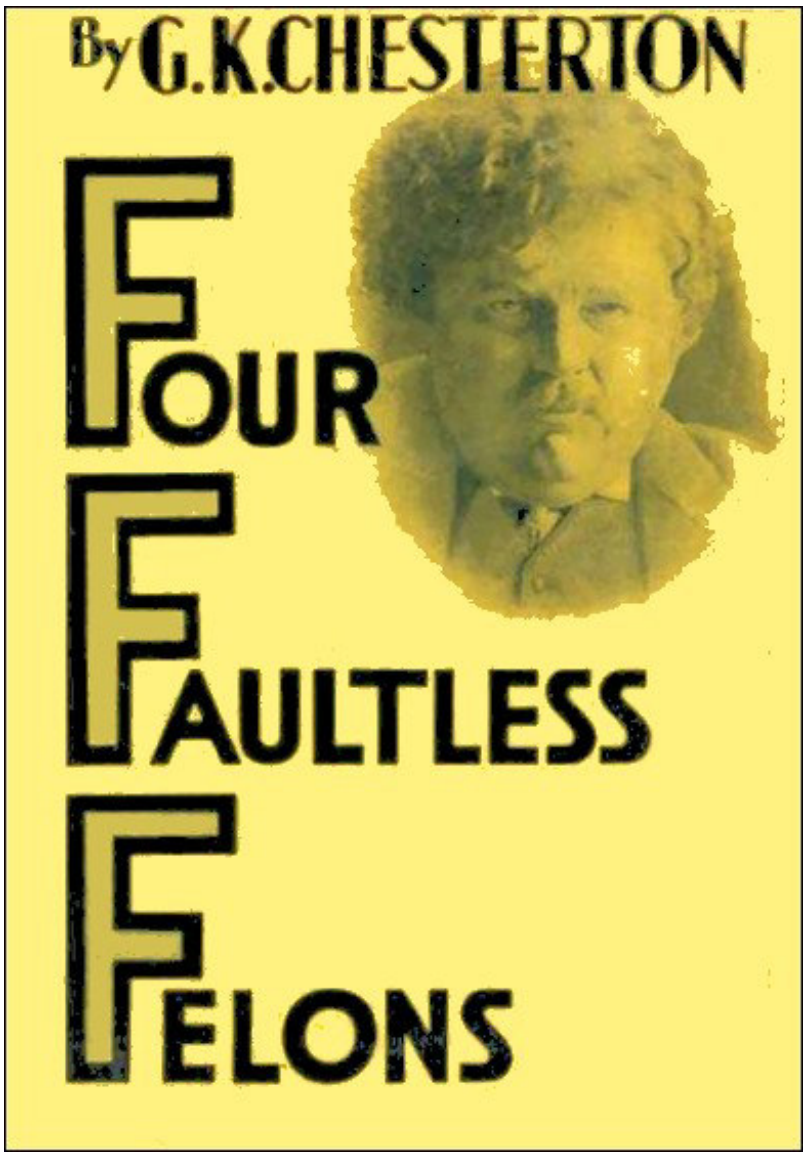
Four Faultless Felons

by

G.K. Chesterton



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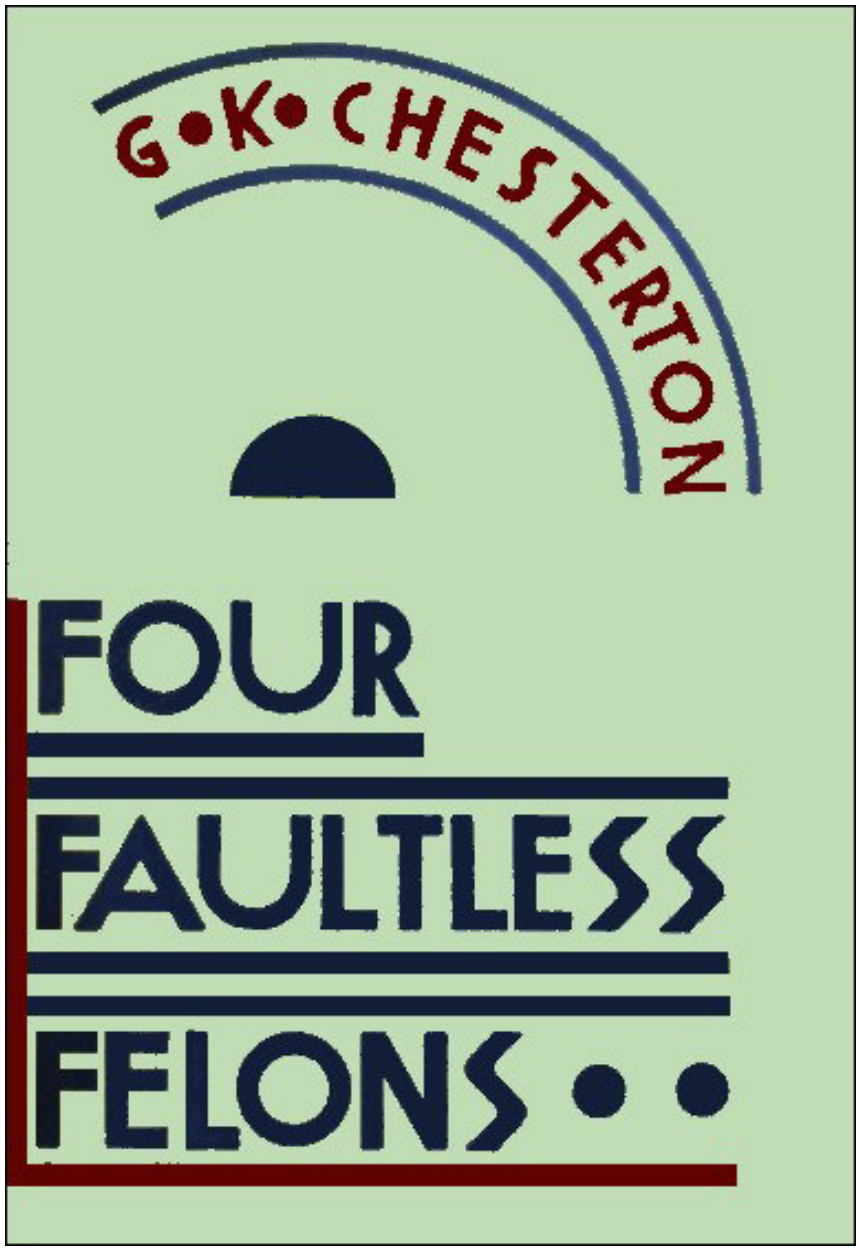

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PROLOGUE OF THE PRESSMAN

Mr. Asa Lee Pinion, of the *Chicago Comet*, had crossed half of America, the whole of the Atlantic, and eventually even Piccadilly Circus, in pursuit of the notable, if not notorious figure of Count Raoul de Marillac. Mr. Pinion wanted to get what is called "a story"; a story to put in his paper. He did get a story, but he did not put it in his paper. It was too tall a story, even for the *Comet*. Perhaps the metaphor is true in more ways than one, and the fable was tall like a church-spire or a tower among the stars: beyond comprehension as well as belief. Anyhow, Mr. Pinion decided not to risk his readers' comments. But that is no reason why the present writer, writing for more exalted, spiritual and divinely credulous readers, should imitate his silence.

Really, the anecdote he heard was quite incredible: and Mr. Pinion was not intolerant. While the Count was painting the town red and himself black, it was quite possible to believe that he was not so black as he was painted. After all, his extravagance and luxury, however ostentatious, did no particular harm to anybody but himself; and if he associated with the dissipated and degraded, he had never been known to interfere with the innocent or the reputable. But while it was credible enough that the nobleman was not so black as he was painted, he certainly could not be quite so white as he was painted, in the wild story that was told that evening. The story came from a friend of the Count's, much too friendly a friend, thought Mr. Pinion, friendly to the point of feeble-mindedness. He supposed it must be a delusion or a hoax; anyhow he did not put it into his paper. Yet it is because of this highly improbable anecdote that the Count de Marillac stands at the opening of this book, to introduce the four stories which were put forth as parallels to his own.

But there was one fact which struck the journalist as odd even at the beginning. He understood well enough that it would be difficult to catch the Count anywhere, as he whirled from one social engagement to another, in the manner appropriately called "fast". And he was not offended when Marillac said he could only spare ten minutes at his London club before going on to a theatrical first-night and other ensuing festivities. During that ten minutes, however, Marillac was quite polite, answered the rather superficial society questions which the *Comet* wanted answered, and very genially introduced the journalist to three or four club companions or cronies who were standing about him in the lounge, and who continued to stand about after the Count himself had made his beaming and flashing exit.

"I suppose," said one of them, "that the naughty old man has gone to see the naughty new play with all the naughty new people."

