manager was an old acquaintance of mine and discreetly secured us a room.

We sat up late into the night. This, in summary, is what I told her.

My mother’s family, the Mores of Church Langton, were West Country farmers of long standing. Her uncle, Mr Byam More, was land-agent for Sir Robert Fairmile, of Langton Court near Taunton, whose only daughter, Laura, was nearly of an age with my mother. The two little girls grew up together and became the closest of friends, their friendship continuing when Laura married and moved

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to a Midlands county.

The following year my mother also married, though hers was a much less grand match than her friend's. Laura became Lady Tansor, of Evenwood in Northamptonshire, one of the most enchanting houses in England, and the seat of an ancient and distinguished line; my mother became the wife of a wastrel half-pay officer in the Hussars.

My father – always known as ‘the Captain’ – served inconspicuously in the 11th Regiment of Light Dragoons, the celebrated ‘Cherry-pickers’, which later became famous, as the 11th Prince Albert's Own Hussars, under the command of Lord Cardigan, though the Captain was long dead before the regiment's immortal action in the Russian War. He left the regiment after sustaining injury in the Peninsula and was promoted to half-pay; but his leisure was productive of nothing except a renewed dedication to a long-held love of strong liquor, which he pursued vigorously, to the exclusion of all other occupations. He spent little time with his wife, could settle at nothing, and when he was not engaged with his local companions at the Bell and Book in Church Langton, he was away visiting old regimental comrades, and partaking of the usual lively debauchery such occasions afford. The birth of a daughter, it appears, did not encourage him to mend his ways, and on the evening of her untimely death, at only five days old, he was to be found in his usual corner at the Bell and Book. He compounded his iniquity by being absent – I know not where, but I can guess why – on the day of the poor child's funeral.

My mother and the Captain, on the latter's insistence, left Church Langton soon afterwards for Sandchurch, in Dorset, where remnants of the Captain's family resided. The change brought no improvement in his behaviour: he merely exchanged the Bell and Book in Church Langton for the King's Head in Sandchurch. I have said enough, I hope, to demonstrate the Captain's execrable

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character, and his utter contempt for the duties of a husband and father.

In the summer of 1819, my mother accompanied her friend, Laura Tansor, to France, where she stayed for several months. I was born there, in the Breton city of Rennes, the following spring. Some weeks later, the two companions travelled together to Dinan, where they took lodgings near the Tour de l'Horloge. Lady Tansor then departed for Paris whilst my mother remained in Dinan for several more days. But just as she was preparing to leave for St-Malô, she received terrible news from England.

The Captain, returning home late one pitch-black night from the King's Head in an extreme state of inebriation, had wandered off the path, missed his footing, and tumbled over the cliff not twelve yards from his door. Tom Grexby, the village schoolmaster, found him the next morning, his neck quite broken.

The Captain appears to have been perfectly content to let his wife gad off to France with her friend. He found it not in the least inconvenient to have the house to himself, and to be able to spend his leisure unencumbered by even the few domestic duties required of him when his wife was at home. And so he died, a miserable mediocrity.

On a late summer evening in the year 1820, my mother brought me into Dorset, tucked up in a plaid blanket and laid on her lap, up the long dusty road that leads from the church to the little white-painted house on the cliff-top. Naturally, she received heartfelt sympathy from her friends and neighbours in Sandchurch. To return home husbandless, and with a fatherless child! All about the village, heads could not stop shaking in disbelief at the double calamity. The general commiseration was received by my mother with genuine gratitude, for the sudden death of the Captain had been a severe shock to her, despite his inadequacies as a husband.

All these things I came to know much later, after my mother's

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death. I pass now to my own memories of my childhood at Sandchurch.

We lived quietly enough – my mother and I, Beth, and Billick, a grizzled old salt, who chopped wood, tended the garden, and drove the trap. The house faced south across a stretch of soft turf towards the Channel, and from my earliest years the strongest memory I have is of the sound of waves and wind, as I lay in my cradle under the apple tree in the front garden, or in my room, with its little round window set above the porch.

We had few visitors. Mr Byam More, my mother's uncle, would come down from the West Country two or three times a year; and I also have a clear memory of a pale, sad-eyed lady called Miss Lamb, who sat talking quietly with my mother whilst I played on the rug before the parlour fire, and who reached down to stroke my hair, and ran her fingers across my cheek, in a most gentle and affecting way, which I can still vividly recall.

For a period of my childhood, my mother suffered from severe depression of spirits, which I now know was caused by the death of her childhood friend, Laura, Lady Tansor, whose name was unknown to me until after my mother's death. Her Ladyship (as I also later learned) had discreetly supported my mother with little gifts of her own money, and other considerations. But when she died, these payments ceased, and things went hard for Mamma, the Captain's paltry legacy to her having long since been exhausted; but she determined that she would do all in her power to maintain ourselves, for as long as possible, in the house at Sandchurch.

And so it came about that the publisher, Mr Colburn, received on his desk in New Burlington-street a brown-paper package containing *Edith; or, The Last of the Fitzalans*, the first work of fiction from the pen of a lady living on the Dorset coast. The covering letter sent Mr Colburn her very best compliments, and requested a professional opinion on the work.

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Mr Colburn duly replied to the lady with a courteous two-page critique of its merits and demerits, and concluded by saying that he would be happy to arrange for publication, though on terms that provided for my mother's contributing towards the costs. This she accepted, using money she could ill afford to speculate with; but the venture was successful, and Mr Colburn came back gratifyingly quickly with a request for a successor, on much improved terms.

So began my mother's literary career, which ran uninterruptedly for over ten years, until her death. Though the income derived from her literary efforts kept us safe and secure, the effort involved was prodigious, and the effects on my mother's constitution only too apparent to me as I grew older and observed her slight hunched form forever bent over the big square table that served her for a desk. Sometimes, when I entered the room, she would not even look up, but would speak gently to me as she continued to write, her face close to the paper. 'What is it, Eddie? Tell Mamma quickly, dear.' And I would tell her what I wanted and she would tell me to ask Beth – and off I would go, back to the concerns of my own world, leaving her to scratch away in hers.

At the age of six, or thereabouts, I was put into the pedagogic care of Thomas Grexby. When I joined it, Tom's little school consisted of himself, a plump, blank-faced boy called Cooper, who appeared to find even the most elementary branches of learning deeply mystifying, and me. Master Cooper was set exercises in basic schooling that required him to pass long hours on his own in strenuous concentration, tongue lolling out with the effort, leaving Tom and me to read and talk together. I made rapid progress, for Tom was an excellent teacher, and I was exceedingly eager to learn.

Under Tom's care I quickly mastered my reading, writing, and numbers; and on the firm foundations thus laid down, he encouraged me to build according to my own inclinations. Every subject, and every topic within every subject, to which Tom

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introduced me assailed me with a keen hunger to know more. In this way, my mind began to fill up with prodigious amounts of undigested information on every conceivable topic, from the principles of Archimedes to the date of the creation of the world according to Bishop Ussher.

Gradually, however, Tom began to impose some rigour on this habit of mental acquisitiveness, and I settled down to gain a thorough mastery of the Greek and Latin tongues, and a solid grounding in history and the main vernacular literatures of Europe. Tom was also a dedicated bibliophile, though his attempts to assemble a collection of fine editions of his own were severely curtailed by his always limited means. Still, his knowledge and connoisseurship in this area were considerable, and it was from him that I learned about incunabula and colophons, bindings and dentelles, editions and issues, and all the other minutiae beloved of the bibliographical scholar.

And so things went on until I reached the age of twelve, at which point my life changed.

On the day of my twelfth birthday, in April, 1832, I came down to breakfast to find my mother sitting at her work-table with a wooden box in her hands.

‘Happy birthday, Eddie,’ she smiled. ‘Come and kiss me.’

I did so most willingly, for I had seen little of her in recent days as she struggled to finish yet another work for Mr Colburn and his increasingly demanding deadlines.

‘This is for you, Eddie,’ she said quietly, holding out the box.

