

Le Fanu Joseph Sheridan

Guy Deverell. Volume 2 of 2



Joseph Le Fanu

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	15
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	22
CHAPTER VII	25
CHAPTER VIII	28
CHAPTER IX	31
CHAPTER X	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	35

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CHAPTER I

Lady Alice and Varbarriere tête-à-tête in the Library

"Well, he told you something, did not he?" persisted Lady Alice.

"In the sense of a distinct disclosure, nothing," said the Bishop, looking demurely over his horizontal leg on the neatly-shorn grass. "He did speak to me upon subjects – his wishes, and I have no doubt he intended to have been much more explicit. In fact, he intimated as much; but he was overtaken by death – unable to speak when I saw him next morning."

"He spoke to you, I know, about pulling down or blowing up that green chamber," said Lady Alice, whose recollections grew a little violent in proportion to the Bishop's reserve and her own impatience.

"He did not suggest quite such strong measures, but he did regret that it had ever been built, and made me promise to urge upon his son, as you once before mentioned you were aware, so soon as he should come of age, to shut it up."

"And you did urge him?"

"Certainly, Lady Alice," said the Bishop, with dignity. "I viewed it in the light of a duty, and a very sacred one, to do so."

"He told you the reason, then?" inquired Lady Alice.

"He gave me no reason on earth for his wish; perhaps, had he been spared for another day, he would have done so; but he expressed himself strongly indeed, with a kind of horror, and spoke of the Italian who built, and his father who ordered it, in terms of strong disapprobation, and wished frequently it had never been erected. Perhaps you would like to take a little turn. How very pretty the flowers still are!"

"Very. No, thank you, I'll sit a little. And there was something more. I know perfectly there was, my lord; what was it, pray?" answered the old lady.

"It was merely something that I took charge of," said the Bishop, cautiously.

"You need not be so reserved with me, my lord; I'm not, as you very well know, a talking old woman, by any means. I know something of the matter already, and have never talked about it; and as the late Lady Marlowe was my poor daughter by marriage, you may talk to me, I should hope, a little more freely than to a total stranger."

The Bishop, I fancy, thought there was something in this appeal, and was, perhaps, amused at the persistency of women, for he smiled sadly for a second or two on his gaiter, and he said, looking before him with his head a little on one side —

"You give me credit, my dear Lady Alice, for a great deal more reserve than I have, at least on this occasion, exercised. I have very little to disclose, and I am not forbidden by any promise, implied or direct, to tell you the very little I know."

He paused.

"Well, my lord, *pray* go on," insisted Lady Alice.

"Yes, on the whole," said the Bishop, thoughtfully, "I prefer telling you. In the room in which he died, in this house, there is, or was, a sort of lock-up place."

"That was the room in which Jekyl now sleeps," interrupted Lady Alice.

"I am not aware."

"The room at the extreme back of the house. You go through a long passage on the same level as the hall, and then, at the head of the far back-stair, into a small room on your left, and through that into the bed-room, I mean. It was there, I know, his coffin lay, for I saw him in it."

"As well as I recollect, that must have been the room. I know it lay as you describe. He gave me some keys that were placed with his purse under his pillow, and directed me to open the press, and take out a box, resembling a small oak plate-chest, which I did, and, by his direction, having unlocked it, I took out a very little trunk-shaped box, covered with stamped red leather, and he took it from me, and the keys, and that time said no more."

"Well?"

"In the evening, when I returned, he said he had been thinking about it, and wished to place it and the key in my care, as his boy was not of age, and it contained something, the value of which, as I understood, might be overlooked, and the box mislaid. His direction to me was to give it to his son, the present Sir Jekyl, on his coming of age, and to tell him from him that he was to do what was right with it. I know those were his words, for he was exhausted, and not speaking very distinctly; and I repeated them carefully after him, and as he said, 'correctly;' after a short time he added, 'I think I shall tell you more about it to-morrow;' but, as I told you, he was unable to speak next morning."

"And what did that red box contain?" asked Lady Alice.

"I can't tell. I never unlocked it. I tied it round with a tape and sealed it, and so it remained."

"Then, Jekyl got it when he came of age?"

"I had him, about that time, at my house. He examined the box, and, when he had satisfied himself as to its contents, he secured it again with his own seal, and requested me to keep it for him for some short time longer."

"Have you got it still in your possession?"

"No. I thought it best to insist at last on his taking it into his own keeping. I've brought it with me here – and I gave it to him on the day of my arrival."

"Very heavy, was it?"

"On the contrary, very light."

"H'm! Thank you, my lord; it is very good of you to converse so long with an old woman such as I."

"On the contrary, Lady Alice, I am much obliged to you. The fact is, I believe it is better to have mentioned these circumstances. It may, perhaps, prove important that some member of the family should know exactly what took place between me and the late Sir Harry Marlowe during his last illness. You now know everything. I have reminded him, as I thought it right, of the earnest injunction of his father, first with respect to that room, the green chamber; and he tells me that he means to comply with it when his party shall have broken up. And about the other matter, the small box, I mentioned that he should do what is right with it. He asked me if I had seen what the box contained; and on my saying no, he added that he could not tell what his father meant by telling him to do what was right with it – in fact, that he could do nothing with it."

"Quite an Italian evening!" exclaimed the Bishop, after a pause, rising, and offering his arm to Lady Alice.

And so their conference ended.

Next day, contrary to her secluded custom, and for the first time, Lady Alice glided feebly into the new library of Marlowe, of which all the guests were free.

Quite empty, except of that silent company in Russia leather and gold, in vellum, and other fine suits; all so unobtrusive and quiet; all so obsequiously at her service; all ready to speak their best, their brightest, and wisest thoughts, or to be silent and neglected, and yet never affronted; always alert to serve and speak, or lie quiet.

Quite deserted! No, not quite. There, more than half hidden by that projection and carved oak pilaster, sat Monsieur Varbarriere, in an easy-chair and a pair of gold spectacles, reading easily his vellum quarto.

"Pretty room!" exclaimed Lady Alice in soliloquy, so soon as she had detected the corpulent and grave student.

Monsieur Varbarriere laid down his book with a look of weariness, and seeing Lady Alice, smiled benignly, and rose and bowed, and his sonorous bass tones greeted her courteously from the nook in which he stood framed in oak, like a portrait of a rich and mysterious burgomaster.

"What a pretty room!" repeated the old lady; "I believe we are *tête-à-tête*."

"Quite so; I have been totally alone; a most agreeable surprise, Lady Alice. Books are very good company; but even the best won't do always; and I was beginning to weary of mine."

M. Varbarriere spoke French, so did Lady Alice; in fact, for that gentleman's convenience, all conversations with him in that house were conducted in the same courtly language.

Lady Alice looked round the room to satisfy herself that they were really alone; and having made her commendatory criticisms on the apartment once more,

"Very pretty," echoed Monsieur Varbarriere; "I admire the oak, especially in a library, it is so solemn and contemplative. The Bishop was here to-day, and admired the room very much. An agreeable and good man the Bishop appears to be."

"Yes; a good man; an excellent man. I had a very interesting conversation with him yesterday. I may as well tell you, Monsieur Varbarriere – I know I may rely upon you – I have not come to my time of life without knowing pretty well, by a kind of instinct, whom I may trust; and I well know how you sympathise with me about my lost son."

"Profoundly, madame;" and Monsieur Varbarriere, with his broad and brown hand on his breast, bowed slowly and very deep.

CHAPTER II

M. Varbarriere orders his Wings

In her own way, with interjections, and commentary and occasional pauses for the sake of respiration, old Lady Alice related the substance of what the Bishop had communicated to her.

"And what do you suppose, Monsieur Varbarriere, to have been the contents of that red leather box?" asked Lady Alice.

Monsieur Varbarriere smiled mysteriously and nodded.

"I fancy, Lady Alice, I have the honour to have arrived at precisely the same conclusion with yourself," said he.

"Well, I dare say. You see now what is involved. You understand now why I should be, for his own sake, more than ever grieved that my boy is gone," she said, trembling very much.

Monsieur Varbarriere bowed profoundly.

"And why it is, sir, that I do insist on your explaining your broken phrase of the other evening."

Monsieur Varbarriere in his deep oak frame stood up tall, portly, and erect. A narrow window, with stained heraldic emblazonry, was partly behind him, and the light from above fell askance on one side of his massive countenance, throwing such dark downward bars of shadow on his face, that Lady Alice could not tell whether he was scowling or smiling, or whether the effect was an illusion.

"What phrase, pray, does your ladyship allude to?" he inquired.

"You spoke of my boy – my poor Guy – as if you knew more of him than you cared to speak – as if you were on the point of disclosing, and suddenly recollected yourself," replied Lady Alice.

"You mean when I had the honour to converse with you the night before last in the drawing-room," said he, a little brusquely, observing that the old lady was becoming vehemently excited.

"Yes; when you left me under the impression that you thought my son still living," half screamed Lady Alice, like a woman in a fury.

"Bah!" thundered the sneering diapason of Monsieur Varbarriere, whose good manners totally forsook him in his angry impatience, and his broad foot on the floor enforced his emphasis with a stamp.

"What do you mean, you foreign masquerader, whom nobody knows? What *can* it be? Sir, you have half distracted me. I've heard of people getting into houses – I've heard of magicians – I've heard of the devil – I have heard of charlatans, sir. I'd like to know what right, if you know nothing of my dear son, you have to torture me with doubts – "

"Doubts!" repeated Varbarriere, if less angrily, even more contemptuously. "Pish!"

"You may say *pish*, sir, or any rudeness you please; but depend upon this, if you do know *anything* of any kind, about my darling son, I'll have it from you if there be either laws or men in England," shrieked Lady Alice.