"Yes," grunted a big man standing in front of the fire. "He's gone with the naughtiest person of all, the author, Mrs. Prague. Authoress, I suppose she'd call herself—being only cultured and not educated."

"He always goes to the first night of those plays," assented the other. "P'raps he thinks there won't be a second night, if the police raid the place."

"What play is it?" asked the American in a gentle voice. He was a quiet little man with a very long head and a refined falcon profile; he was much less loud and casual than the Englishmen.

"*Naked Souls*," said the first man with a faint groan. "Dramatized version of the world-shaking novel 'Pan's Pipes.' Grapples grimly with the facts of life."

"Also bold, breezy and back to Nature," said the man by the fire. "We hear a lot just now about Pan's Pipes. They seem to me a little too like drain-pipes."

"You see," said the other, "Mrs. Prague is so very Modern, she has to go back to Pan. She says she cannot bear to believe that Pan is dead."

"I think," said the large man, with a touch of heavy violence, "that Pan is not only dead but rotting and stinking in the street."

It was the four friends of Marillac who puzzled Mr. Pinion. They were obviously rather intimate friends, and yet they were not, on the whole, of the sort likely to be even acquaintances. Marillac himself was much what might have been expected, rather more restless and haggard than his handsome portraits might have implied, a thing likely enough with his late hours and his advancing years. His curly

hair was still dark and thick, but his pointed grey beard was whitening fast; his eyes were a little hollow, and had a more anxious expression than could be inferred, at a distance, from his buoyant gestures and rapid walk. All that was quite in character, but the tone of the group was different. One figure alone out of the four seemed in some sense of Marillac's world, having something of the carriage of a military officer, with that fine shade that suggests a foreign officer. He had a clean-shaven, regular and very impassive face; he was sitting down when he bowed politely to the stranger, but something in the bow suggested that, standing up, he would have clicked his heels. The others were quite English and quite different. One of them was the very big man, with big shoulders bowed but powerful and a big head not yet bald but striped with rather thin brown hair. But the arresting thing about him was that indescribable suggestion of dust or cobwebs that belongs to a strong man leading a sedentary life, possibly scientific or scholarly, but certainly obscure, in its method if not its effect; the sort of middle-class man with a hobby, who seems to have been dug out of it with a spade. It was hard to imagine a more complete contradiction to such a meteor of fashion as the Count. The man next him, though more alert, was equally solid and respectable and free from fashionable pretensions; a short, square man with a square face and spectacles, who looked like what he was, an ordinary busy suburban general practitioner. The fourth of Marillac's incongruous intimates was quite frankly shabby. Grey seedy clothes hung limply on his lean figure, and his dark hair and rather ragged beard could, at the best, be only excused as Bohemian. He had very remarkable eyes, sunk very deep in his head and yet, by a paradox, standing out like signals. The visitor found himself continually drawn to them, as if they were magnets.

But, all together, the group bothered and bewildered him. It was not merely a difference of social class, it was an atmosphere of sobriety and even of solid work and worth, which seemed to belong to another world. The four men in question were friendly in a modest and even embarrassed manner; they fell into conversation with the journalist as with any ordinary equal in a tram or a tube, and when, about an hour later, they asked him to share their dinner at the club, he had no such sense of strain as he might have felt in facing one of the fabulous Luculline banquets of their friend the Count de Marillac.

For however seriously Marillac might or might not be taking the serious drama of Sex and Science, there was no doubt that he would take the dinner even more seriously. He was famous as an epicure of almost the classic and legendary sort, and all the *gourmets* of Europe reverenced his reputation. The little man with the spectacles glanced at this fact, indeed, as they sat down to dinner:

"Hope you can put up with our simple fare, Mr. Pinion," he said. "You'd have had a much more carefully selected menu if Marillac had been here."

The American reassured him with polite expressions about the club dinner; but added:

"I suppose it is true that he does make rather an art of dining?"

"Oh, yes," said the man in spectacles. "Always has all the right things at the wrong times. That's the ideal, I suppose."

"I suppose he takes a lot of trouble?" said Pinion.

"Yes," said the other. "He chooses his meals very carefully. Not carefully from my point of view. But then I'm a doctor."

Pinion could not keep his eyes off the magnetic eyes of the man with the shabby clothes and shaggy hair. Just now the man was gazing across the table with a curious intentness, and in the ensuing silence, he suddenly intervened.

"Everybody knows he's very particular in choosing his dinner. But I bet not one man in a million knows the principle on which he chooses it."