It was deep, hinged, about nine inches square, and made of a rich dark wood, with a pale band of lighter wood running round an inch or so above the base. The lid had raised angled sides and was inlaid on one of the faces with a coat of arms. Two little brass handles were set on each side, and on the front face was a shield-shaped escutcheon. It stands yet on my mantelpiece in Temple-street.

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‘Open it,’ my mother said gently.

Inside, nestled two soft leather purses, each containing a large quantity of gold coins. I tumbled them out onto the table. They amounted to two hundred sovereigns.*

Naturally, I could not comprehend how so much money could suddenly find its way to us in this way, when my mother’s poor drawn face told so eloquently of what necessity required her to do, constantly and with no prospect of cessation, in order to keep our little family safe from want.

‘Where has all this money come from?’ I asked in astonishment. ‘Mamma, is it yours?’

‘No, my love,’ my mother replied, ‘it is yours, to do with as you like. A present from an old, old friend, who loved you very much, but who will never see you again. She wished for this to be given to you, so that you may know that she will think of you always.’

Now, the only friend of my mother’s I could think of was sad-eyed Miss Lamb; and so for some years I cherished the belief, never contradicted by my mother, that *she* had been my benefactress. Unsure though I was of the source of my good fortune, however, the weight of the coins, as they lay in my cupped hands, had a powerful effect, for I instantly saw that they would allow me to set my mother free from her literary labours. But she refused to countenance such a thing, and with an affronted resoluteness that I had never seen in her before. After some discussion, it was agreed that the money, except

* [A former gold English coin worth 20 shillings (i.e. one pound sterling). It is notoriously difficult to estimate comparative values; but using the indexes and formulas provided by J. O’Donoghue, L. Goulding, and G. Allen in *Consumer Price Inflation Since 1750* (Office for National Statistics, 2004), in 1832 the value of the two hundred coins was roughly equivalent to £14,000 in today’s money. The coins would have carried the head of William IV (d. 1837). *Ed.*]

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for fifty sovereigns, which I insisted she must have, would be placed into the hands of her Uncle More, for investment in such a way as he would see fit to produce profit on the sum, until I attained my majority.

‘There is more, Eddie,’ she said.

I was to go to school – to a real school, away from Sandchurch. This special friend of my mother’s, who had loved me very much, had wished for me to be educated as a foundation boy at Eton College on reaching the age of twelve, and had made arrangements to this effect. That time had now arrived. When the summer was over, and the leaves had fallen from the chestnut-tree by the front gate, and if I succeeded in the examination, I would become a Scholar of the King’s College of Our Lady of Eton Beside Windsor, founded by that most devout and unworldly of English monarchs, Henry VI. At first, I did not well know how I should contemplate this momentous change, either for good or ill; but Tom Grexby soon put me right. It was the very best thing that could have happened, he said, and he knew – no one better – that it would be the making of me.

‘Hold fast, Ed,’ he said, ‘to what we have done together, and go forward to greater things. Your life, your true life, is not here – ’ he pointed to his breast and the heart beating within it – ‘ but here – ’, pointing now to his head. ‘*There* is your kingdom,’ he said, ‘and it is yours to extend and enrich as you please, to the ends of the earth.’

The scholarship examination, taken that July, held no terrors for me, and a letter came soon afterwards with the gratifying intelligence that I had been placed first on the list. Tom and I spent the remainder of the summer reading hard together, and taking long walks along the cliffs in deep conversation about the subjects we both loved. And then the day came; Billick brought the trap round to the front gate, my cases were stowed, and I climbed up beside him. Tom had walked up from the village to see me off and give me a gift

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to take with me: it was Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*, the edition printed by Newcomb for Lownds in 1682.* I stared in disbelieving delight to hold in my hands a volume I had longed to read ever since Tom had set me to consider Hamlet's celebrated contention to Horatio, on witnessing the appearance of his father's ghost, that heaven and earth contain more things than we can dream of.†

'A little addition to your philosophical library,' he said, smiling. 'But don't tell your mamma – she might think I am corrupting your young mind. And be prepared, now, to be tested on it when you come home.' At which he took my hand and shook it hard – the first time anyone had done such a thing. It impressed me strongly that I was no longer a child, but had become a man amongst men.

When all was ready, we waited in the bright and windy sunshine for my mother to come out from the house. When she did, I noticed that she was carrying something, which I soon saw was the box that had contained the two hundred sovereigns from her friend.

'Take this, Eddie, to remind you of the dear lady who has made

* [*Saducismus Triumphatus; or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions*, by Joseph Glanvill (1636–80), an attempt to convince sceptics that such things were real. It was in fact an enlarged and posthumous edition (with additions by Henry More) of Glanvill's *A Philosophical Endeavour Towards a Defence of the Being of Witches and Apparitions*, published in 1666, most of the copies of which were destroyed in the Fire of London. Glanvill's position was that disbelief in demons and witches would inevitably lead to disbelief in God and the immortality of the soul. It is now regarded as one of the most important and influential of all English works on the subject. The first edition of *Saducismus Triumphatus* was published for S. Lownds in 1681. Ed.]

† ['There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' *Hamlet*, 1: 5. Ed.]

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this possible. I know you will not let her down, and that you will work hard at your lessons and become a very great scholar. You will write, won't you, as soon as you can? And always remember that you are your mamma's best boy.'

And then she took my hand, but she did not shake it, as Tom had done, but placed it to her lips and kissed it.

To Bella, I now told the story of my time as an Eton Colleger; but as the events relating to my time at the school, in particular the manner of my leaving it, are needful for the reader of these confessions to know in some detail, I propose to describe them at a more suitable place in my narrative, together with the story of my life in the immediately succeeding years.

Bella listened attentively, occasionally getting up to walk over to the window as I spoke. When I had finished, she sat in thought for a moment.

'You have said little concerning your present employment,' she said suddenly. 'Perhaps the answer lies there. I confess that I have never been quite clear in my mind what your duties are at Tredgolds.'

'As I have said before, I work in a private capacity for the Senior Partner.'

'You will forgive me, Eddie, if I say that your answer seems a little evasive.'

'Dearest, you must understand that there are professional confidences involved, which do not permit me to say more. But I assure you that the firm is highly respected, and that my duties there – purely of an advisory nature – can have no bearing on the present matter.'

'But how can you be sure?'

Her persistence gave me the opportunity I had been looking for. I got up and began to walk around, as if gripped by some deep thought.

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‘Perhaps you are right,’ I said at last. ‘Perhaps I have overlooked the possibility of some antagonism arising from my work.’

I continued to pace the floor, until at last she came over to where I was standing.

‘Eddie, what is the matter? You look so strangely.’

She gripped my hand imploringly.

It was cruel of me to let her suffer in this way; but as I could not tell her the truth, I had no choice but to let her think that the cause of the note lay in some matter connected with my employment. And so I resorted to the lie direct.

‘There is a man,’ I said at last, ‘a client of the firm’s, who blames me for the failure of a case he has recently brought, on which the firm advised.’

‘And do you think this man could have written the note?’

‘It is possible.’

‘But for what purpose? And the note itself – why was it sent to me? And why does it say that you are not what you seem?’

I told her the man I suspected of writing the note was rich and powerful, but of notorious reputation; that he might have no other wish than to sow discord between us, to pay me back for my perceived part in the failure of his suit. She considered this for a moment, and then shook her head.

‘It was sent to *me*! How did he know about me, or where I lived?’

‘Perhaps he has set someone to follow me,’ I ventured. At this, her whole body stiffened, and she gave a little gasp.

‘Am I in danger, then?’

This, I said, was very unlikely, though I begged her not to go out again without the protection of Mr Braithwaite.

We continued to talk, as midnight came and went. I promised Bella that I would find out the truth and, if my suspicions proved correct, bring charges against the man, assuring her over and over that the implications of the note were false. But she remained visibly

agitated, and it was plain that I had succeeded only in making the situation worse by my clumsy fabrication. We lay together on the bed, fully clothed, for an hour or so, saying nothing. Then, just before first light, she asked me to take her back to St John's Wood.