Varbarriere all at once subsided, and looked hesitatingly. In tones comparatively quiet, but still a little ruffled, he said —

"I've been, I fear, very rude; everyone that's angry is. I think you are right. I ought never to have approached the subject of your domestic sorrow. It was not my doing, madame; it was *you* who insisted on drawing me to it."

"You told me that you had seen my son, and knew Mr. Strangways intimately."

"I did *not*!" cried Varbarriere sternly, with his head thrown back; and he and Lady Alice for a second or two were silent. "That is, I beg pardon, you *misapprehended* me. I'm sure I never could have said I had seen your son, Mr. Guy Deverell, or that I had a particularly intimate acquaintance with Mr. Strangways."

"It won't do," burst forth Lady Alice again; "I'll not be fooled – I won't be fooled, sir."

"Pray, then, pause for one moment before you have excited an alarm in the house, and possibly decide me on taking my leave for ever," said Varbarriere, in a low but very stern tone. "Whatever I may be – charlatan, conjurer, devil – if you but knew the truth, you would acknowledge yourself profoundly and everlastingly indebted to me. It *is* quite true that I am in possession of facts of which you had not even a suspicion; it is true that the affairs of those nearest to you in blood have occupied my profoundest thoughts and most affectionate care. I believe, if you will but exercise the self-command of which I have no doubt you are perfectly capable, for a very few days, I shall have so matured my plans as to render their defeat impracticable. On the other hand, if you give me any trouble, or induce the slightest suspicion anywhere that I have taken an interest of the kind I describe, I shall quit England, and you shall go down to your grave in *darkness*, and with the conviction, moreover, that you have blasted the hopes for which you ought to have sacrificed not your momentary curiosity only, but your unhappy life."

Lady Alice was awed by the countenance and tones of this strange man, who assumed an authority over her, on this occasion, which neither of her deceased lords had ever ventured to assert in their lifetimes.

Her fearless spirit would not, however, succumb, but looked out through the cold windows of her deep-set eyes into the fiery gaze of her *master*, as she felt him, daringly as before.

After a short pause, she said —

"You would have acted more wisely, Monsieur Varbarriere, had you spoken to me on other occasions as frankly as you have just now done."

"Possibly, madame."

"Certainly, monsieur."

M. Varbarriere bowed.

"Certainly, sir. But having at length heard so much, I am willing to concede what you say. I trust the delay may not be long. – I think you ought to tell me soon. I suppose we had better talk no more in the interim," she added, suddenly turning as she approached the threshold of the room, and recovering something of her lofty tone – "upon that, to me, terrible subject."

"*Much* better, madame," acquiesced M. Varbarriere.

"And we meet otherwise as before," said the old lady, with a disdainful condescension and a slight bow.

"I thank you, madame, for that favour," replied M. Varbarriere, reverentially, approaching the door, which, as she drew near to withdraw, he opened for her with a bow, and they parted.

"I hope she'll be quiet, that old grey wildcat. I must get a note from her to Madame Gwynn. The case grows stronger; a little more and it will be irresistible, if only that stupid and ill-tempered old woman can be got to govern herself for a few days."

That evening, in the drawing-room, Monsieur Varbarriere was many degrees more respectful than ever to that old grey wildcat, at whom that morning he had roared in a way so utterly ungentlemanlike and ferocious.

People at a distance might have almost fancied a sexagenarian caricature of a love-scene. There had plainly been the lovers' quarrel. The lady carried her head a little high, threw sidelong glances on the carpet, had a little pink flush in her cheeks, and spoke little; listened, but smiled not; while the gentleman sat as close as he dare, and spoke earnestly and low.

Monsieur Varbarriere was, in fact, making the most of his time, and recovering all he could of his milder influence over Lady Alice, and did persuade and soften; and at length he secured a promise of the note he wanted to Mrs. Gwynn, pledging his honour that she would thoroughly approve the object of it, so soon as he was at liberty to disclose it.

That night, taking leave of Sir Jekyl, Monsieur Varbarriere said —

"You've been so good as to wish me to prolong my visit, which has been to me so charming and so interesting. I have ventured, therefore, to enable myself to do so, by arranging an absence of two days, which I mean to devote to business which will not bear postponement."

"Very sorry to lose you, even for the time you say; but you must leave your nephew, Mr. Strangways, as a hostage in our hands to secure your return."

"He shall remain, as you are so good as to desire it, to enjoy himself. As for me, I need no tie to hold me to my engagement, and only regret every minute stolen for other objects from my visit."

There was some truth in these complimentary speeches. Sir Jekyl was now quite at ease as to the character of his guests, whom he had at first connected with an often threatened attack, which he profoundly dreaded, however lightly he might talk of its chances of success. The host, on the whole, liked his guests, and really wished their stay prolonged; and Monsieur Varbarriere, who silently observed many things of which he did not speak, was, perhaps, just now particularly interested in his private perusal of that little romance which was to be read only at Marlowe Manor.

"I see, Guy, you have turned over a new leaf – no fooling now – you must not relapse, mind. I shall be away for two days. If longer, address me at Slowton. May I rely on your good sense and resolution – knowing what are our probable relations with this family – to continue to exercise the same caution as I have observed in your conduct, with much satisfaction, for the last two evenings? Well, I suppose I may. If you cannot trust yourself – fly. Get away – pack. You may follow me to Slowton, make what excuse you please; but don't loiter here. Good-night."

Such was the farewell spoken by Varbarriere to his nephew, as he nodded his good-night on the threshold of their dressing-room.

In the morning Monsieur Varbarriere's place knew him no more at the breakfast-table. With his valise, despatch-box, and desk, he had glided away, in the frosty sunlight, in a Marlowe post-chaise, to the "Plough Inn," on the Old London Road, where, as we know, he had once sojourned before. It made a slight roundabout to the point to which his business really invited his route; and as he dismissed his vehicle here, I presume it was done with a view to mystify possible inquirers.

At the "Plough Inn" he was received with an awful bustle and reverence. The fame of the consideration with which he was entertained at Marlowe had reached that modest hostelry, and Monsieur Varbarriere looked larger, grander, more solemn in its modest hall, than ever; his valise was handled with respect, and lifted in like an invalid, not hauled and trundled like a prisoner; and the desk and despatch-box, as the more immediate attendants on his person, were eyed with the respect which such a confidence could not fail to inspire.

So Monsieur Varbarriere, having had his appetising drive through a bright country and keen air, ate his breakfast very comfortably; and when that meal was over, ordered a "fly," in which he proceeded to Wardlock, and pulled up at the hall-door of Lady Alice's reserved-looking, but comfortable old redbrick mansion.

CHAPTER III

Monsieur Varbarriere talks with Donica Gwynn

The footman opened the door in *deshabille* and unshorn, with a countenance that implied his sense of the impertinence of this disturbance of his gentlemanlike retirement. There was, however, that in the countenance of Monsieur Varbarriere, as well as the intangible but potent "aura" emitted by wealth, which surrounded him – an influence which everybody feels and no one can well define, which circumambiates a rich person and makes it felt, nobody knows how, that he *is* wealthy – that brought the flunky to himself; and adjusting his soiled necktie hastily with one hand, he ran down to the heavy but commanding countenance that loomed on his from the window of the vehicle.

"This is Wardlock?" demanded the visitor.

"Wardlock Manor? – yes, sir," answered the servant.

"I've a note from Lady Alice Redcliffe, and a few words to Mrs. Gwynn the housekeeper. She's at home?"

"Mrs. Gwynn? – yes, sir."

"Open the door, please," said Monsieur Varbarriere, who was now speaking good frank English with wonderful fluency, considering his marked preference for the French tongue elsewhere.

The door flew open at the touch of the footman; and Monsieur Varbarriere entered the staid mansion, and was shown by the servant into the wainscoted parlour in which Lady Alice had taken leave of the ancient retainer whom he was about to confer with.

When Mrs. Gwynn, with that mixture of curiosity and apprehension which an unexpected visit is calculated to inspire, entered the room, very erect and natty, she saw a large round-shouldered stranger, standing with his back toward her, arrayed in black, at the window, with his grotesque high-crowned hat on.

Turning about he removed this with a slight bow and a grave smile, and with his sonorous foreign accent inquired —

"Mrs. Gwynn, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, that is my name, if you please."

"A note, Mrs. Gwynn, from Lady Alice Redcliffe."

And as he placed it in the thin and rather ladylike fingers of the housekeeper, his eyes rested steadily on her features, as might those of a process-server, whose business it might be hereafter to identify her.

Mrs. Gwynn read the note, which was simply an expression of her mistress's wish that she should answer explicitly whatever questions the gentleman, M. Varbarriere, who would hand it to her, and who was, moreover, a warm friend of the family, might put to her.

When Mrs. Gwynn, with the help of her spectacles, had spelled through this letter, she in turn looked searchingly at Monsieur Varbarriere, and began to wonder unpleasantly what line his examination might take.

"Will you, Mrs. Gwynn, allow me the right to sit down, by yourself taking a chair?" said Monsieur Varbarriere, very politely, smiling darkly, and waving his hand toward a seat.

"I'm very well as I am, I thank you, sir," replied Gwynn, who did not very much like the gentleman's looks, and thought him rather like a great roguish Jew pedlar whom she had seen long ago at the fair of Marlowe.

"Nay, but pray sit down – I can't while you stand – and our conversation may last some time – pray do."

"I can talk as well, sir, one way as t'other," replied she, while at the same time, with a sort of fidgeted impatience, she did sit down and fold her hands in her lap.

"We have all, Mrs. Gwynn, a very high opinion of you; I mean Lady Alice and the friends of her family, among whom I reckon myself."

"It's only of late as I came to my present misses, you're aware, sir, 'aving been, from, I may say, my childhood in the Marlowe family."

"I know – the Marlowe family – it's all one, in fact; but I may say, Mrs. Gwynn, that short, comparatively, as has been your time with Lady Alice, you are spoken of with more respect and liking by that branch of the family than by Sir Jekyl."