"You must remember," said Pinion, with his soft accent, "that I am a journalist, and I should like to be the one man in a million."

The man opposite looked at him steadily and rather strangely for a moment, and then said:

"I have half a mind. . . . Look here, have you any human curiosity as well as journalistic curiosity? I mean, would the one man like to know, even if the million never knew?"

"Oh, yes," replied the journalist, "I have plenty of curiosity, even about things I am told in confidence. But I can't quite see why Marillac's taste in champagne and ortolans should be so very confidential."

"Well," answered the other gravely, "why do you think he chooses them?"

"I guess I've got a bromide mind," said the American, "but I should rather suspect him of choosing the things he likes."

"*Au contraire*, as the other *gourmet* said when asked if he lunched on the boat."

The man with the peculiar eyes broke off from his flippant speech, plunged for a few moments into profound silence, and then resumed in so different a tone that it was like another man suddenly speaking at the table.

"Every age has its bigotry, which is blind to some particular need of human nature; the Puritans to the need for merriment, the Manchester School to the need for beauty, and so on. There is a need in man, or at least in many men, which it is not fashionable to admit or allow for in these days. Most people have had a touch of it in the more serious emotions of youth; in a few men it burns like a flame to the last, as it does here. Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, has been blamed for imposing it, but in fact, it rather regulated and even restrained the passion than forced it. It exists in all religions, to a wild and frantic extent in some of the religions of Asia. There men hack themselves with knives or hang themselves on hooks, or walk through life with withered arms rigidly uplifted, crucified upon empty air. It is the appetite for what one does not like. Marillac has it."

"What on earth—" began the startled journalist, but the other continued:

"In short, it is what people call Asceticism, and one of the modern mistakes is not allowing for its real existence in rare but quite real people. To live a life of incessant austerity and self-denial, as Marillac does, is surrounded with extraordinary difficulties and misunderstandings in modern society. Society can understand some particular Puritan fad, like Prohibition, especially if it is imposed on other people, above all, on poor people. But a man like Marillac, imposing on himself, not abstinence from wine, but abstinence from worldly pleasures of every sort. . . ."

"Excuse me," said Pinion in his most courteous tones, "I trust I'd never have the incivility to suggest that you have gone mad, so I must ask you to tell me candidly whether I have."

"Most people," replied the other, "would answer that it is Marillac who has gone mad. Perhaps he has; anyhow, if the truth were known, he would certainly be thought so. But it isn't only to avoid being put in a lunatic asylum that he hides his hermit's ideal by pretending to be a man of pleasure. It's part of the whole idea, in its only tolerable form. The worst of those Eastern fakirs hung on hooks is that they are too conspicuous. It may make them just a little vain. I don't deny that Stylites and some of the first hermits may have been touched with the same danger. But our friend is a Christian anchorite; and understands the advice, 'When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.' He is not seen of men to fast. On the contrary, he is seen of men to feast. Only, don't you see, he has invented a new kind of fasting."

Mr. Pinion of the *Comet* suddenly laughed, a curt and startled laugh, for he was very quick and had already guessed the joke.

"You don't really mean—" he began.

"Well, it's quite simple, isn't it?" replied his informant. "He feasts on all the most luxurious and expensive things that he doesn't like. Especially on the things that he simply detests. Under that cover, nobody can possibly accuse him of virtue. He remains impenetrably protected behind a rampart of repulsive oysters and unwelcome *aperitifs*. In short, the hermit must now hide anywhere but in the hermitage. He generally hides in the latest luxurious gilded hotels, because that's where they have the worst cooking."

"This is a very extraordinary tale," said the American, arching his eyebrows.

"You begin to see the idea?" said the other. "If he has twenty different *hors-d'œuvres* brought to him and takes the olives, who is to know that he hates olives? If he thoughtfully scans the whole wine-list and eventually selects a rather recondite Hock, who will guess that his whole soul rises in disgust at the very thought of Hock: and that he knows that's the nastiest—even of Hocks? Whereas, if he were to demand dried peas or a mouldy crust at the Ritz, he would probably attract attention."

"I never can quite see," said the man in spectacles restlessly, "what is the good of it all."

The other man lowered his magnetic eyes and looked down with some embarrassment. At last he said:

"I think I can see it, but I don't think I can say it. I had a touch of it myself once, only in one special direction, and I found it almost impossible to explain to anybody. Only there is one mark of the real mystic and ascetic of this sort; that he only wants to do it to himself. He wants everybody else to have what wine or smokes they want and will ransack the Ritz for it. The moment he wants to dragoon the others, the mystic sinks into a mire of degradation and becomes the moral reformer."