We slipped out of the side-door of the Clarendon into a bitter yellow fog, walking through the almost deserted streets in silence, each of us wrapped in our own thoughts.

Arriving at Blithe Lodge, I asked if I might call on Sunday.

'If you wish,' she said flatly, taking out a key from her reticule and opening the door.

She did not turn to kiss me.

Mors certa*

I returned to Temple-street, but could not settle. Sleep was impossible; and I had no taste for reading, or for anything else for that matter. I could not even bring myself to take down my much-thumbed copy of Donne's sermons – which, like a cold bath, would usually invigorate my faculties and set me back on the path of action. I simply sat, sunk in gloomy reflection, before the empty fireplace.

I deeply regretted lying to Bella; but deceit had become a constant companion: I had already betrayed her in fact, and continued to do so in my heart. I lived for another, hungered for another, dreamed only of possessing another, though she was now lost to me beyond recall. How, then, could I tell Bella the truth? I could only lie to her. It was the lesser evil.

By the faint gleam of the staircase lamp below my window I could see the fog clinging and oozing against the glass. A dreary mood slid into me irresistibly, like a knife. Harder, deeper, it bit. I knew where it would end. I tried, as always, to hold it at bay, but to no avail. The blood began to thump in my temples until I could

* ['Death is certain'. *Ed.*]

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stand it no more; and so, submitting to my demons, I threw on my great-coat again and descended the stairs. Great Leviathan's unsleeping, inviting maw beckoned.

I found her where I knew I would, where they could always be found while a fragment of night remained – returning home from the West-end.

I caught up with her on the corner of Mount-street. A few words, and the bargain was secured.

The house was kept by a Jewess, who even at this late hour opened the door to her knock and regarded us suspiciously as we ascended three cramped flights of stairs to a long low chamber on the third floor.

The place was sparsely but decently furnished, and moderately clean. At the far end of the room, beneath a boarded-up window, a ginger kitten slept in a box festooned with bright red ribbons and with his name, 'Tyger', written in crude letters on the side; on a table close by lay a pile of half-finished needlework, the arm of a thick velvet dress hanging down towards the floor like a dead thing. At the other end of the room, alongside a half-curtained window that gave onto the street, stood a single French bed-stead draped with a patched and faded cover, too short for concealing the unemptied chamber-pot beneath.

'Do you have a name?' she asked.

'Geddington,' I replied, smiling. 'Ernest Geddington. General footman. And what do they call you?'

'*You* may call me Lady Jane,' came her answer, in a tone of strained jocularly. 'And now, Mr Ernest Geddington, general footman, I suppose you must be ready to judge the quality of the goods on offer.'

She is a slight, auburn-haired girl of about twenty years of age and speaks with a quiet Cockney intonation roughened by her life in smoke-filled places. Her attempt at levity is hollow. Her eyes are

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tired, the smile forced. I notice her red knuckles, her thin white legs, and that she coughs quietly every few seconds. Swaying uneasily on her tired and swollen feet, she begins undressing until she stands before me, shivering slightly, in just her chemise and drawers.

She leads me backwards towards the bedstead, and sits down.

‘Your carriage awaits you, Mr Geddington,’ she says, the exhaustion now plain in a barely withheld yawn.

‘Oh no, my lady,’ says I, turning her round as I speak. ‘I know my place. I’ll take the back stairs, if you please.’

And so to Bluegate-fields, dangerous and deadly. A black gash of damp stone leads up from a narrow court and into another kind of fog, dry and burning, which hurts the eyes as it curls and drifts about the room. A Lascar is huddled on the dirty, rain-stained floor, another attenuated figure mumbles in a far corner, and an empty divan awaits.

I lie down, am handed the instrument of dreams, loaded with its potent freight, and the dissolution begins. Clouds, piercing sunlight, the shining peaks of eternal mountains, and a cold green sea. An elephant gazes at me with a look of ineffable compassion in its small dark eyes. A man with red hair whose face I cannot see.

The boundaries of this world are forever shifting – from day to night, joy to sorrow, love to hate, and from life itself to death; and who can say at what moment we may suddenly cross over the border, from one state of existence to another, like heat applied to some flammable substance? I have been given my own ever-changing margins, across which I move, continually and hungrily, like a migrating animal. Now civilized, now untamed; now responsive to decency and human concern, now viciously attuned to the darkest of desires.

I admit these degradations because they are true, as true as

* [The Wandering Jew of legend. *Ed.*]

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anything else in this confession; as true as the killing of Lucas Trendle and my hatred of Phoebus Daunt; and as true as the cursed love I hold, and will always hold, for her whom I cannot yet name. If these acts disgust you, then it must be so. I do not – cannot – seek to excuse them, or explain them; for the terrible itching urge to wander perpetually, like some poor Ahasuerus,* between light and darkness, will stay with me, driving me under its goad, until the day of my death.

A reviving cigar and I return to the fog-weighted streets. Once again, I wearily climb the stairs to my rooms in Temple-street as the day struggles into life.

On reaching my sitting-room, I slumped heavily into the chair by the fireplace I had left some hours before and fell into a deep untroubled sleep.

I awoke with a start a little before noon, thinking of Jukes.

Fordyce Jukes, my neighbour on the ground floor. His greasy, cunning look and insinuating manners: ‘So nice to see you, Mr Glapthorn. Always a pleasure, Mr Glapthorn. A touch cold today, Mr Glapthorn.’ The opportune opening of his door as I pass up or down the stairs; the glutinous smile of greeting; and always the infallible sense of a watching eye at my back.

It was Jukes! I was sure of it. I should have seen it immediately. He had followed me that night to Cain-court. He knew it all.

He was a clerk in the offices of Tredgold, Tredgold & Orr, solicitors, of Paternoster-row, where I was also employed, and of which I shall have occasion to speak more fully hereafter. Clever enough, certainly; educated enough, with sufficient knowledge of my comings and goings to ensnare me. Yes, it must be Jukes. Under the pretence of civility, his eye was always upon me, as if he half-knew that I was not what I seemed. And he had recently had the opportunity to snoop amongst my papers, as I shall later relate. We had never spoken of Bella, it was true: our conversations had been

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scrupulously neutral on all personal matters; but he had watched me, followed me, and had found her out.

What had begun it? I knew him to be a damned inquisitive meddler; my nocturnal ramblings were frequent, and the stairs would have creaked out my exits to his always receptive ears. An urge one night – impossible for this ultracrepidarian sneak to resist – to follow me out, to see where I went and what I did, then repeated on other nights until a habit is formed. How many shadows had welcomed his watching eye; how many doorways; how many dark and secret places?

Then, one late-October night, he follows me again, a little earlier than usual, puzzled by the apparent lack of any specific intent or objective, as I make my way to Threadneedle-street. He cannot see Lucas Trendle standing outside the Bank: only I can see him. But he continues to watch, still puzzled, as I proceed westwards towards the Strand.

He cannot know why I committed the deed he witnessed, but he knows I did it. *He knows.*

The revelation galvanizes me. After splashing my face with cold water, I descend the stairs. His door stays closed and there is no sound from within, for these are of course his usual hours at Tredgolds. But I know that he must have contrived to be absent from the office for the afternoon in order to carry out his intention to confront me at Stoke Newington, or at least to satisfy himself that I have accepted his invitation to pay my last respects to Lucas Trendle. All the same, I stop at the foot of the staircase and contemplate

* [The monumental gates, in the Egyptian style, that lead into the cemetery. *Ed.*]

† [Isaac Watts (1674–1748), the Dissenting divine, poet, and hymn-writer. The cemetery, laid out on the former Fleetwood-Abney estate, had been opened in May 1840. *Ed.*]

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forcing an entrance to his chambers, in order to secure confirmation that the hand responsible for the two anonymous notes was his. But this, I decide, is both foolhardy and unnecessary; so I step out into the street, to execute the plan I have formed.