"I've done nothing to disoblige Sir Jekyl, as Lady Alice knows. Will you be so kind, sir, as to say what you want of me, having business to attend to up-stairs?"

"Certainly, it is only a trifle or two."

Monsieur Varbarriere cleared his voice.

"Having ascertained all about that *secret door* that opens into the green chamber at Marlowe, we would be obliged to you to let us know at what time, to your knowledge, it was first used."

His large full eyes, from under his projecting brows, stared full upon her shrinking gaze as he asked this question in tones deep and firm, but otherwise as civil as he could employ.

It was vain for Mrs. Gwynn to attempt to conceal her extreme agitation. Her countenance showed it – she tried to speak, and failed; and cleared her throat, and broke down again.

"Perhaps you'd like some water," said Varbarriere, rising and approaching the bell.

"No," said Donica Gwynn, rising suddenly and getting before him. "Let be."

He saw that she wished to escape observation.

"As you please, Mrs. Gwynn – sit down again – I shan't without your leave – and recover a little."

"There's nothing wrong with me, sir," replied Donica, now in possession of her voice, very angrily; "there's nothing to cause it."

"Well, Mrs. Gwynn, it's quite excusable; I know all about it."

"What *are* you, a builder or a hartist?"

"Nothing of the kind; I'm a gentleman without a profession, Mrs. Gwynn, and one who will not permit you to be compromised; one who will protect you from the slightest suspicion of anything unpleasant."

"I don't know what you're a-driving at," said Mrs. Gwynn, still as white as death, and glancing furiously.

"Come, Mrs. Gwynn, you're a sensible woman. You *do* know *perfectly*. You have maintained a respectable character."

"Yes, sir!" said Donica Gwynn, and suddenly burst into a paroxysm of hysterical tears.

"Listen to me: you have maintained a respectable character, I know it: nothing whatever to injure that character shall ever fall from my lips; no human being – but two or three just as much interested in concealing all about it as you or I – shall ever know anything about it; and Sir Jekyl Marlowe has consented to take it down, so soon as the party at present at Marlowe shall have dispersed."

"Lady Alice – I'll never like to see her again," sobbed Donica.

"Lady Alice has no more suspicion of the existence of that door than the Pope of Rome has; and what is more, never shall. You may rely upon me to observe the most absolute silence and secrecy – nay, more, if necessary for the object of concealment – so to mislead and mystify people, that they can never so much as surmise the truth, *provided* – pray observe me — *provided* you treat me with the most *absolute candour*. You must not practise the least reserve or concealment. On tracing the slightest shadow of either in your communication with me, I hold myself free to deal with the facts in my possession, precisely as may seem best to myself. You understand?"

"Not Lady Alice, nor none of the servants, nor – nor a creature living, please."

"*Depend* on me," said Varbarriere.

"Well, sure I may; a gentleman would not break his word with such as me," said Donica, imploringly.

"We can't spend the whole day repeating the same thing over and over," said Varbarriere, rather grimly; "I've said my say – I know everything that concerns *you* about it, without your opening your lips upon the subject. You occupied that room for two years and a half during Sir Harry's lifetime – you see I know it all. *There!* you are perfectly safe. I need not have made you any promise, but I do – perfectly safe with me – and the room shall vanish this winter, and no one but ourselves know anything of that door – do you understand? —*provided*— "

"Yes, sir, please – and what do you wish to know more from me? I don't know, I'm sure, why I should be such a fool as to take on so about it, as if *I* could help it, or was ever a bit the worse of it myself. There's been many a one has slep' in that room and never so much as knowd there was a door but that they came in by."

"To be sure; so tell me, do you recollect Mr. Deverell's losing a paper in that room?"

"Well, I do mind the time he said he lost it there, but I know no more than the child unborn."

"Did Sir Harry never tell you?"

"They said a deal o' bad o' Sir Harry, and them that should a' stood up for him never said a good word for him. Poor old creature! – I doubt if he had pluck to do it. I don't think he had, poor fellow!"

"Did he ever *tell* you he had done it? Come, remember your promise."

"No, upon my soul – never."

"Do you *think* he took it?"

Their eyes met steadily.

"Yes, I do," said she, with a slight defiant frown.

"And *why* do you think so?"

"Because, shortly after the row began about that paper, he talked with me, and said there was something a-troubling of him, and he wished me to go and live in a farm-house at Applehythe, and keep summat he wanted kep safe, as there was no one in all England so true as me – poor old fellow! He never told me, and I never asked. But I laid it down in my own mind it was the paper Mr. Deverell lost, that's all."

"Did he ever show you that paper?"

"No."

"Did he tell you where it was?"

"He never said he had it."

"Did he show you where that thing was which he wanted you to take charge of?"

"Yes, in the press nigh his bed's head."

"Did he open the press?"

"Ay."

"Well?"

"He showed me a sort of a box, and he said that was all."

"A little trunk of stamped red leather – was that like it?"

"That was just it."

"Did he afterwards give it into anybody's charge?"

"I know no more about it. I saw it there, that's all. I saw it once, and never before nor since."

"Is there more than one secret door into that room?" pursued Varbarriere.

"More than one; no, never as I heard or thought."

"Where is the door placed with which *you* are acquainted?"

"Why? Don't you know?"

"Suppose I know of two. We have discovered a second. Which is the one you saw used? *Come!*"

Parenthetically it is to be observed that no such discovery had been made, and Varbarriere was merely fishing for information without disclosing his ignorance.

"In the recess at the right of the bed's head."

"Yes; and how do you open it? I mean from the green chamber?"

"I never knowd any way how to open it – it's from t'other side. There's a way to bolt it, though."

"Ay? How's that?"

"There's an ornament of scrowl-work, they calls it, bronze-like, as runs down the casing of the recess, shaped like letter esses. Well, the fourteenth of them, reckoning up from the bottom, next the wall, turns round with your finger and thumb; so if anyone be in the green chamber, and knows the secret, they can stop the door being opened."

"I see – thank you. You've been through the passage leading from Sir Harry's room that was – Sir Jekyl Marlowe's room, at the back of the house, to the secret door of the green chamber?"

"No, never. I know nothink o' that, no more nor a child."

"No?"

"No, nothink at all."

Varbarriere had here been trying to establish another conjecture.

There was a pause. Varbarriere, ruminating darkly, looked on Donica Gwynn. He then closed his pocket-book, in which he had inscribed a few notes, and said —

"Thank you, Mrs. Gwynn. Should I want anything more I'll call again; and you had better not mention the subject of my visit. Let me see the pictures – that will be the excuse – and do *you* keep *your* secret, and I'll keep mine."

"No, I thank you, sir," said Donica, drily, almost fiercely, drawing back from his proffered *douceur*.

"Tut, tut – pray do."

"No, I thank you."

So he looked at the pictures in the different rooms, and at some old china and snuff-boxes, to give a colour to his visit; and with polite speeches and dark smiles, and a general courtesy that was unctuous, he took his leave of Donica Gwynn, whom he left standing in the hall with a flushed face and a sore heart.

CHAPTER IV

A Story of a Magician and a Vampire

The pleasant autumn sun touched the steep roofs and mullioned windows of Marlowe Manor pleasantly that morning, turning the thinning foliage of its noble timber into gold, and bringing all the slopes and undulations of its grounds into relief in its subdued glory. The influence of the weather was felt by the guests assembled in the spacious breakfast-parlour, and gay and animated was the conversation.

Lady Jane Lennox, that "superbly handsome creature," as old Doocey used to term her, had relapsed very much into her old ways. Beatrix had been pleased when, even in her impetuous and uncertain way, that proud spirit had seemed to be drawn toward her again. But that was past, and that unruly nature had broken away once more upon her own solitary and wayward courses. She cared no more for Beatrix, or, if at all, it was plainly not kindly.

In Lady Jane's bold and mournful isolation there was something that interested Beatrix, ungracious as her ways often were, and she felt sore at the unjust repulse she had experienced. But Beatrix was proud, and so, though wounded, she did not show her pain – not that pain, nor another far deeper.

Between her and Guy Strangways had come a coldness unintelligible to her, an estrangement which she would have felt like an insult, had it not been for his melancholy looks and evident loss of spirits.

There is a very pretty room at Marlowe; it is called (*why*, I forget) Lady Mary's boudoir; its door opens from the first landing on the great stair. An oak floor, partly covered with a Turkey carpet, one tall window with stone shafts, a high old-fashioned stone chimneypiece, and furniture perhaps a little incongruous, but pleasant in its incongruity. Tapestry in the Teniers style – Dutch village festivals, with no end of figures, about half life-size, dancing, drinking, making music; old boors, and young and fair-haired maidens, and wrinkled vraus, and here and there gentlemen in doublets and plumed hats, and ladies, smiling and bare-headed, and fair and plump, in great stomachers. These pleasant subjects, so lifelike, with children, cocks and hens, and dogs interspersed, helped, with a Louis Quatorze suit of pale green, and gold chairs cushioned with Utrecht velvet, to give to this room its character so mixed, of gaiety and solemnity, something very quaint and cheery.

This room had old Lady Alice Redcliffe selected for her sitting-room, when she found herself unequal to the exertion of meeting the other ladies in the drawing-room, and hither she had been wont to invite Guy Strangways, who would occasionally pass an hour here wonderfully pleasantly and happily – in fact, as many hours as the old lady would have permitted, so long as Beatrix had been her companion.

But with those self-denying resolutions we have mentioned came a change. When Beatrix was there the young gentleman was grave and rather silent, and generally had other engagements which at least shortened his visit. This was retorted by Beatrix, who, a few minutes after the arrival of the visitor whom old Lady Alice had begun to call her secretary, would, on one pretence or another, disappear, and leave the old princess and her secretary to the uninterrupted enjoyment of each other's society.