There was a pause, and then the journalist said suddenly:

"But, look here, this won't do. It isn't only wasting his money on wining and dining that has got Marillac a bad name. It's the whole thing. Why is he such a fan for these rotten erotic plays and things? Why does he go about with a woman like Mrs. Prague? That doesn't seem like a hermit, anyhow."

The man facing Pinion smiled and the heavier man on his right half turned with a sort of grunt of laughter.

"Well," he said, "it's pretty plain you've never been about with Mrs. Prague."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Pinion; and this time there was something like a general laugh.

"Some say she's his Maiden Aunt and it's his duty to be kind to her," began the first man, but the second man interrupted him gruffly:

"Why do you call her a Maiden Aunt when she looks like a—"

"Quite so, quite so," said the first man rather hastily, "and why 'looks like'—if it comes to that?"

"But her conversation!" groaned his friend. "And Marillac stands it for hours on end!"

"And her play!" assented the other. "Marillac sits through five mortal acts of it. If that isn't being a martyr—"

"Don't you see?" cried the shabby man with something like excitement. "The Count is a cultivated and even learned man; also he is a Latin and logical to the point of impatience. And yet he sticks it. He endures five or six acts of a Really Modern Intellectual Incisive Drama. The First Act in which she says that Woman will no longer be put on a pedestal; the Second Act in which Woman will no longer be put under a glass case; the Third Act in which Woman will no longer be a plaything for man, and the Fourth in which she will no longer be a chattel; all the *clichés*. And he still has two acts before him, in which she will not be something else, will not be a slave in the home or an outcast flung from the home. He's seen it six times without turning a hair; you can't even see him grind his teeth. And Mrs. Prague's conversation! How her first husband could never understand, and her second husband seemed as if he might understand, only her third husband carried her off as if there was real understanding—and so on, as if there were anything to be understood. You know what an utterly egotistical fool is like. And he suffers even those fools gladly."

"In fact," put in the big man in his brooding manner, "you might say he has invented the Modern Penance. The Penance of Boredom. Hair-shirts and hermits' caves in a howling wilderness would not be so horrible to modern nerves as that."

"By your account," ruminated Pinion, "I've been chasing a pleasure-seeker tripping on the light fantastic toe and only found a hermit standing on his head." After a silence he said abruptly, "Is this really true? How did you find it out?"

"That's rather a long story," replied the man opposite. "The truth is that Marillac allows himself one feast in the year, on Christmas Day, and eats and drinks what he really likes. I found him drinking beer and eating tripe and onions in a quiet pub in Hoxton, and somehow we were forced into confidential conversation. You will understand, of course, that this is a confidential conversation."

"I certainly shan't print it," answered the journalist. "I should be regarded as a lunatic if I did. People don't understand that sort of lunacy nowadays, and I rather wonder you take to it so much yourself."

"Well, I put my own case before him, you see," answered the other. "In a small way it was a little like his own. And then I introduced him to my friends, and so he became a sort of President of our little club."

"Oh," said Pinion rather blankly, "I didn't know you were a club."

"Well, we are four men with a common bond at least. We have all had occasion, like Marillac, to look rather worse than we were."

"Yes," grunted the large man rather sourly, "we've all been Misunderstood. Like Mrs. Prague."

"The Club of Men Misunderstood is rather more cheerful than that, however," continued his friend. "We are all pretty jolly here, considering that our reputations have been blasted by black and revolting crimes. The truth is we have devoted ourselves to a new sort of detective story—or detective service if you like. We do not hunt for crimes but for concealed virtues. Sometimes, as in Marillac's case, they are very artfully concealed. As you will doubtless be justified in retorting, we conceal our own virtues with brilliant success."

The journalist's head began to go round a little, though he thought himself pretty well accustomed both to crazy and criminal surroundings. "But I thought you said," he objected, "that your reputations were blasted with crime. What sort of crime?"

"Well, mine was murder," said the man next to him. "The people who blasted me did it because they disapproved of murder, apparently. It's true I was rather a failure at murder, as at everything else."

Pinion's gaze wandered in some bewilderment to the next man who answered cheerfully:

"Mine was only a common fraud. A professional fraud, too, the sort that gets you kicked out of your profession sometimes. Rather like Dr. Cook's sham discovery of the North Pole."

"What does all this mean?" asked Pinion; and he looked inquiringly at the man opposite, who had done so much of the explaining so far.