I am in Chancery-lane in time for the half-past twelve omnibus to Stoke Newington, for it is now November the third, and Mr Lucas Trendle is to be buried. The omnibus comes and leaves without me – I do not intend to take any chances. I therefore hold back, observing every face that passes along the street, every stationary or loitering figure. Now I move to the back of the queue for the next green ‘Favourite’, which I board, and then immediately descend as it pulls away. Satisfied that I have not been followed, I finally take my place on the one o’clock vehicle, and arrive at last at my destination.

Through the portals of Death,* surmounted by hieroglyphs announcing ‘The Gates of the Abode of the Mortal Part of Man’, I walked into Abney Cemetery, in the quiet village of Stoke Newington. London lay behind me, beneath a louring and obscuring red-yellow pall interposed between earth and sky, the progeny of a million chimneys. But here the air was clear, the day dull, but with a promise of brightness.

It wanted an hour until the time. I wandered, as a casual visitor might, amongst the spacious lawns and Lebanon cedars, observing the monuments of granite and marble – some striking, most of a becoming simplicity, for this was a resting-place for Non-Conformist mortality; the petrified angels; the columns and draped urns. I examined the small Gothic Chapel, and then made my way over to a fenced-off spot, around a large and venerable chestnut, that marked the favourite place of retirement of Dr Watts,[†] friend of the former Lady Abney, and tutor to her daughters.

Lingering here, I looked about me, taking in the patterns of paths and walkways, and trying to picture to myself how events

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might unfold.

Would Jukes risk a direct approach in such a place? Would he take me quietly aside and put some proposal to me for the maintenance of his silence? I could not feel in the least physically threatened by him – a stunted, weaselly fellow – and was, in any case, well prepared for that eventuality. I would take the initiative and suggest a civilized discussion of the matter, gentleman to gentleman. He would be appreciative of my consideration: no need for unpleasantness, no need at all. Simply a little matter of business. A stroll, perhaps, towards the chapel, and a further meeting arranged – at some mutually convenient place and time in town – in order to conclude matters. Then I would secure my advantage, complete and final.

Thus I imagined as I continued to stroll slowly up and down the path, as if in sober contemplation of my surroundings. I took out my watch. A few moments later the church clock tolled three.

I turned back towards the gates to see a hearse pulled by four horses – ostrich-plumed and richly caparisoned – enter the grounds, followed by two mourning coaches and a number of smaller carriages swathed in rich black velvet. I counted four mutes in their gowns, and a little group of perhaps half a dozen pages. A moderately expensive affair, I reflected, in spite of Mr Trendle's plain theology.

A little knot of villagers, not of the family party, followed the procession a little way behind. I scanned this group closely, moving nearer, and as quickly as I dared, to try and make out my man.

The cortège entered through one of the arches of the Chapel; the coffin was removed by the bearers and taken inside; the mourners descended and followed the doleful burden.

I had stationed myself a little distance off. His mother – there – for sure; a slight figure holding for support against the arm of a tall younger gentleman, perhaps his brother. I did not detect a wife or

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children, for which I was grateful. But the sight of his poor mother unnerved me momentarily, as I saw again in memory the rictus smile her son had given me as I had withdrawn the knife from his neck.

As the members of the family party took their places in the Chapel, I surveyed the accompanying group of neighbours and others for a second time. Jukes must be amongst them, but his distinctive squat figure was not apparent to me. Then the thought strikes me that he might send an agent; unlikely as it seems, I sweep my eye once more over the onlookers, and move closer, until I am a part of the little crowd.

‘Were you acquainted with Mr Trendle, sir?’

The plaintive enquirer was a little person of some rotundity, who gazed up at me through pale grey-green eyes from behind a pair of gold spectacles.

‘Slightly, ma’am,’ I replied.

My companion shook her head slowly from side to side. ‘Such a wonderful man – wonderful. So good and generous, so adoring of his mamma. You know Mrs Trendle, I dare say?’

‘Slightly.’

‘But perhaps not her late husband?’

‘No, indeed.’

I did not wish to keep up the conversation, but she came back again.

‘You are of the Chapel, perhaps?’

I replied that I had known the deceased only through business.

‘Ah, business. I do not understand business. But Mr Trendle did. Such a clever man! What the dear people in Africa will do without him I cannot think.’

She continued her lament for some time, animadverting in particular, with a curious kind of wistful relish, against the wickedness and certain damnation of the person who had thus deprived the Africans of their great champion.

Eventually, unencouraged by any response from me, she smiled faintly and waddled away, her fluttering mourning clothes making her seem like a great aggregated ball of soot escaped from the prison of fog that still lay in a dark looming bar across the murmuring city at our back, pressing down on the poor souls beneath like the weight of sin itself.

No sign. Nothing. I moved about the crowd, anxious to be part of it but wary of any individual contact. When would he come? *Would* he come?

In due course, the Chapel bell tolled out and the coffin, followed by the mourners and their attendants, was carried back out to the awaiting hearse. Slowly, the procession wound its way to the place that had been prepared.

The ceremony of interment was duly performed by an elderly white-haired clergyman, and the usual displays of grief and abandonment were displayed. I found myself unwillingly regarding the coffin as it was lowered gently into the receiving earth, the last mortal home of the unfortunate Lucas Trendle, late of the Bank of England. For I had put him there, and for nothing he had done to me.

The party began to disperse. I looked once more at his mother, and at the gentleman I had seen accompanying her earlier. From beneath the rim of his hat peeked a narrow curtain of red hair.

Eventually, I was left alone at the graveside with the diggers and their assistants. Of Fordyce Jukes there was not a trace.

I waited for nearly an hour, and then made my way back towards the Egyptian portals, with darkness coming on. The gatekeeper tipped his hat as he let me through a smaller side entrance. I took a deep breath. The wretched Jukes had played me for a fool, sending me all the way out here as a prank, for which he would pay dearly when the moment of reckoning came.

But then, just as I was passing beneath the deeply shadowed arch into the outer world, I felt a tap on my shoulder as a person – a man

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– pushed past me. I had instinctively swung to the left, towards the shoulder on which I had received the tap; but he had gone to the right, quickly becoming absorbed in a remaining group of mourners standing just outside the gates, and disappearing into the deepening gloom.

It had not been Jukes. Taller, broader, quick on his feet. *It had not been Jukes.*

I returned to Temple-street dejected and confused. As I passed through the staircase entrance, the door of the ground-floor chamber opened.

‘Good evening, Mr Glaphorn,’ said Fordyce Jukes. ‘I trust you’ve had a pleasant day?’

6:

Vocat*

The conviction that Fordyce Jukes was my blackmailer would not leave me; and yet he had not been at Stoke Newington, and no attempt had been made by any other person or persons to make themselves known to me – except for that tap on the shoulder: that unsettling sense of gentle but firm pressure deliberately applied. An accidental brush by a hastily departing stranger, no doubt. But not the first such ‘accident’ – I still thought of the incident outside the Diorama – and not the last.

Why had he sent me out to Stoke Newington, if he had not intended to reveal himself to me there? I could reach no other conclusion but that he was biding his time; that the second note, summoning me to the interment of my victim, had been designed to apply a little additional torment, which would be repaid with compound interest. Two communications received. Perhaps a third would bring matters to a head.

I kept a close eye on Jukes from that moment on. From my sitting-room window, if I placed my face close against the glass, I

* [‘He calls’. The significance of the title of this section is not altogether clear. *Ed.*]

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could just see down to where the staircase gave onto the street. I observed him carrying in his provisions, or passing the time of day with the occupants of neighbouring chambers, sometimes taking the mangy little dog he kept out for a walk by the river. His work hours were regular, his private activities innocent.

Nothing happened: the expected third communication did not come; there was no soft knock on the door, and no indication of an unravelling plan. Slowly, over the following days, I began to gain ground on my enfeebled self, and, with returning strength and concentration, emerged one morning after a sound night's sleep – the first for a week or more – to rededicate myself to the destruction of my enemy.