Now since the night on which Varbarriere in talking with Lady Alice had, as we have heard, suddenly arrested his speech respecting her son – leaving her in uncertainty how it was to have been finished – an uncertainty on which her morbid brain reflected a thousand horrid and impossible shapes, the old lady had once more conceived something of her early dread of Guy Strangways. It

was now again subsiding, although last night, under the influence of laudanum, in her medicated sleep her son had been sitting at her bedside, talking incessantly, she could not remember what.

Guy Strangways had just returned from the Park for his fishing-rod and angler's gear, when he was met in the hall by the grave and courteous butler, who presented a tiny pencilled note from Lady Alice, begging him to spare her half an hour in Lady Mary's boudoir.

Perhaps it was a bore. But habitual courtesy is something more than "mouth honour, breath." Language and thought react upon one another marvellously. To restrain its expression is in part to restrain the feeling; and thus a well-bred man is not only in words and demeanour, but inwardly and sincerely, more gracious and noble than others.

How oddly things happen sometimes!

Exactly as Guy Strangways arrived on the lobby, a little gloved hand – it was Beatrix's – was on the door-handle of Lady Mary's boudoir. It was withdrawn, and she stood looking for a second or two at the young gentleman, who had evidently been going in the same direction. He, too, paused; then, with a very low bow, advanced to open the door for Miss Marlowe.

"No, thank you – I – I think I had better postpone my visit to grandmamma till I return. I'm going to the garden, and should like to bring her some flowers."

"I'm afraid I have arrived unluckily – she would, I know, have been so glad to see you," said Guy Strangways.

"Oh, I've seen her twice before to-day. You were going to make her a little visit now."

"I – if you wish it, Miss Marlowe, I'll defer it."

"She would be very little obliged to me, I'm sure; but I must really go," said Beatrix, recollecting on a sudden that there was no need of so long a parley.

"It would very much relieve the poor secretary's labours, and make his little period of duty so much happier," said Guy, forgetting his wise resolutions strangely.

"I am sure grandmamma would prefer seeing her visitors singly – it makes a great deal more of them, you know."

And with a little smile and such a pretty glow in her cheeks, she passed him by. He bowed and smiled faintly too, and for a moment stood gazing after her into the now vacant shadow of the old oak wainscoting, as young Numa might after his vanished Egeria, with an unspoken, burning grief and a longing at his heart.

"I'm sure she can't like me – I'm sure she *dislikes* me. So much the better – Heaven knows I'm glad of it."

And with an aching heart he knocked, turned the handle, and entered the pretty apartment in which Lady Alice, her thin shoulders curved, as she held her hands over the fire, was sitting alone.

She looked at him over her shoulder strangely from her hollow eyes, without moving or speaking for a time. He bowed gravely, and said —

"I have this moment received your little note, Lady Alice, and have hastened to obey."

She sat up straight and sighed.

"Thanks – I have not been very well – so nervous – so very nervous," she repeated, without removing her sad and clouded gaze from his face.

"We all heard with regret that you had not been so well," said he.

"Well, we'll not talk of it – you're very good – I'm glad you've come – very nervous, and almost wishing myself back at Wardlock – where indeed I should have returned, only that I should have been wishing myself back again before an hour – miserably nervous."

And Lady Alice sniffed at her smelling-salts, and added —

"And Monsieur Varbarriere gone away on business for some days – is not he?"

"Yes – quite uncertain – possibly for two, or perhaps three, he said," answered Guy.

"And he's very – he knows – he knows a great deal – I forget what I was going to say – I'm half asleep to-day – no sleep – a very bad night."

And old Lady Alice yawned drearily into the fire.

"Beatrix said she'd look in; but everyone forgets – you young people are so selfish."

"Mademoiselle Marlowe was at the door as I came in, and said she would go on instead to the garden first, and gather some flowers for you."

"Oh! h'm! – very good – well, I can't talk to-day; suppose you choose a book, Mr. Strangways, and read a few pages – that is, if you are quite at leisure?"

"Perfectly – that is, for an hour – unfortunately I have then an appointment. What kind of book shall I take?" he asked, approaching one of the two tall bookstands that flanked an oval mirror opposite the fireplace.

"Anything, provided it is old."

Nearly half an hour passed in discussing what to read – the old lady not being in the mood that day to pursue the verse readings which had employed Guy Strangways hitherto.

"This seems a curious old book," he said, after a few minutes. "Very old French – I think upon witchcraft, and full of odd narratives."

"That will do very well."

"I had better try to translate it – the language is so antiquated."

He leaned the folio on the edge of the chimneypiece, and his elbow beside it, supporting his head on his hand, and so read aloud to the *exigeante* old lady, who liked to see people employed about her, even though little of comfort, amusement, or edification resulted from it.

The narrative which Lady Alice had selected was entitled thus: —

"CONCERNING A REMARKABLE REVENGE AFTER SEPULTURE

"In the Province of Normandy, in the year of grace 1405, there lived a young gentleman of Styrian descent, possessing estates in Hungary, but a still more opulent fortune in France. His park abutted on that of the Chevalier de St. Aubrache, who was a man also young, of ancient lineage, proud to excess, and though wealthy, by no means so wealthy as his Styrian neighbour.

"This disparity in riches excited the wrath of the jealous nobleman, who having once admitted the passions of envy and hatred to his heart, omitted no opportunity to injure him.

"The Chevalier de St. Aubrache, in fact, succeeded so well – "

Just at this point in the tale, Beatrix, with her flowers, not expecting to find Guy Strangways still in attendance, entered the room.

"You need not go; come in, dear – you've brought me some flowers – come in, I say; thank you, Beatrix, dear – they are very pretty, and very sweet too. Here is Mr. Strangways – sit by me, dear – reading a curious old tale of witchcraft. Tell her the beginning, pray."

So Strangways told the story over again in his best way, and then proceeded to read as follows:

—

"The Chevalier de St. Aubrache, in fact, succeeded so well, that on a point of law, aided by a corrupt judge in the Parliament of Rouen, he took from him a considerable portion of his estate, and subsequently so managed matters without committing himself, that he lost his life unfairly in a duel, which the Chevalier secretly contrived.

"Now there was in the household of the gentleman so made away with, a certain Hungarian, older than he, a grave and politic man, and reputed to have studied the art of magic deeply. By this man was the corpse of the deceased gentleman duly coffined, had away to Styria, and, it is said, there buried according

to certain conditions, with which the Hungarian magician, who had vowed a terrible revenge, was well acquainted.

"In the meantime the Chevalier de St. Aubrache had espoused a very beautiful demoiselle of the noble family of D'Ayenterre, by whom he had one daughter, so beautiful that she was the subject of universal admiration, which increased in the heart of her proud father that affection which it was only natural that he should cherish for her.

"It was about the time of Candlemas, a full score of years after the death of his master, that the Hungarian magician returned to Normandy, accompanied by a young gentleman, very pale indeed, but otherwise so exactly like the gentleman now so long dead, that no one who had been familiar with his features could avoid being struck, and indeed, affrighted with the likeness.

"The Chevalier de St. Aubrache was at first filled with horror, like the rest; but well knowing that the young man whom he, the stranger, so resembled, had been actually killed as aforesaid, in combat, and having never heard of vampires, which are among the most malignant and awful of the manifestations of the Evil One, and not recognising at all the Hungarian magician, who had been careful to disguise himself effectually; and, above all, relying on letters from the King of Hungary, with which, under a feigned name, as well as with others from the Archbishop of Toledo in Spain, he had come provided, he received him into his house; when the grave magician, who resembled a doctor of a university, and the fair-seeming vampire, being established in the house of their enemy, began to practise, by stealth, their infernal arts."

The old lady saw that in the reader's countenance, as he read this odd story, which riveted her gaze. Perhaps conscious of her steady and uncomfortable stare, as well as of a real parallel, he grew obviously disconcerted, and at last, as it seemed, even agitated as he proceeded.

"Young man, for Heaven's sake, will you tell me who you are?" said Lady Alice, her dark old eyes fixed fearfully on his face, as she rose unconsciously from her chair.

The young man, very pale, turned a despairing and almost savage look from her to Beatrix, and back to her again.

"You are not a Strangways," she continued.

He looked steadily at her, as if he were going to speak, then dropped his glance suddenly and remained silent.

"I say, I know your name is not Strangways," said the old lady, in increasing agitation.

"I can tell you nothing about myself," said he again, fixing his great dark eyes, that looked almost wild in his pallid face, full upon her, with a strange expression of anguish.

"In the Almighty's name, are you Guy Deverell?" she screamed, lifting up her thin hands between him and her in her terror.

The young man returned her gaze oddly, with, she fancied, a look of baffled horror in his face. It seemed to her like an evil spirit detected.

He recovered, however, for a few seconds, something of his usual manner. Instead of speaking, he bowed twice very low, and, on the point of leaving the room, he suddenly arrested his departure, turning about with a stamp on the floor; and walking back to her, he said, very gently —

"Yes, yes, why should I deny it? My name *is* Guy Deverell."

And was gone.

CHAPTER V

Farewell

"Oh! grandmamma, *what* is it?" said Beatrix, clasping her thin wrist.

The old lady, stooping over the chair on which she leaned, stared darkly after the vanished image, trembling very much.

"*What* is Deverell – why should the name be so dreadful – is there anything – oh! grandmamma, *is* there anything very bad?"

"I don't know – I am confused – did you ever see such a face? My gracious Heaven!" muttered Lady Alice.

"Oh! grandmamma, darling, tell me what it is, I implore of you."

"Yes, dear, everything; another time. I can't now. I might do a mischief. I might prevent – you must promise me, darling, to tell no one. You must not say his name is Deverell. *You* say nothing about it. That dreadful, dreadful story!"

The folio was lying with crumpled leaves, back upward, on the floor, where it had fallen.