"Oh, theft," said the man opposite, indifferently; "the charge on which I was actually arrested was petty larceny."

There was a profound silence, which seemed to settle in a mysterious manner, like a gathering cloud, on the figure of the fourth member, who had not spoken so far a single word. He sat erect in his rather stiff, foreign fashion; his wooden, handsome face was unchanged and his lips had never moved even for so much as a murmur. But now, when the sudden and deep silence seemed to challenge him, his face seemed to harden from wood to stone and when he spoke at last, his foreign accent seemed something more than alien, as if it were almost inhuman.

"I have committed the Unpardonable Sin," he said. "For what sin did Dante reserve the last and lowest hell; the Circle of Ice?"

Still no one spoke; and he answered his own question in the same hollow tone:

"Treason. I betrayed the four companions of my party, and gave them up to the Government for a bribe."

Something turned cold inside the sensitive stranger, and for the first time he really felt the air around him sinister and strange. The stillness continued for another half minute, and then all the four men burst out into a great uproar of laughter.

The stories they told, to justify their boasts or confessions, are here retold in a different fashion, as they appeared to those on the outskirts rather than the centre of the events. But the journalist, who liked to collect all the odd things of life, was interested enough to record them, and then afterwards recast them. He felt he had really got something, if not exactly what he had expected, out of his pursuit of the dashing and extravagant Count Raoul de Marillac.

THE MODERATE MURDERER

I. THE MAN WITH THE GREEN UMBRELLA

The new Governor was Lord Tallboys, commonly called Top-hat Tallboys, because of his attachment to that uncanny erection, which he continued to carry balanced on his head as calmly among the palm-trees of Egypt as among the lamp-posts of Westminster. Certainly he carried it calmly enough in lands where few crowns were safe from toppling. The district he had come out to govern may here be described, with diplomatic vagueness, as a strip on the edge of Egypt and called for our convenience Polybia. It is an old story now; but one which many people had reason to remember for many years, and at the time it was an imperial event. One Governor was killed, another Governor was nearly killed, but in this story we are concerned only with one catastrophe, and that was rather a personal and even private catastrophe.

Top-hat Tallboys was a bachelor and yet he brought a family with him. He had a nephew and two nieces of whom one, as it happened, had married the Deputy Governor of Polybia, the man who had been called to rule during the interregnum after the murder of the previous ruler. The other niece was unmarried; her name was Barbara Traill, and she may well be the first figure to cross the stage of this story.

For indeed she was rather a solitary and striking figure, raven dark and rich in colouring with a very beautiful but rather sullen profile, as she crossed the sandy spaces and came under the cover of one long low wall which alone threw a strip of shadow from the sun, which was sloping towards the desert horizon. The wall itself was a quaint example of the patchwork character of that borderland of East and West. It was actually a line of little villas, built for clerks and small officials, and thrown out as by a speculative builder whose speculations spread to the ends of the earth. It was a strip of Streatham amid the ruins of Heliopolis. Such oddities are not unknown, when the oldest countries are turned into the newest colonies. But in this case the young woman, who was not without imagination, was conscious of a quite fantastic contrast. Each of these dolls' houses had its toy shrubs and plants and its narrow oblong of back garden running down to the common and continuous garden wall; and it was just outside this wall that there ran the rough path, fringed with a few hoary and wrinkled olives. Outside the fringe there faded away into infinity the monstrous solitude of sand. Only there could still be detected on that last line of distance a faint triangular shape, a sort of mathematical symbol whose unnatural simplicity has moved all poets and pilgrims for five thousand years. Anyone seeing it really for the first time, as the girl did, can hardly avoid uttering a cry: "The Pyramids!"

Almost as she said it a voice said in her ear, not loud but with alarming clearness and very exact articulation: "The foundations were traced in blood and in blood shall they be traced anew. These things are written for our instruction."

It has been said that Barbara Traill was not without imagination; it would be truer to say that she had rather too much. But she was quite certain she had not imagined the voice, though she certainly could not imagine where it came from. She appeared to be absolutely alone on the little path which ran along the wall and led to the gardens round the Governorate. Then she remembered the wall itself, and looking sharply over her shoulder, she fancied she saw for one moment a head peering out of the shadow of a sycamore, which was the only tree of any size for some distance, since she had left the last of the low sprawling olives two hundred yards behind. Whatever it was, it had instantly vanished, and somehow she suddenly felt frightened, more frightened at its disappearance than its appearance. She began to hurry along the path to her uncle's residence at a pace that was a little like a run. It was probably through this sudden acceleration of movement that she seemed to become aware, rather abruptly, that a man was marching steadily in front of her along the same track towards the gates of the Governorate.