Of *his* history and character you shall know more – much more – as this narrative continues. He was ever in my mind. I breathed him in every day, for his fate was anchored to mine. ‘*And I shall cover his head with the mountains of my wrath, and press him down, / And he shall be forgotten by men.*’ This is an untypically fine line from the epic pen of P. Rainsford Daunt (*The Maid of Minsk*, Book III); but there is a finer by Mr Tennyson, which I had constantly before my mental eye: ‘*I was born to other things.*’*

On the Sunday following the interment of Lucas Trendle, I had called at Blithe Lodge, as arranged, and had been shown into the back parlour by Charlotte, the Scottish housemaid. I waited for some little time until, at last, I heard the sound of Bella's distinctive tripping tread on the stairs.

‘How are you, Eddie?’ she asked. She did not take my hand, or kiss me spontaneously, as she might have done once, or even proffer her own cheek to be kissed.

* [The line is from *In Memoriam* (1850), cxx: ‘Let him, the wiser man who springs/Hereafter, up from childhood shape/His action like the greater ape,/But I was *born* to other things’. *Ed.*]

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We exchanged the usual pleasantries as she sat down on a chaise-longue by the tall sash-window that looked down over the dark garden below.

‘Well, then,’ she said, ‘tell me what you’ve been doing. Things have been so busy here. So much to do, and so many things to think about! And with Mary leaving – you know of course that Sir Charles is going to marry her! Such excitement – and so brave of him! But she deserves it, the dear girl, and he does love her so. Kitty has a new girl coming tomorrow, but of course we never know how these things will work out, and then Kitty herself has gone back to France, and so it falls to me to conduct the interview, as well as everything else, and you know that Charlie is to go to Scotland for her sister’s confinement . . .’

She twittered on in this inconsequential way for some minutes, laughing from time to time and curling her fingers around in her lap as she spoke. But the old light in her eyes had gone. I saw and felt the change. I did not have to ask the reason. I could see that she had considered, in the cold light of day, what I had told her at the Clarendon Hotel, and had found it wanting – fatally so. A tale told to a child; a demeaning, absurd fantasy of a paste-board villain and his mysterious henchman – one of my mother’s stories, perhaps, dusted down for the purpose. All to hide the truth – whatever hideous truth it was – about Edward Glaphorn, who was not what he seems. It was only too apparent that she had taken ‘Veritas’ at his word.

Charlotte brought us tea, and Bella continued with her trivial banter – I sitting silently, smiling and nodding from time to time as she went on – until a knocking on the front door announced the arrival of some member of The Academy to whom she had to attend.

We stood up; I shook her unlingering hand and left by the garden door. She had been a dear friend and companion to me; but I had

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not loved her as she had wished me to do. I had sought, out of deep regard, to protect her from hurt; and, if my fate had been otherwise, would have married her gladly, and been content to give myself to her alone. But my heart had never been mine to bestow on whom I pleased: it had been ripped from me by a greater power and given to another, against my will, and would now remain in *her* possession, a poor forgotten prisoner, for all eternity.

The next day, feeling tetchy and out of sorts following the previous evening's conversation with Bella, I sent a note over to Le Grice proposing a spin in the skiff I kept at the Temple Pier, to which he immediately agreed. Our plan was to row down to the Hungerford Passenger Bridge, take a little lunch at his club, and then row back. The morning had broken fair, though with a brisk wind, and I sallied forth to meet him with a lust for exertion.

At the bottom of the stairs, the door to Jukes's room stood ajar. I stopped, unable to help myself.

Across the street I saw the distinctive figure of my neighbour, his rounded back towards me, disappearing towards the Temple Gardens with his little dog in tow. He had not meant to leave his door open, of that I was sure, a careful, crafty fellow like that. But it *was* open, and it was an irresistible invitation to me.

The sitting-room was a large, panelled apartment, with a little arched door in the far corner leading to the sleeping area and wash-room. It was comfortably furnished, with evidence of taste and discernment that seemed to sit ill with the walking, breathing Fordyce Jukes. I had often wondered, as I gazed down on his comings and goings from my room in the eaves, what interior world the funny little creature inhabited; to see such wholly unsuspected illustrations of that world palpably adorning the walls and shelves momentarily distracted me from my immediate purpose.

Adjacent to the door of his bedchamber stood an elegant glass-fronted cabinet containing several exquisite items: miniatures from

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the Tudor period (a Hilliard?), little painted boxes of the highest quality workmanship, Chinese ivory carvings of the greatest delicacy, Delftware, Bohemian goblets; a dazzling miscellany of objects linked only by the refinement of taste – and sufficiency of income – that had assembled them. On the walls, carefully mounted and displayed, were equally startling indications of the unexpected character of Fordyce Jukes's interior world. Works by Altdorfer, Dürer, Hollar, and Baldung, a Callot; even – it could not be? – a sketched self-portrait by Rembrandt. Books, too, which drew my especial attention. I gazed in wonderment at the first edition of Thomas Netter's *Sacramentalia* (folio, Paris, François Regnault, 1523),* which I had long wished to own, and at other sweetly choice items that stood arranged in glowing ranks in another locked cabinet aside the desk.

My amazement was complete. That such a man as Jukes could have assembled this collection of rarities, beneath my very nose, as it were, seemed inconceivable. How had he come by it all? Where had he acquired the taste and knowledge? And where the money to dispose on these treasures?

I began to consider the idea that blackmail and extortion might be Jukes's real trade, his secret profession, slyly exercised away from the workaday light of his duties at Tredgolts, though with a success that I could hardly credit. Taste and knowledge can be acquired; money, if it be not naturally to hand, demands other skills to amass.

* [Thomas Netter (c.1375–1430), born in Saffron Walden in Essex (thus known in religion as Thomas Waldensis), was a Carmelite theologian and controversialist and confessor to Henry V. He played a prominent part in the prosecution of Wycliffites and Lollards. The *Sacramentalia* is the third volume of the author's *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei ecclesiae catholicae*, a complete apologia of Catholic dogma and ritual intended to counter the attacks of Wycliff and others. On the face of it, it is a strange work for the narrator to covet. *Ed.*]

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Perhaps his talent, in which his employment at Tredgolds would place him in a helpful position, was to extort money from clients of the firm who had something to hide from the world at large.

It seemed fanciful at first, but the more I thought on it, the more it seemed to constitute a sort of possibility, an explanation for what I had found in this treasure cave that had lain, unremarked, for so long beneath my feet. Was I, then, merely the most recent of his victims? Did he suppose that I had the means to satisfy his demands, and so enable him to acquire one more rare and beautiful item for his walls and cabinets? But I would be no victim of Fordyce Jukes's, or of any man's. From these thoughts, I recalled myself to my present task and turned towards the desk, which, like mine three floors above, stood before the window looking out into the street.

The polished surface bore nothing except a fine silver inkstand. The drawers were fast locked. I looked about me. Another locked cupboard in the corner. No papers. No note-books. Nothing to show me the character of Jukes's hand for comparison with the notes Bella and I had received. Another sign, I thought, that my renewed suspicions were well founded. A man who had acquired so much through extortion would not be so careless as to leave such evidence easily open to view.

Then, on a small side table by the fireplace, I saw an open book. Approaching nearer I saw that it was an octavo bible of the seventeenth century, though of no especial beauty or rarity. The title-words of the opened recto met my astonished gaze:

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

I had found no evidence of the creature's handwriting, but this seemed to provide the proof I needed that he was the blackmailer.

I turned to leave, standing at the half-open door for a moment to see if he was returning; but the street was clear, so I stepped out and

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headed down towards Temple Pier.

7:

In dubio*

Le Grice was waiting for me, lounging against a wall, cheroot in mouth, in the feeble but welcome sun.

‘God damn you, G.,’ he cursed, good-humouredly, as I approached. ‘Been waitin’ for you for fifteen minutes or more. Where the devil have you been? The tide will be out before we get off.’

We pulled the skiff down to the water, stowed our coats in the stern, rolled up our sleeves, and pushed off into the inky brown water.