"There is something plainly fearful in it. *You* think so, grandmamma; something discovered; something going to happen. Send after him, grandmamma; call him back. If it is anything you can prevent, I'll ring."

"Don't *touch* the bell," cried granny, sharply, clutching at her hand, "don't *do* it. See, Beatrix, you promise me you say nothing to anyone of what you've witnessed —*promise*. I'll tell you all I know when I'm better. He'll come again. I *wish* he'd come again. I'm sure he will, though I hardly think I could bear to see him. I don't know what to think."

The old lady threw herself back in her chair, not affectedly at all, but looking so awfully haggard and agitated that Beatrix was frightened.

"Call nobody, there's a darling; just open the window; I shall be better."

And she heaved some of those long and heavy sighs which relieve hysterical oppression; and, after a long silence, she said —

"It is a long time since I have felt so ill, Beatrix. Remember this, darling, my papers are in the black cabinet in my bed-room at home – I mean Wardlock. There is not a great deal. My jointure stops, you know; but whatever little there is, is for you, darling."

"You're not to talk of it, granny, darling, you'll be quite well in a minute; the air is doing you good. May I give you a little wine? – Well, a little water?"

"Thanks, dear; I *am* better. Remember what I told you, and particularly your promise to mention what you heard to no one. I mean the – the – strange scene with that young man. I think I will take a glass of wine. I'll tell you all when I'm better – when Monsieur Varbarriere comes back. It is important for a time, especially having heard what I have, that I should wait a little."

Granny sipped a little sherry slowly, and the tint of life, such as visits the cheek of the aged, returned to hers, and she was better.

"I'd rather not see him any more. It's all like a dream. I don't know what to make of it," muttered granny; and she began audibly to repeat passages, tremblingly and with upturned eyes, from her prayer-book.

Perplexed, anxious, excited, Beatrix looked down on the collapsed and haggard face of the old lady, and listened to the moaned petition, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" which trembled from her lips as it might from those of a fainting sinner on a death-bed.

Guy Deverell, as I shall henceforward call him, thinking of nothing but escape into solitude, was soon a good way from the house. He was too much agitated, and his thoughts too confused at first, to estimate all the possible consequences of the sudden disclosure he had just made.

What would Varbarriere, who could be stern and violent, say or do, when he learned it? Here was the one injunction on which he had been ever harping violated. He felt how much he owed to the unceasing care of that able and disinterested friend through all his life, and how had he repaid it all!

"Anything but deception – anything but that. I could not endure the agony of my position longer – yes, agony."

He was now wandering by the bank of the solitary river, and looked back at the picturesque gables of Marlowe Manor through the trees; and he felt that he was leaving all that could possibly interest him in existence in leaving Marlowe. Always was rising in his mind the one thought, "What does she think of my deception and my agitation – what can she think of *me*?"

It is not easy, even in silence and alone, when the feelings are at all ruffled, to follow out a train of thought. Guy thought of his approaching farewell to his uncle: he sometimes heard his great voice thundering in despair and fury over his ruined schemes – schemes, be they what they might, at least unselfish. Then he thought of the effect of the discovery on Sir Jekyl, who, no doubt, had special reasons for alarm connected with this name – a secret so jealously guarded by Varbarriere. Then he thought of his future. His commission in the French army awaited him. A life of drudgery or listlessness? No such thing! a career of adventure and glory – ending in a baton or death! Death is so romantic in the field! There are always some beautiful eyes to drop in secret those tears which are worth dying for. It is not a crowded trench, where fifty corpses pig together in the last noisome sleep – but an apotheosis!

He was sure he had done well in yielding to the impulse that put an end to the tedious treachery he had been doomed to practise; and if well, then *wisely* – so, no more retrospection.

All this rose and appeared in fragments like a wreck in the eddies of his mind.

One thing was clear – he must leave Marlowe forthwith. He could not meet his host again. He stood up. It is well to have hit upon anything to be done – anything quite certain.

With rapid steps he now returned to Marlowe, wondering how far he had walked, as it seemed to him, in so mere a moment of time.

The house was deserted; so fine a day had tempted all its inmates but old Lady Alice abroad. He sent to the village of Marlowe for a chaise, while Jacques, who was to await where he was the return of his master, Monsieur Varbarriere, got his luggage into readiness, and he himself wrote, having tried and torn up half a dozen, a note to Sir Jekyl, thanking him for his hospitality, and regretting that an unexpected occurrence made his departure on so short notice unavoidable. He did not sign it. He would not write his assumed name. Sir Jekyl could have no difficulty in knowing from which of his guests it came, perhaps would not even miss the signature.

The chaise stood at the door-steps, his luggage stowed away, his dark short travelling cloak about his shoulders, and his note to Sir Jekyl in his fingers.

He entered the great hall, meaning to place it on the marble table where Sir Jekyl's notes and newspapers usually awaited him, and there he encountered Beatrix.

There was no one else. She was crossing to the outer door, and they almost met before they came to a stop.

"Oh! Mr. Strangways."

"Pray call me by my real name, Deverell. Strangways was my mother's; and in obedience to those who are wiser than I, during my journey I adopted it, although the reasons were not told me."

There was a little pause here.

"I am very glad I was so fortunate as to meet you, Miss Marlowe, before I left. I'm just going, and it would be such a privilege to know that you had not judged me very hardly."

"I'm sure papa will be very sorry you are going – a break-up is always a sad event – we miss our guests so much," she said, smiling, but a little pale.

"If you knew my story, Miss Marlowe, you would acquit me," he said, bursting forth all at once. "Misfortune overtook me in my early childhood, before I can remember. I have no right to trouble you with the recital; and in my folly I superadded this – the worst – that madly I gave my love to one who could not return it – who, perhaps, ought not to have returned it. Pardon me, Miss Marlowe, for talking of these things; but as I am going away, and wished you to understand me, I thought, perhaps, you would hear me. Seeing how hopeless was my love, I never told it, but resolved to see her no more, and so to the end of my days will keep my vow; but this is added, that for her sake my life becomes a sacrifice – a real one – to guard her from sorrows and dangers, which I believe *did* threaten her, and to save her from which I devote myself, as perhaps she will one day understand. I thought I would just tell you so much before I went, and – and – that *you* are that lady. Farewell, dear Miss Marlowe, most beautiful – beloved."

He pressed her hand, he kissed it passionately, and was gone.

It was not until she had heard the vehicle drive rapidly away that she quite recovered herself. She went into the front hall, and, through the window, standing far back, watched the receding chaise. When it was out of sight, humming a gay air, she ran up-stairs, and into her bed-room, when, locking the door, she wept the bitterest tears, perhaps, she had ever shed, since the days of her childhood.

CHAPTER VI

At the Bell and Horns

With the reader's permission, I must tell here how Monsieur Varbarriere proceeded on his route to Slowton.

As he mounted his vehicle from the steps of Wardlock, the flunky, who was tantalised by the very unsatisfactory result of his listening at the parlour-door, considered him curiously.

"Go on towards the village," said M. Varbarriere to the driver, in his deep foreign accents.

And so soon as they were quite out of sight of the Wardlock flunky, he opened the front window of his nondescript vehicle, and called —

"Drive to Slowton."

Which, accordingly, was done. M. Varbarriere, in profound good-humour, a flood of light and certainty having come upon him, sat back luxuriously in a halo of sardonic glory, and was smiling to himself, as men sometimes will over the chess-board when the rest of their game is secure.

At the Bell and Horns he was received with a reverential welcome.

"A gentleman been inquiring for Monsieur Varbarriere?" asked the foreign gentleman in black, descending.

"A gentleman, sir, as has took number seven, and expects a gentleman to call, but did not say who, which his name is Mr. Rumsey?"

"Very good," said Monsieur Varbarriere.

Suddenly he recollected that General Lennox's letter might have reached the post-office, and, plucking a card from his case, wrote an order on it for his letters, which he handed to Boots, who trudged away to the post-office close by.

Varbarriere was half sorry now that he had opened his correspondence with old General Lennox so soon. He had no hope that Donica Gwynn's reserves would have melted and given way so rapidly in the interview which had taken place. He was a man who cared nothing about penal justice, who had embraced the world's ethics early, and looked indulgently on escapades of human nature, and had no natural turn for cruelty, although he could be cruel enough when an object was to be accomplished.

"I don't think I'd have done it, though he deserves it richly, and has little right to look for quarter at my hands."

And whichever of the gentlemen interested he may have alluded to, he cursed him under his breath ardently.

In number seven there awaited him a tall and thin man of business, of a sad countenance and bilious, with a pale drab-coloured and barred muslin cravat, tied with as much precision as a curate's; a little bald at the very top of his head; a little stooped at his shoulders. He did not smile as Monsieur Varbarriere entered the room. He bowed in a meek and suffering way, and looked as if he had spent the morning in reading Doctor Blewish's pamphlet "On the Ubiquity of Disguised Cholera Morbus," or our good Bishop's well-known tract on "Self-Mortification." There was a smell of cigars in the room, which should not have been had he known that Monsieur Varbarriere was to be here so early. His chest was weak, and the doctors ordered that sort of fumigation.

Monsieur Varbarriere set his mind at ease by preparing himself to smoke one of the notable large cigars, of which he carried always a dozen rounds or so in his case.

"You have brought the cases and opinions with you?" inquired Varbarriere.

The melancholy solicitor replied by opening a tin box, from which he drew several sheafs of neatly labelled papers tied up in red tape; the most methodical and quiet of attorneys, and one of the most efficient to be found.

"Smoke away; you like it, so do I; we can talk too, and look at these," said Varbarriere, lighting his cigar.

Mr. Rumsey bowed, and meekly lighted his also.

Then began the conference on business.

"Where are Gamford's letters? – these? – ho!"