He was a very large man, and seemed to take up the whole of the narrow path. She had something of the sensation, with which she was already slightly acquainted, of walking behind a camel through the narrow and crooked cracks of the Eastern town. But this man planted his feet as firmly as an elephant; he walked, one might say, even with a certain pomp, as if he were in a procession. He wore a long frock-coat and his head was surmounted by a tower of scarlet, a very tall red fez, rather taller than the top-hat of Lord Tallboys. The combination of the red Eastern cap and the black Western clothes is common enough among the *Effendi* class in those countries. But somehow it seemed novel and incongruous in this case, for the man was very fair and had a big blond beard blown about in the breeze. He might have been a model for the idiots who talk of the Nordic type of European, but somehow he did not look like an Englishman. He carried hooked on one finger a rather grotesque green umbrella or parasol, which he twirled idly like a trinket. As he was walking slower and slower and Barbara was walking fast and wanted to walk faster, she could hardly repress an exclamation of impatience and something like a request for room to pass. The large man with the beard immediately faced round and stared at her; then he lifted a monocle and fixed it in his eye and instantly smiled his apologies. She realized that he must be short-sighted and that she had been a mere blur to him a moment before, but there was something else in the change of his face and manner, something that she had seen before, but to which she could not put a name.

He explained, with the most formal courtesy, that he was going to leave a note for an official at the Governorate, and there was really no reason for her to refuse him credence or conversation. They walked a little way together, talking of things in general, and she had not exchanged more than a few sentences before she realized that she was talking to a remarkable man.

We hear much in these days about the dangers of innocence, much that is false and a little that is true. But the argument is almost exclusively applied to sexual innocence. There is a great deal that ought to be said about the dangers of political innocence. That most necessary and most noble virtue of patriotism is very often brought to despair and destruction, quite needlessly and prematurely, by the folly of educating the comfortable classes in a false optimism about the record and security of the Empire. Young people like Barbara Traill have often never heard a word about the other side of the story, as it would be told by Irishmen or Indians or even French Canadians, and it is the fault of their parents and their papers if they often pass abruptly from a stupid Britishism to an equally stupid Bolshevism. The hour of Barbara Traill was come, though she probably did not know it.

"If England keeps her promises," said the man with the beard, frowning, "there is still a chance that things may be quiet."

And Barbara had answered, like a schoolboy:

"England always keeps her promises."

"The Waba have not noticed it," he answered with an air of triumph.

The omniscient are often ignorant. They are often especially ignorant of ignorance. The stranger imagined that he was uttering a very crushing repartee, as perhaps he was, to anybody who knew what he meant. But Barbara had never heard of the Waba. The newspapers had seen to that.

"The British Government," he was saying, "definitely pledged itself two years ago to a complete scheme of local autonomy. If it is a complete scheme, all will be well. If Lord Tallboys has come out here with an incomplete scheme, a compromise, it will be very far from well. I shall be very sorry for everybody, but especially for my English friends."

She answered with a young and innocent sneer, "Oh yes—I suppose you are a great friend of the English."

"Yes," he replied calmly. "A friend: but a candid friend."

"Oh, I know all about that sort," she said with hot sincerity. "I know what they mean by a candid friend. I've always found it meant a nasty, sneering, sneaking, treacherous friend."

He seemed stung for an instant and answered, "Your politicians have no need to learn treachery from the Egyptians." Then he added abruptly: "Do you know on Lord Jaffray's raid they shot a child? Do you know anything at all? Do you even know how England tacked on Egypt to her Empire?"

"England has a glorious Empire," said the patriot stoutly.

"England had a glorious Empire," he said. "So had Egypt."

They had come, somewhat symbolically, to the end of their common path and she turned away indignantly to the gate that led into the private gardens of the Governor. As she did so he lifted his

green umbrella and pointed with a momentary gesture at the dark line of the desert and the distant Pyramid. The afternoon had already reddened into evening, and the sunset lay in long bands of burning crimson across the purple desolation of that dry inland sea.

"A glorious Empire," he said. "An Empire on which the sun never sets. Look . . . the sun is setting in blood."