Behind us were the myriad masts of the Docks, London Bridge, dense with its morning traffic, and the looming dome of St Paul’s; before us, the distant line of Waterloo Bridge, and the slow curve of the broad stream down towards Hungerford Market. All around were vessels of every type and size, plying up and down, and on each bank the city bristled in silhouette against the pearly grey light, brushed over with the always present haze the metropolis exuded. Past vistas of dark lanes opening out towards the river’s edge we went, past the crazy lines of chimney pots and jagged tenements

* [‘In doubt’. *Ed.*]

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etched against the sky, and the nobler outlines of spires and battlements, past watermen's stairs and landing stages, warehouses and gardens. All about us gulls wheeled and circled, their raucous cries mingling with the river sounds of waves slapping against moored hulls, the flap of sails and pennants, the distant toot of a steam-tug.

We rowed on steadily, saying nothing, each enjoying the sensation of pulling against the mighty stream, glad to be out on the open water – even foul Thames water on a November day. For my part, I felt sweet release from the many nights I had spent staring at the skylight above my bed. In front of me, the muscles of Le Grice's great back pulled and stretched the oyster-coloured silk of his waistcoat almost to bursting, and for a moment my mind started back to my former dream of rowing down a hot summer river behind the muffled form of Lucas Trendle. But the image passed, and I pulled on.

Just below Essex Wharf, a woman dressed in tattered and filthy clothes, a hamper suspended by her side from a leather strap about her shoulders, the remnant of a ragged bonnet on her head, was prodding and poking along the shore, serenely seeking objects of value in the ooze and foetid slime of the river's margin. She looked up and, ankle-deep in the mud, stood watching us, her hand shielding her eyes against the sun, as we glided past.

After tying up below Hungerford Stairs, I reached into the stern to retrieve our coats. On doing so I noticed, some way behind us, a single figure in a small rowing boat, oars down in the water. He had clearly been proceeding upstream on a similar course to ourselves, but now, like us, he had come to a rest, though he remained some distance out from the shore.

'Did you not see him?' asked Le Grice, twisting his great neck back towards me and looking over at the solitary figure. 'He joined us soon after we saw the woman at Essex Wharf. Friend of yours?'

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No friend of mine, I thought. He presented a threatening silhouette, his tall hat standing up starkly black against the light that was now breaking westwards down the channel of the river.

Then it struck me. I had been a fool to believe that Fordyce Jukes would think of following me himself, knowing that I would instantly have recognized him. He must have some accomplice— and here he was, the man in the boat, grimly biding his time; the man, perhaps, who had tapped me on the shoulder outside the Diorama; and the man who had pushed past me under the Egyptian portals at Abney Cemetery. No longer invisible; no longer shadow-hidden: he was here, in full daylight, though still out of reach. But sweet relief washed over me on seeing him; for now, I hoped, I could begin to turn the tables. *Come a little closer*, I whispered to myself, *just a little closer. Let me see your face.*

‘What’s that you say?’ Le Grice was reaching back for me to hand him his coat.

‘I said nothing. Here.’

I threw his coat at him, and then turned again to look back at our pursuer. If I could lure him from the safety of his boat on to dry land, then I might contrive an opportunity to confront him. I pulled on my coat, feeling the reassuring weight of the pocket-pistols I always carried with me. Then one more look astern, to fix the distant figure of the watcher in my mind.

He was exceptionally tall, with broad shoulders – even broader, perhaps, than Le Grice’s; clean shaven, as far as I could tell, though his upturned coat collar might conceal whiskers; and his large ungloved hands gripped the oars purposefully as he contended with the current to maintain his stationary position. But the more I scrutinized him, the more anxious I became. A formidable opponent, doubtless; but I am also a big man, and was confident that I could give a good account of myself, if it came to it. Why, then, this anxiety? What was it about this bobbing figure that

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discomfited me?

We gained the street and proceeded to Le Grice's club, the United Service. Le Grice had been kicking around for some years with no fixed prospect in view; but the opening of hostilities in the East earlier in the year, and the despatch of the expeditionary force to the Crimea, had suddenly stirred him to buy into the Guards, though he had yet to take up his duties. He talked excitedly of his impending military career. Like everyone at that time, his head was full of the great events in the Russian campaign, especially of the Light Brigade's heroic charge at Balaclava, soon to be so memorably evoked in Mr Tennyson's great ode.* For my part, I was happy to let him talk on, for my mind was occupied with our friend from the river. I'd expected to catch sight of him by now, but, to my surprise, no one appeared to be following us.

We reached the steps of the club, crowded with arriving members, without incident. Lunch was excellent in every respect. Le Grice, in fine form, called for another bottle of champagne, and then another; but I wished to stay alert, thinking still of our pursuer, and so let him have the lion's share. After an hour or so had passed, it became apparent that my companion was in no fit state to row back with me; and so, after putting him into a hansom, I walked back down to the river alone.

Stopping every few yards to make sure I was not being tracked, I finally arrived at Hungerford Steps, retrieved the skiff, and prepared to row back. My head was racing. Where was he? I set off, turning my head from time to time, expecting to see him, but the sun was bright in my eyes and I could see nothing. Arriving at Temple Pier, I stood up to moor the craft, lost my balance, and fell back into the

* ['The Charge of the Light Brigade' was published in *The Examiner* on 9 December 1854. The poem was reprinted in *Maud, and Other Poems* (1855). *Ed.*]

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river. As I sat there, in two feet of cold stinking water, the amused object of attention of a number of passers-by on the embankment above, I saw the dark figure of the solitary rower, a hundred yards or so downstream. Once more he stopped his craft mid-stream, laid back his oars, and sat looking straight ahead with ominous concentration. Again, no features were discernible, simply this alarming attitude of acute attentiveness.

Cursing under my breath, I slopped and splashed my way back to Temple-street. At each corner I stopped and looked back, to see if the mysterious rower had disembarked his craft and was following me, but there was no sign of him. Unable to bear the water in my boots any longer, I tore them off in frustrated fury and walked the last few yards to the staircase of my chambers in just my stockinged feet.

And so it was, my sodden stockings muffling the sound of my footsteps on the stairs, that I came upon Fordyce Jukes bending down at my door, preparing to slip something underneath it.

He screamed like a stuck pig as, throwing my dripping boots on the stairs, I grabbed him by his miserable neck and hurled him to the floor.

Holding him still by the scruff, like the cur he was, I unlocked the door and kicked him inside.

He cowered in the corner, his hand across his face.

‘Mr Glapthorn! Mr Glapthorn!’ he whimpered, ‘whatever is the matter? It is I, your neighbour Fordyce Jukes. Do you not know me?’

‘Know you?’ I snarled back. ‘Oh yes, I know you. I know you very well for the villain you are.’

He leant back a little into the corner, letting his hand drop away from his face to reveal a look of genuine alarm. I had him now.

‘Villain? What can you mean? What villainy have I done to you?’

I advanced towards him, as he frantically forced himself back yet further into the corner, the heels of his boots scraping noisily on the

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boards, in a futile attempt to escape the beating I was now preparing to administer. But something held me back.

‘Well, let us see now,’ said I. ‘Perhaps this will serve as an instance.’

I turned away from him and went back to the door, picked up the paper he had been pushing under it when I’d arrived unnoticed behind him, and began to read it.

It was written in a highly distinctive hand; but it was the distinctiveness of the professional scribe, the practised hand of a solicitor’s clerk. It bore no resemblance at all to either of the notes Bella and I had received. And the message it contained? An invitation for Mr Edward Glaphorn to join Mr Fordyce Jukes, and a few other friends, at a dinner to celebrate his birthday, at the Albion Tavern, on Saturday evening, November the twelfth.

I stood in silent befuddlement.

What on earth could be happening? I had caught the rogue red-handed, or so I thought; and now – this! Was it some kind of diabolical variation on his usual game to throw me off the scent? And then, as I considered the matter, the clearer became the possibility that I might have been mistaken – dangerously mistaken – about the identity of the blackmailer; but if not Jukes, then who?