And as Monsieur Varbarriere read them, puffing away as fast as a furnace, and threw each down as he would play a card, in turn, he would cry "Bah!" – "Booh!" – or, "Did you ever read such Galamathias?" – and, at last —

"Who was right about that *benet*— you or I? I told you what he was."

"You will perceive just now, I think, sir, that there are some things of value there notwithstanding. You can't see their importance until you shall have looked into the enlarged statement we have been enabled by the result of some fresh discoveries to submit to counsel."

"Give me that case. Fresh discoveries, have you? I venture to say, when you've heard my notes, you'll open your eyes. No, I mean the cigar-case; well, you may give me that too."

So he took the paper, with its bluish briefing post pages, and broad margin, and the opinions of Mr. Serjeant Edgeways and Mr. Whaulbane, Q.C., copied in the same large, round hand at the conclusion.

"Well, these opinions are stronger than I expected. There is a bit here in Whaulbane's I don't like so well – what you call fishy, you know. But you shall hear just now what I can add to our proofs, and you will see what becomes of good Mr. Whaulbane's doubts and queries. You said always you did not think they had destroyed the deed?"

"If well advised, they did not. I go that length. Because the deed, although it told against them while a claimant in the Deverell line appeared, would yet be an essential part of their case in the event of their title being attacked from the Bracton quarter; and therefore the fact is, they could not destroy it."

"They are both quite clear upon the question of secondary evidence of the contents of a lost deed, I see," said Varbarriere, musingly, "and think our proof satisfactory. Those advocates, however —*why* do they? – always say their say with so many reserves and misgivings, that you begin to think they know very little more of the likelihoods of the matter, with all their pedantry, than you do yourself."

"The glorious uncertainty of the law!" ejaculated Mr. Rumsey, employing a phrase which I have heard before, and with the nearest approach to a macerated smile which his face had yet worn.

"Ay," said Varbarriere, in his metallic tones of banter, "the glorious uncertainty of the law. That must be true, for you're always saying it; and it must be pleasant too, if one could only see it; for, my faith! you look almost cheerful while you say it."

"It makes counsel cautious, though it does not cool clients when they're once fairly blooded," said Mr. Rumsey. "A client is a wonderful thing sometimes. There would not be half the money made of our profession if men kept their senses when they go into law; but they seldom do. Lots of cool gamblers at every other game, but no one ever keeps his head at law."

"That's encouraging; thank you. Suppose I take your advice, and draw stakes?" said Varbarriere.

"You have no notion," said Mr. Rumsey, resignedly.

"Well, I believe you're right, monsieur; and I believe *I* am right too; and if you have any faith in your favourite oracles, so must you; but, have you done your cigar? Well, take your pen for a moment and listen to me, and note what I say. When Deverell came down with his title-deeds to Marlowe, they gave him the Window dressing-room for his bed-room, and the green chamber, with the bed taken down, for his dressing-room; and there he placed his papers, with the key turned in the door. In the morning his attorney came. It was a meeting about a settlement of the mortgage;

and when the papers were overhauled it was found that that deed had been abstracted. Very good. Now listen to what I have to relate concerning the peculiar construction of that room."

So Monsieur Varbarriere proceeded to relate minutely all he had ascertained that day, much to the quiet edification of Mr. Rumsey, whose eyes brightened, and whose frontal wrinkles deepened as he listened.

"I told you I suspected some legerdemain about that room long ago; the idea came to me oddly. When on a visit to the Marquis de Mirault he told me that in making alterations in the chateau they had discovered a false door into one of the bed-rooms. The tradition of this contrivance, which was singularly artful, was lost. It is possible that the secret of it perished with its first possessor. By means of this door the apartment in question was placed in almost immediate conjunction with another, which, except through this admirably concealed door, could not be reached from it without a long circuit. The proximity of the rooms, in fact, had been, by reason of the craft with which they were apparently separated, entirely overlooked."

The attorney observed, sadly —

"The French are an ingenious people."

"The curiosity of my friend was excited," continued Varbarriere, "and with some little search among family records he found that this room, which was constructed in the way of an addition to the chateau, had been built about the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the marquise of one of the line, who was celebrated as *un homme à bonnes fortunes*, you understand, and its object was now quite palpable."

"A man, no doubt, of ability — a long-headed gentleman," mused the melancholy attorney.

"Well, at Marlowe I saw a collection of elevations of the green chamber, as it is called, built only two or three years later — and, mind this, by the same architect, an Italian, called Paulo Abruzzi, a remarkable name, which I perfectly remembered as having been mentioned by my friend the Marquis as the architect of his ancestral relic of Cupid's legerdemain. But here is the most remarkable circumstance, and to which my friend Sir Jekyl quite innocently gave its proper point. The room under this chamber, and, of course, in the same building, was decorated with portraits painted in the panel, and one of them was this identical Marquis de Mirault, with the date 1711, and the Baronet was good enough to tell me that he had been a very intimate friend, and had visited his grandfather, at Marlowe."

CHAPTER VII

M. Varbarriere's Plans

Varbarriere solemnly lighted a cigar, and squinted at its glowing point with his great dark eyes, in which the mild attorney saw the lurid reflection. When it was well lighted he went on —

"You may suppose how this confirmed my theory. I set about my inquiries quietly, and was convinced that Sir Jekyl knew all about it, by his disquietude whenever I evinced an interest in that portion of the building. But I managed matters very slyly, and collected proof very nearly demonstrative; and at this moment he has not a notion who I am."

"No. It will be a surprise when he does learn," answered the attorney, sadly.

"A fine natural hair-dye is the air of the East Indies: first it turns light to black, and then black to grey. Then, my faith! — a bronzed face with plenty of furrows, a double chin, and a great beard to cover it, and eleven stone weight expanded to seventeen stone — *Corpo di Bacco!* — and six pounds!"

And Monsieur Varbarriere laughed like the clang and roar of a chime of cathedral bells.

"It will be a smart blow," said the attorney, almost dreamily.

"Smash him," said Varbarriere. "The Deverell estate is something over five thousand a-year; and the mesne rates, with four per cent. interest, amount to 213,000*l.*"

"He'll defend it," said the knight of the sorrowful countenance, who was now gathering in his papers.

"I hope he will," growled Varbarriere, with a chuckle. "He has not a leg to stand on — all the better for *you*, at all events; and then I'll bring down that other hammer on his head."

"The criminal proceedings?" murmured the sad attorney.

"Ay. I can prove that case myself — he fired before his time, and killed him, I'm certain simply to get the estate. I was the only person present — poor Guy! Jekyl had me in his pocket then. The rascal wanted to thrust me down and destroy me afterwards. He employed that Jew house, Rōbenzahl and Isaacs — the villain! Luck turned, and I am a rich fellow now, and his turn is coming. Vive la justice éternelle! Vive la bagatelle! Bravo! Bah!"

Monsieur Varbarriere had another pleasant roar of laughter here, and threw his hat at the solemn attorney's head.

"You'll lunch with me," said Varbarriere.

"Thanks," murmured the attorney.

"And now the war — the campaign — what next?"

"You'll make an exact note," the attorney musingly replied, "of what that woman Wynn or Gwynn can prove; also what the Lord Bishop of what's-his-name can prove; and it strikes me we shall have to serve some notice to intimidate Sir Jekyl about that red-leather box, to prevent his making away with the deed, and show him we know it is there; or perhaps apply for an order to make him lodge the deed in court; but Tom Weavel — he's always in town — will advise us. You don't think that woman will leave us in the lurch?"

"No," said Varbarriere, as if he was thinking of something else. "That Donica Gwynn, you mean. She had that green chamber to herself, you see, for a matter of three years."

"Yes."

"And she's one of those old domestic Dianas who are sensitive about scandal — you understand — and she knows what ill-natured people would say; so I quieted her all I could, and I don't think she'll venture to recede. No; she certainly won't."

"How soon can you let me have the notes, sir?"

"To-morrow, when I return. I've an appointment to keep by rail to-night, and I'll make a full memorandum from my notes as I go along."

"Thanks – and what are your instructions?"

"Send back the cases with copies of the new evidence."

"And assuming a favourable opinion, sir, are my instructions to proceed?"

"Certainly, my son, forthwith – the grass it must not grow under our feet."

"Of course subject to counsel's opinion?" said the attorney, sadly.

"To be sure."

"And which first – the action or the indictment? or both together?" asked Mr. Rumsey.

"*That* for counsel too. Only my general direction is, let the onset be as sudden, violent, and determined as possible. You see?"

The attorney nodded gently, tying up his last bundle of papers as softly as a lady might knot her ribbon round the neck of her lap-dog.

"You see?"

"Yes, sir; your object is destruction. *Delenda est Carthago* – that's the word," murmured Mr. Rumsey, plaintively.

"Yes – ha, ha! – what you call double him up!" clanged out Varbarriere, with an exulting oath and a chuckle.

The attorney had locked up his despatch-box now, and putting the little bunch of keys deep into his trowsers pocket, he said, "Yes, that's the word; but I suppose you have considered –"

"*What?* I'm tired considering."

"I was going to say whether some more certain result might not be obtainable by negotiation; that is, if you thought it a case for negotiation."

"*What* negotiation? What do you mean?"

"Well, you see there are materials – there's something to yield at both sides," said the attorney, very slowly, in a diplomatic reverie.

"But why should you think of a compromise? – the worst thing I fancy could happen to *you*."

There was a general truth in this. It is not the ferryman's interest to build a bridge, nor was it Mr. Rumsey's that his client should walk high and dry over those troubled waters through which it was his privilege and profit to pilot him. But he had not quite so much faith in this case as Monsieur Varbarriere had, and he knew that his wealthy and resolute client could grow savage enough in defeat, and had once or twice had stormy interviews with him after failures.

"If the young gentleman and young lady liked one another, for instance, the conflicting claims might be reconciled, and a marriage would in that case arrange the difference."

"There's nothing very deep in that," snarled Varbarriere, "but there is everything impracticable. Do you think Guy Deverell, whose father that *lache* murdered before my eyes, could ever endure to call *him* father? Bah! If I thought so I would drive him from my presence and never behold him more. No, no, no! There is more than an estate in all this – there is justice, there is *punishment*."

Monsieur Varbarriere, with his hands in his pockets, took a turn up and down the room, and his solemn steps shook the floor, and his countenance was agitated by violence and hatred.

The pale, thin attorney eyed him with a gentle and careworn observation. His respected client was heaving with a great toppling swagger as he to-ed and fro-ed in his thunderstorm, looking as black as the Spirit of Evil.

This old-maidish attorney was meek and wise, but by no means timid. He was accustomed to hear strong language, and sometimes even oaths, without any strange emotion. He looked on this sort of volcanic demonstration scientifically, as a policeman does on drunkenness – knew its stages, and when it was best left to itself.

Mr. Rumsey, therefore, poked the fire a little, and then looked out of the window.

"You don't go to town to-night?"

"Not if you require me here, sir."

"Yes, I shall have those memoranda to give you – and tell me now, I think you know your business. Do you think, as we now stand, success is *certain*?"

"Well, sir, it certainly is very strong – very; but I need not tell you a case will sometimes take a queer turn, and I never like to tell a client that anything is absolutely certain – a case is sometimes carried out of its legitimate course, you see; the judges may go wrong, or the jury bolt, or a witness may break down, or else a bit of evidence may start up – it's a responsibility we never take on ourselves to say that of any case; and you know there has been a good deal of time – and that sometimes raises a feeling with a jury."

"Ay, a quarter of a century, but it can't be helped. For ten years of that time I could not show, I owed money to everybody. Then, when *I* was for striking on the criminal charge for *murder*, or *manslaughter*, or whatever you agreed it was to be, you all said I must begin with the civil action, and first oust him from Guy Deverell's estate. Well, *there* you told me I could not move till he was twenty-five, and now you talk of the good deal of time —*ma foi!*— as if it was I who delayed, and not *you*, messieurs. But enough, past is past. We have the present, and I'll use it."

"We are to go on, then?"

"Yes, we've had to wait too long. Stop for nothing, drive right on, you see, at the fastest pace counsel can manage. If I saw the Deverell estate where it should be, and a judgment for the mesne rates, and Sir Jekyl Marlowe in the dock for his crime, I don't say I should sing *nunc dimittis*; but, *parbleu*, sir, it would be very agreeable – ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER VIII

Tempest

"Does Mr. Guy Deverell know anything of the measures you contemplate in his behalf?" inquired the attorney.

"Nothing. Do you think me a fool? Young men *are* such asses!"

"You know, however, of course, that he will act. The proceedings, you know, must be in his name."

"Leave that to me."

Varbarriere rang the bell and ordered luncheon. There were grouse and trout – he was in luck – and some cream cheese, for which rural delicacy he had a fancy. They brew very great ale at Slowton, like the Welsh, and it was a novelty to the gentleman of foreign habits, who eat as fastidiously as a Frenchman, and as largely as a German. On the whole it was satisfactory, and the high-shouldered, Jewish-looking sybarite shook hands in a very friendly way with his attorney in the afternoon, on the platform at Slowton, and glided off toward Chester, into which ancient town he thundered, screaming like a monster rushing on its prey; and a victim awaited him in the old commercial hotel; a tall, white-headed military-looking man, with a white moustache twirled up fiercely at the corners; whose short pinkish face and grey eyes, as evening deepened, were pretty constantly presented at the window of the coffee-room next the street door of the inn. From that post he saw all the shops and gas-lamps, up and down the street, gradually lighted. The gaselier in the centre of the coffee-room, with its six muffed glass globes, flared up over the rumpled and coffee-stained morning newspapers and the almanac, and the battered and dissipated-looking railway guide, with corners curled and back coming to pieces, which he consulted every ten minutes through his glasses.

How many consultations he had had with the waiter upon the arrival of trains due at various hours, and how often the injunction had been repeated to see that no mistake occurred about the private room he had ordered; and how reiterated the order that any gentleman inquiring for General Lennox should be shown at once into his presence, the patient waiter with the bilious complexion could tell.

As the time drew near, the General having again conferred with the waiter, conversed with the porter, and even talked a little with Boots – withdrew to his small square sitting-room and pair of candles up-stairs, and awaited the arrival of Monsieur Varbarriere, with his back to the fire, in a state of extreme fidget.

That gentleman's voice he soon heard upon the passage, and the creaking of his heavy tread; and he felt as he used, when a young soldier, on going into action.

The General stepped forward. The waiter announced a gentleman who wished to see him; and Varbarriere's dark visage and mufflers, and sable mantle loomed behind; his felt hat in his hand, and his wavy cone of grizzled hair was bowing solemnly.

"Glad you're come – how d'ye do?" and Varbarriere's fat brown hand was seized by the General's pink and knotted fingers in a very cold and damp grasp. "Come in and sit down, sir. What will you take? – tea, or dinner, or what?"

"Very much obliged. I have ordered something, by-and-by, to my room – thank you very much. I thought, however, that you might possibly wish to see me immediately, and so I am here, at all events, as you soldiers say, to report myself," said Varbarriere, with his unctuous politeness.

"Yes, it *is* better, I'd rather have it now," answered the General in a less polite and more literal way. "A chair, sir;" and he placed one before the fire, which he poked into a blaze. "I – I hope you

are not fatigued," – here the door shut, and the waiter was gone; "and I want to hear, sir, if you please, the – the meaning of the letter you favoured me with."

The General by this time had it in his hand open, and tendered it, I suppose for identification, to M. Varbarriere, who, however, politely waved it back.

"I quite felt the responsibility I took upon myself when I wrote as I did. That responsibility of course I accept; and I have come all this way, sir, for no other purpose than to justify my expressions, and to invite you to bring them to the test."

"Of *course*, sir. Thank you," said the General.

Varbarriere had felt a momentary qualm about this particular branch of the business which he had cut out for himself. When he wrote to General Lennox he was morally *certain* of the existence of a secret passage into that green room, and also of the relations which he had for some time suspected between Sir Jekyl and his fair guest. On the whole it was not a bad *coup* to provide, by means of the old General's jealousy, such literal proof as he still required of the concealed entrance, through which so much villany had been accomplished – and so his letter – and now its consequences – about which it was too late to think.

General Lennox, standing by the table, with one candle on the chimneypiece and his glasses to his eyes, read aloud, with some little stumbling, these words from the letter of Monsieur Varbarriere: —

"The reason of my so doing will be obvious when I say that I have certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your honour. I decline making any detailed statement by letter; nor will I explain my meaning at Marlowe Manor. But if, without *fracas*, you will give me a private meeting, at any place between this and London, I will make it my business to see you, when I shall satisfy you that I have not made this request without the gravest reasons."

"Those are the passages, sir, on which you are so good as to offer me an explanation; and first, there's the phrase, you know, 'certain circumstances to lay before you which nearly affect your *honour*;' that's a word, you know, sir, that a fellow *feels* in a way – in a way that can't be trifled with."

"Certainly. Put your question, General Lennox, how you please," answered Varbarriere, with a grave bow.

"Well, how – how – exactly – I'll – I will put my question. I'd like to know, sir, in what relation – in – yes – in what relation, as a soldier, sir, or as a gentleman, sir, or as —*what*?"

"I am very much concerned to say, sir, that it is in the very nearest and most sacred interest, sir – as a *husband*."

General Lennox had sat down by this time, and was gazing with a frank stern stare full into the dark countenance of his visitor; and in reply he made two short little nods, clearing his voice, and lowering his eyes to the table.

It was a very trifling way of taking it. But Varbarriere saw his face flush fiercely up to the very roots of his silver hair, and he fancied he could see the vessels throbbing in his temples.

"I – very good, sir – thank you," said the General, looking up fiercely and shaking his ears, but speaking in a calm tone.

"Go on, pray – let me know – I say – in God's name, don't keep me."

"Now, sir, I'll tell it to you briefly – I'll afterwards go into whatever proof you desire. I have reason, I deeply regret it, to believe – in fact to know – that an immoral intimacy exists between Sir Jekyl Marlowe and Lady Jane Lennox."

"It's a lie, sir!" screamed the General – "a damned lie, sir – a damned lie, sir – a *damned* lie, sir."

His gouty claw was advanced trembling as if to clutch the muffler that was folded about Monsieur Varbarriere's throat, but he dropped back in his seat again shaking, and ran his fingers through his white hair several times. There was a silence which even M. Varbarriere did not like.

Varbarriere was not the least offended at his violence. He knew quite well that the General did not understand what he said, or mean, or remember it – that it was only the wild protest of agony. For the first time he felt a compunction about that old foozle, who had hitherto somehow counted for nothing in the game he was playing, and he saw him, years after, as he had shrieked at him that night, with his claw stretched towards his throat, ludicrous, and also terrible.

"My God! sir," cried the old man, with a quaver that sounded like a laugh, "do you tell me so?"

"It's true, sir," said Varbarriere.

"Now, sir, I'll not interrupt you – tell all, pray – hide nothing," said the General.

"I was, sir, accidentally witness to a conversation which is capable of no other interpretation; and I have legal proof of the existence of a secret door, connecting the apartment which has been assigned to you, at Marlowe, with Sir Jekyl's room."

"The damned villain! What a fool," and then very fiercely he suddenly added, "You can prove all this, sir? I hope you can."

"All this, and more, sir. I suspect, sir, there will hardly be an attempt to deny it."

"Oh, sir, it's terrible; but I was such a fool. I had no business – I deserve it all. Who'd have imagined such villains? But, d – me, sir, I can't believe it."

There was a tone of anguish in the old man's voice which made even his grotesque and feeble talk terrible.