My stomach tightened as the threatening figure of the solitary rower rose up before my mind’s eye. The anxiety I had earlier experienced returned; and then, gradually, the truth began to form itself, and I saw what I should have seen when I had tried to force the blackmail note to give up the identity of its author.

Still Jukes cowered in the corner, but he had seen my discomposure on reading the invitation, and his attitude had relaxed somewhat.

‘Mr Glaphorn, please. Allow me to stand.’

I said nothing, but walked instead over to my armchair by the fire and threw myself down, still clutching the piece of paper.

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I heard him pick himself up from the floor, dust himself down, and walk across to where I was sitting.

‘Mr Glapthorn, please, I meant no harm, no harm at all. Perhaps coming on me like that – it is quite dark on your landing, is it not? – I can see – that is, I expect you mistook me for some house-thief or such. A shock, I’m sure, to find someone here. But no harm intended, sir, no harm at all, no, none at all . . .’

And so he went on, repeating the same sentiments over and over, and wringing his fat little hands to emphasize his contrition and regret at the trouble caused.

I took a deep breath, rose from my chair, and faced my neighbour.

‘Mr Jukes, I apologize. Sincerely and completely. It is *I* who have done *you* wrong. Much wrong. You are right. In the gloom of the landing I thought that someone was attempting to break into my rooms. I have been on the river, you see, and am a little fatigued and dizzy from the exertion. I did not recognize you. Unforgivable.’

I screwed up all my will-power and held out my hand.

He limply reciprocated, at which I immediately withdrew myself to my work-table and sat down again.

‘I thought that we see so little of each these days, Mr Glapthorn,’ I heard him say, though my mind was already far away from the stunted figure in old-fashioned breeches and tailcoat standing on my Turkey rug, wringing his hands still, and looking about him nervously. ‘You are so rarely in the office now, and I used to so enjoy our little chats. Not that we have ever been friends as such, I realize, but we are neighbours, and neighbours, you know, should be neighbourly. And so I thought, perhaps Mr Glapthorn is in need of some company? And then I thought, couldn’t I bring together a few friends to partake in a little celebratory dinner – it being my birthday on Saturday – and invite Mr Glapthorn—’

He had paused.

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‘I’m afraid I am not free on Saturday, Mr Jukes, but I thank you for your invitation.’

‘Of course. I understand, Mr Glapthorn. You are a busy man, I’m sure.’

He edged a little towards the door.

‘Well,’ he said, in an effort to brighten his tone, ‘I shall take my leave.’

I was preparing to apologize again for my rough behaviour, but he forestalled me with a rapid shake of his head. ‘Pray, say no more, Mr Glapthorn. All a mistake. No harm done, none at all.’

I nodded. Then a thought struck me. Perhaps I might be wrong in acquitting him.

‘A moment, Mr Jukes.’

He looked up.

‘Are you a religious man?’

‘Religious?’ he said, evidently surprised at my question. ‘Well, I suppose I am as observant in that way as most. Brought up strictly, though perhaps I have relaxed a little in my ways. But I attend the Temple Church every Sunday morning, and read my bible every day, sir – every day.’ He raised his head as he said the last words, and pulled his shoulders back in a little gesture of defiance, as if to say, ‘There now. Here is villainy!’

‘Every day?’ I said, quizzically.

‘Every day. Regular as clockwork, a few pages before I take Little Fordyce for his walk. It is surprising how much one gets through. I am coming towards the end of the Old Testament for the second time this twelvemonth.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘that is excellent. Excellent. Good day, Mr Jukes, and —’

He held up his hand again. ‘No need, sir, no need at all.’ With which he turned, smiled wanly, and closed the door.

I sat, still in my dripping clothes, looking out of my little dormer

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window at rags of clouds, drifting overhead like smoke over a battlefield, until I heard him descend the stairs and bang his own door shut.

8:

Amicus verus*

The following morning, a note came from Le Grice apologizing for this over-consumption of champagne the previous day, and announcing that he would be at the Ship and Turtle at his usual hour that evening, if I cared to join him.

He was in voluble mood, and I happily let him regale me with reports of what this fellow or that had been up to, who had said what at the club, and where so and so had been, the gossip supplemented by an excited account of all the business he was engaged upon preparatory to leaving for the war. I was sorry he was going, and was of course anxious for his safety; but it was impossible not to become caught up in his enthusiasm, to the extent that I almost began to regret that I had never thought of going for a soldier myself.

We parted just before midnight. He was heading back to his rooms in Albany[†] when he suddenly stopped short.

* ['A true friend'. *Ed.*]

† [On the north side of Piccadilly, opposite Fortnum & Mason. Formerly Melbourne House, built in 1770, it was converted into sixty-nine elegant bachelor apartments in 1802 by Henry Holland. The author properly refers to it as 'Albany' (without the definite article). *Ed.*]

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‘By the bye,’ he called back, ‘I almost forgot. This was sent to me at the Club. It’s for you.’ Reaching into the inside pocket of his great-coat, he handed me a small wrapped package, obviously containing a book.

‘You’ll never guess who it’s from.’ I looked at him blankly.

‘That fearful tug Daunt. You’ll remember him, of course. Pretty thick at school, weren’t you, for a time? Scribbles poetry for a living now. Sends his compliments to me with a request to pass this on to you. Haven’t written back yet, of course. Thought I’d speak to you first.’ He instantly saw that his words, and the package, had produced an effect, and he reddened.

‘I say, G., is anything the matter? You look a little upset.’ I delayed my reply as I turned the package over in my hands.

‘Has he written to you before?’

‘First time, old boy. Not quite my sort. Never expected to hear from him again after going down from the Varsity. Damned unpleasant blighter, always putting on airs. Little sign, by all accounts, that he’s changed for the better.’

When I did not reply, Le Grice took a step closer and looked me straight in the eye.

‘Look here,’ he said, ‘there’s something going on, I can see. Wouldn’t dream of pressing you, of course, but glad to help, if I can.’

‘You can tell him I’m travelling abroad,’ I replied. ‘Present whereabouts, unknown. Date of return, uncertain.’

‘Right ho. Nothing easier. Consider it done.’ He coughed nervously and made to go; but he had only taken a few steps when he suddenly stopped and swung round to face me again.

‘There’s another thing. You can tell me to go and boil my head, but answer me this, if you can. Why was that fellow following us on the river yesterday? It’s no use saying he wasn’t, so why not come out with it straight.’

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I could have hugged the dear old bear. For weeks I had been living on my nerves, desperately engaged night and day in mental combat with my enemy, my spirit broken by betrayal, racked by rage and despair, but unable to confide in any living soul. I'd believed I had no ally, no strength other than my own with which to contest the great battle of my life; but here was dear old Le Grice, bull-headed in friendship, obstinately loyal, offering me his hand. And if I took it? No one more trustworthy than him, no one more willing to fight by your side to the last breath, no one more forgiving of a friend's sins. Yes, but if I took it? He would need to be told the secrets I have lived with for so long: would he then keep faith with me, stand by me in the final contention, and forgive me? Then he spoke again.

'You and I, G. – chalk and cheese. But you're the best friend I have. Do anything for you, don't you know, anything at all. Not good at this sort of thing, so you'll just have to take it as it comes. You're in trouble – no point trying to deny it. It's been written on your face for weeks past. Whether it's to do with Daunt, or with this fellow on the river, I can't say. But something's wrong, even though you've tried to pretend all's well. But it isn't, so why not spill it, and let's see what can be done about it?'

There are times in a man's life when he must put his immediate fate into the hands of another, regardless of the risk. In a moment, though doubts remained, I had decided. I would spill it.

'Dinner at Mivart's, tomorrow night,' I said.