"I say there can't be such devils on earth;" and then he broke into an incoherent story of all his trust and love, and all that Jane owed him, and of her nature which was frank and generous, and how she never hid a thought from him – open as heaven, sir. What business was it of his, d – him! What did he mean by trying to set a man against his wife? No one but a scoundrel ever did it.

Varbarriere stood erect.

"You may submit how you like, sir, to your fate; but you shan't insult me, sir, without answering it. My note left it optional to you to exact my information or to remain in the darkness, which it seems you prefer. If you wish it, I'll make my bow – it's nothing to me, but two can play at that game. I've fought perhaps oftener than you, and you shan't bully *me*."

"I suppose you're right, sir – don't go, pray – I think I'm half *mad*, sir," said General Lennox, despairingly.

"Sir, I make allowance – I forgive your language, but if you want to talk to me, it must be with proper respect. I'm as good a gentleman as you; my statement is, of course, strictly true, and if you please you can test it."

CHAPTER IX

Guy Deverell at Slowton

"Come, sir, I have a right to know it – have you not an object in fooling me?" said General Lennox, relapsing all on a sudden into his ferocious vein.

"In telling you the truth, sir, I *have* an object, perhaps – but seeing that it *is* the truth, and concerns you so nearly, you need not trouble yourself about *my* object," answered Varbarriere, with more self-command than was to have been expected.

"I *will* test it, sir. I will try you," said the General, sternly. "By – I'll sift it to the bottom."

"So you ought, sir; that's what I mean to help you to," said Varbarriere.

"How, sir? – say *how*, and by Heaven, sir, I'll shoot him like a dog."

"The way to do it I've considered. I shall place you *probably* in possession of such proof as will thoroughly convince you."

"Thank you, sir, go on."

"I shall be at Marlowe to-morrow – you must arrive late – on no account earlier than half-past twelve. I will arrange to have you admitted by the glass door – through the conservatory. Don't bring your vehicle beyond the bridge, and leave your luggage at the Marlowe Arms. The object, sir, is this," said Varbarriere, with deliberate emphasis, observing that the General's grim countenance did not look as apprehensive as he wished, "that your arrival shall be unsuspected. No one must know anything of it except myself and another, until you shall have reached your room. Do you see?"

"Thanks, sir – yes," answered the General, looking as unsatisfactorily as before.

"There are two recesses with shelves – one to the right, the other to the left of the bed's head as you look from the door. The secret entrance I have mentioned lies through that at the right. You must not permit any alarm which may be intended to reach Sir Jekyl. Secure the door, and do you sit up and watch. There's a way of securing the secret door from the inside – which I'll explain – that would *prevent* his entrance – don't allow it. The whole – pardon me, sir – *intrigue* will in that case be disclosed without the possibility of a prevarication. You have followed me, I hope, distinctly."

"I – I'm a little flurried, I believe, sir; I have to apologise. I'll ask you, by-and-by, to repeat it. I think I should like to be alone, sir. She wrote me a letter, sir – I wish I had died when I got it."

When Varbarriere looked at him, he saw that the old East Indian was crying.

"Sir, I grieve with you," said Varbarriere, funereally. "You can command my presence whenever you please to send for me. I shall remain in this house. It will be absolutely necessary, of course, that you should see me again."

"Thank you, sir. I know – I'm sure you mean kindly – but God only knows all it is."

He had shaken his hand very affectionately, without any meaning – without knowing that he had done so.

Varbarriere said —

"Don't give way, sir, too much. If there is this sort of misfortune, it is much better discovered — *much* better. You'll think so just now. You'll view it quite differently in the morning. Call for me the moment you want me – farewell, sir."

So Varbarriere was conducted to his bed-room, and made, beside his toilet, conscientious inquiries about his late dinner, which was in an advanced state of preparation; and when he went down to partake of it, he had wonderfully recovered the interview with General Lennox. Notwithstanding, however, he drank two glasses of sherry, contrary to gastronomic laws, before beginning. Then, however, he made, even for him, a very good dinner.

He could not help wondering what a prodigious fuss the poor old fogey made about this little affair. He could not enter the least into his state of mind. She was a fine woman, no doubt; but

there were others – no stint – and he had been married quite long enough to sober and acquire an appetite for liberty.

What was the matter with the old fellow? But that it was insufferably comical, he could almost find it in his heart to pity him.

Once or twice as he smoked his cigar he could not forbear shaking with laughter, the old Philander's pathos struck him so sardonically.

I really think the state of that old gentleman, who certainly had attained to years of philosophy, was rather serious. That is, I dare say that a competent medical man with his case under observation at that moment would have pronounced him on the verge either of a fit or of insanity.

When Varbarriere had left the room, General Lennox threw himself on the red damask sofa, which smelled powerfully of yesterday's swell bagman's tobacco, never perceiving that stale fragrance, nor the thinness of the cushion which made the ribs and vertebræ of the couch unpleasantly perceptible beneath. Then, with his knees doubled up, and the "Times" newspaper over his face, he wept, and moaned, and uttered such plaintive and hideous maunderings as would do nobody good to hear of.

A variety of wise impulses visited him. One was to start instantaneously for Marlowe and fight Sir Jekyl that night by candlelight; another, to write to his wife for the last time as his wife – an eternal farewell – which perhaps would have been highly absurd, and affecting at the same time.

About two hours after Varbarriere's departure for dinner, he sent for that gentleman, and they had another, a longer, and a more collected interview – if not a happier one.

The result was, that Varbarriere's advice prevailed, as one might easily foresee, having a patient so utterly incompetent to advise himself.

The attorney, having shaken hands with Monsieur Varbarriere, and watched from the platform the gradual disappearance of the train that carried him from the purlieu of Slowton, with an expression of face plaintive as that with which Dido on the wild sea banks beheld the receding galleys of Æneas, loitered back again dolorously to the hostelry.

He arrived at the door exactly in time to witness the descent of Guy Deverell from his chaise. I think he would have preferred not meeting him, it would have saved him a few boring questions; but it was by no means a case for concealing himself. He therefore met him with a melancholy frankness on the steps.

The young man recognised him.

"Mr. Rumsey? – How do you do? Is my uncle here?"

"He left by the last train. I hope I see you well, sir."

"Gone? and where to?"

"He did not tell me." That was true, but the attorney had seen his valise labelled "Chester" by his direction. "He went by the London train, but he said he would be back to-morrow. Can I do anything? Your arrival was not expected."

"Thank you. I think not. It was just a word with my uncle I wished. You say he will be here again in the morning?"

"Yes, so he said. I'm waiting to see him."

"Then I can't fail to meet him if I remain." The attorney perceived, with his weatherwise experience, the traces of recent storm, both in the countenance and the manner of this young man, whose restiveness just now might be troublesome.

"Unless your business is urgent, I think – if you'll excuse me – you had better return to Marlowe," remarked the attorney. "You'll find it more comfortable quarters, a good deal, and your uncle will be very much hurried while here, and means to return to Marlowe to-morrow evening."

"But I shan't. I don't mean to return; in fact, I wish to speak to him here. I've delayed you on the steps, sir, very rudely; the wind is cold."

So he bowed, and they entered together, and the attorney, whose curiosity was now a little piqued, found he could make nothing of him, and rather disliked him; his reserve was hardly fair in so very young a person, and practised by one who had not yet won his spurs against so redoubted a champion as the knight of the rueful countenance.

Next morning, as M. Varbarriere had predicted, General Lennox, although sleep had certainly had little to do with the change, was quite a different man in some respects – in no wise happier, but much more collected; and now he promptly apprehended and retained Monsieur Varbarriere's plan, which it was agreed was to be executed that night.

More than once Varbarriere's compunctions revisited him as he sped onwards that morning from Chester to Slowton. But as men will, he bullied these misgivings and upbraidings into submission. He had been once or twice on the point of disclosing this portion of the complication to his attorney, but an odd sort of shyness prevented. He fancied that possibly the picture and his part in it were not altogether pretty, and somehow he did not care to expose himself to the secret action of the attorney's thoughts.

Even in his own mind it needed the strong motive which had first prompted it. Now it was no longer necessary to explore the mystery of that secret door through which the missing deed, and indeed the Deverell estate, had been carried into old Sir Harry's cupboard. But what was to be done? He had committed himself to the statement. General Lennox had a right to demand – in fact, *he* had promised – a distinct explanation.

Yes, a distinct explanation, and, further, a due corroboration by proof of that explanation. It was all due to Monsieur Varbarriere, who had paid that debt to his credit and conscience, and behold what a picture! Three familiar figures, irrevocably transformed, and placed in what a halo of infernal light.

"The thing could not be helped, and, whether or no, it was only right. Why the devil should I help Jekyl Marlowe to deceive and disgrace that withered old gentleman? I don't think it would have been a pleasant position for me."

And all the respectabilities hovering near cried "hear, hear, hear!" and Varbarriere shook up his head, and looked magisterial over the havoc of the last livid scene of the tragedy he had prepared; and the porter crying "Slowton!" opened the door, and released him.

CHAPTER X

Uncle and Nephew

When he reached his room, having breakfasted handsomely in the coffee-room, and learned that early Mr. Rumsey had accomplished a similar meal in his own sitting-room, he repaired thither, and entered forthwith upon their talk.

It was a bright and pleasant morning; the poplar trees in front of the hotel were all glittering in the mellow early sunlight, and the birds twittering as pleasantly as if there was not a sorrow or danger on earth.

"Well, sir, true to my hour," said Monsieur Varbarriere, in his deep brazen tones, as smiling and wondrously he entered the attorney's apartment.

"Good morning, sir – how d'ye do? Have you got those notes prepared you mentioned?"

"That I have, sir, as you shall see, pencil though; but that doesn't matter – no?"

The vowel sounded grandly in the upward slide of Varbarriere's titanic double bass.

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