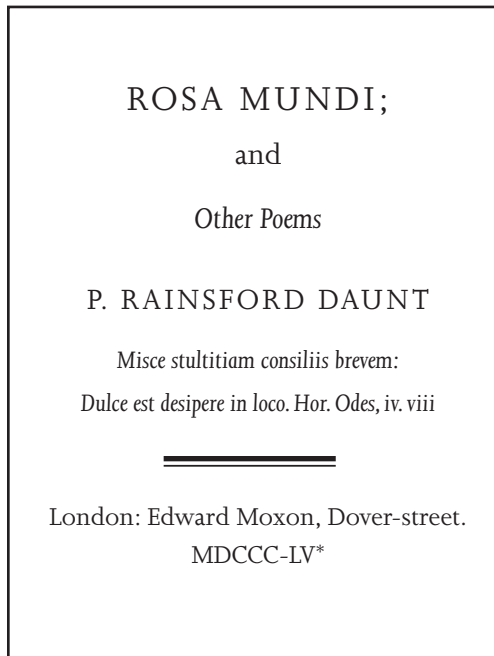
And then we shook hands.

I returned home in meditative mood, questioning the wisdom of confiding in Le Grice, but still determined to go through with it. I shrank, though, from the prospect of confessing what had been done to Lucas Trendle in Cain-court, and what I was planning to do

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now that I had proved myself capable of murder. I was sure, when I had revealed my true history to Le Grice, and set before him the calculated viciousness of our mutual acquaintance, Phoebus Daunt, that I would secure his full-hearted sympathy and support. But would even his staunch soul be put to the test by the knowledge of what I had been driven to do? And could I, even in the name of friendship, ask him to share this burden? Musing thus, I arrived in Temple-street and mounted the stairs.

Once in my rooms, I unwrapped the package Le Grice had given to me. As I'd guessed, it contained a book – a small octavo in dark green cloth, untrimmed, bearing the title *Rosa Mundi*. Taking up my paper-knife, I slowly began to cut away the edges, and opened out the title-page.



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The fly-leaf had been inscribed by the author: ‘*To my friend, E.G., with fondest memories of old times, and hope of early reunion*’. Beneath the inscription was a couplet, ‘*When all is known, and naught remains,/But Truth released from falsehood’s chains*’, which I later discovered was a quotation from one of the poems printed in the volume. If there was meaning in it, I could see none.

I threw the book down in disgust, but could not help staring at the open fly-leaf. To see that hand again, after so many years! It had not changed a great deal: I recognized the idiosyncratic flourish of the initial ‘T’ of ‘Truth’, the intricate descenders (the bane of his teachers at school), the fussiness of it. But what memory had been aroused by it? Of Latin Alcaics and hexameters, exchanged and criticized? Or of something else?

The next evening, as agreed, I met Le Grice at Mivart’s.*

He was awkward and ill at ease, coughing nervously, and constantly running his finger around the inside of his shirt collar, as if it was too tight. As we lit our cigars I asked him if he was still willing to hear what I had come to tell him.

‘Absolutely, old boy. Ready and waiting. Fire away.’

‘Of course I may count on your complete – your complete, mind – discretion?’

He laid down his cigar, positively bristling with indignation.

‘When I give my word to some fellow at the club,’ he said, with impressive seriousness, ‘then he may expect me to keep it, no questions asked. When I give my word to *you*, therefore, there can be not the slightest doubt – not the slightest – that I shall be inclined, under any provocation, to betray whatever confidence you

* [The volume was published in December 1854, post-dated 1855. The Latin motto from Horace reads: ‘Mix with your wise counsels some brief folly./In due place to forget one’s wisdom is sweet’. *Ed.*]

* [At 51 Brook Street, Berkeley Square. Opened in 1812 by James Mivart, it is now better known as Claridge’s. *Ed.*]

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may honour me with. Hope I've made myself clear.' Having delivered himself of this short, but emphatic, speech, he picked up his cigar again and sent me a look that plainly said, 'There: I've said what needed to be said: now contradict me if you dare.'

No, he would never betray me, as others had done; he would be true to his word. But I had resolved that there would be a limit to what I would tell him – not because I distrusted him, or even that I feared he might repudiate our friendship when he learned what I had done, and what was now in my mind to do; but because there was mortal danger in knowing all, to which I would not expose him for all the world.

Calling for another bottle, I began to tell him, in outline, what I now propose to tell you, my unknown reader, in full and complete form – the extraordinary circumstances of my birth; the character and designs of my enemy; and the futile passion that has made it impossible that I can ever love again.

If it is true, as the ancient sage averred, that confession of our faults is the next thing to innocence,[†] then I hope this narrative will weigh something in my favour with those who may read it.

I begin with my name. When 'Veritas' warned Bella that Edward Glaphorn was not what he seems, he lived up to his pseudonym. To Bella, to my employer, to my neighbours in Temple-street, and to others with whom you will soon become acquainted, I was Edward Glaphorn. But I was born Edward Charles Glyver – the name by which I had been known at Eton, when I first met Willoughby Le Grice, and by which, shortened to 'G.', he has known me ever since. Yet even this was not my true name, and Captain and Mrs Edward Glyver of Sandchurch, Dorset, were not my parents. It all began, you see, in deceit; and only when the truth is told at last will expiation be made and the poor unquiet soul, from whom all these

[†] [Publius Syrus (42 BC), *Maxims. Ed.*]

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troubles have flowed, find peace at last.

You have already learned something of the early history of Edward Glaphorn, which, though incomplete, was also a true account of the upbringing of Edward Glyver. I shall return to that history, and its continuance, in due course. But let us first put a little flesh on the bones of Phoebus Rainsford Daunt, my illustrious but as yet shadowy enemy, whose name has already graced the pages of this narrative.

He will already be known to many of you, of course, through his literary works. No doubt, in due course, for the delectation of posterity, some enterprising drudge will assemble an anodyne *Life and Letters* (in three fat volumes), which will reveal nothing whatsoever concerning the true character and proclivities of its subject.* Let me be your guide instead – like Virgil leading Dante through the descending circles of Hell.

By what authority do I presume to take on such a role? My own. I have become the detective of his life, seeking, over many years, to learn everything I could about my enemy. You will find this strange. No doubt it is. The scholar's temperament, however, which I possess in abundance, is not content with facile generalities, or with unsubstantiated testimony, still less with the distortions of self-promotion. The scholar, like the lawyer, requires corroboration, verification, and firm documentary evidence, of a primary character; he sifts, and weighs, and patiently accumulates; he analyses, compares, and combines; he applies the nicest of

* [An attempt was begun by J.R. Wildgoose (1831–89) in 1874 but was abandoned. A fragmentary biographical assessment of Daunt, based on Wildgoose's researches, appeared in his *Adventures in Literature* (1884). Wildgoose was himself a minor poet and author of a short life of Daunt's contemporary, Mortimer Findlay (1812–78). As far as I am aware, no further attempts have been made to memorialize Daunt's life and work. *Ed.*]

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discrimination to separate fact from fabrication, and possibility from probability. Using such methods, I have devoted myself to many objects of study in the course of my life, as I shall describe; but to none of these have I given so much of my time and care as to this pre-eminent subject. Luck, too, has played its part; for my enemy has attained to celebrity, and this always loosens tongues. ‘Ah yes, I knew him when he was a boy.’ ‘Phoebus Daunt – the poet? Indeed I remember him.’ ‘You should speak to so-and-so. He knows a good deal more about the family than me.’ And so it proceeds, piece by piece, memory by memory, until, at last, a picture begins to emerge, rich and detailed.

It is all there for the picking, if you know how. The principal sources on which I have drawn are as follows: the fragmentary recollections of Daunt’s time at Eton, which appeared in the *Saturday Review* of October the 10th, 1849; a fuller memoir of his childhood, adolescence, and literary career, punctuated throughout with little droppings of maudlin verse and published in 1853 as *Scenes of Early Life*; the personal testimony of Dr T—, the physician who attended Daunt’s mother before and immediately after her son’s birth; the unpublished diary of Dr A.B. Daunt, his father (which, I regret to say, came into my hands by unorthodox means); and the recollections of friends and neighbours, as well as those of numerous servants and other attendants.

Why I began on this biographical quest will soon be told. But now Phoebus – the radiant one – attends us. Let us not keep him waiting.

This is an uncorrected sampler,
not for sale or quotation

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