She went through the iron gate like the wind and let it clang behind her. As she went up the avenue towards the inner gardens, she lost a little of her impatient movement and began to trail along in the rather moody manner which was more normal to her. The colours and shadows of that quieter scene seemed to close about her; this place was for the present her nearest approach to home, and at the end of the long perspective of gaily coloured garden walks, she could see her sister Olive picking flowers.

The sight soothed her; but she was a little puzzled about why she should need any soothing. She had a deeply disquieting sense of having touched something alien and terrible, something fierce and utterly foreign, as if she had stroked some strange wild beast of the desert. But the gardens about her and the house beyond had already taken on a tone or tint indescribably English, in spite of the recent settlement and the African sky. And Olive was so obviously choosing flowers to put into English vases or to decorate English dinner-tables, with decanters and salted almonds.

But as she drew nearer to that distant figure, it grew more puzzling. The blossoms grasped in her sister's hand looked like mere ragged and random handfuls, torn away as a man lying on the turf would idly tear out grass, when he is abstracted or angry. A few loose stalks lay littered on the path; it seemed as if the heads had been merely broken off as if by a child. Barbara did not know why she took in all these details with a slow and dazed eye, before she looked at the central figure they surrounded. Then Olive looked up and her face was ghastly. It might have been the face of Medea in the garden, gathering the poisonous flowers.

II. THE BOY WHO MADE A SCENE

Barbara Traill was a girl with a good deal of the boy about her. This is very commonly said about modern heroines. None the less, the present heroine would be a very disappointing modern heroine. For, unfortunately, the novelists who call their heroines boyish obviously know nothing whatever about boys. The girl they depict, whether we happen to regard her as a bright young thing or a brazen little idiot, is at any rate in every respect the complete contrary of a boy. She is sublimely candid; she is slightly shallow; she is uniformly cheerful; she is entirely unembarrassed; she is everything that a boy is not. But Barbara really was rather like a boy. That is, she was rather shy, obscurely imaginative, capable of intellectual friendships and at the same time of emotional brooding over them; capable of being morbid and by no means incapable of being secretive. She had that sense of misfit which embarrasses so many boys, the sense of the soul being too big to be seen or confessed, and the tendency to cover the undeveloped emotions with a convention. One effect of it was that she was of the sort troubled by Doubt. It might have been religious doubt, at the moment it was a sort of patriotic doubt, though she would have furiously denied that there was any doubt about the matter. She had been upset by her glimpse of the alleged grievances of Egypt or the alleged crimes of England, and the face of the stranger, the white face with the golden beard and the glaring monocle, had come to stand for the tempter or the spirit that denies. But the face of her sister suddenly banished all such merely political problems. It brought her back with a shock to much more private problems, indeed to much more secret problems, for she had never admitted them to anyone but herself.

The Traills had a tragedy, or rather, perhaps, something that Barbara's brooding spirit had come to regard as the dawn of a tragedy. Her younger brother was still a boy; it might more truly be said that he was still a child. His mind had never come to a normal maturity, and though opinions differed about the nature of the deficiency, she was prone in her black moods to take the darkest view and let it darken the whole house of Tallboys. Thus it happened that she said quickly, at the sight of her sister's strange expression:

"Is anything wrong about Tom?"

Olive started slightly, and then said, rather crossly than otherwise: "No, not particularly. . . . Uncle has put him with a tutor here, and they say he's getting on better. . . . Why do you ask? There's nothing special the matter with him."

"Then I suppose," said Barbara, "that there is something special the matter with you."

"Well," answered the other, "isn't there something the matter with all of us?"

With that she turned abruptly and went back towards the house, dropping the flowers she had been making a pretence of gathering, and her sister followed, still deeply disturbed in mind.

As they came near the portico and veranda, she heard the high voice of her uncle Tallboys, who was leaning back in a garden chair and talking to Olive's husband, the Deputy Governor. Tallboys was a lean figure with a large nose and ears standing out from his stalk of a head; like many men of that type he had a prominent Adam's apple and talked in a full-throated gobbling fashion. But what he said was worth listening to, though he had a trick of balancing one clause against another, with alternate gestures of his large, loose hands, which some found a trifle irritating. He was also annoyingly deaf. The Deputy Governor, Sir Harry Smythe, was an amusing contrast, a square man with a rather congested face, the colour high under the eyes, which were very light and clear, and two parallel black bars of brow and moustache, which gave him rather a look of Kitchener, until he stood up and looked stunted by the comparison. It also gave him a rather misleading look of bad temper, for he was an affectionate husband and a good-humoured comrade, if a rather stubborn party man. For the rest the conversation was enough to show that he had a military point of view, which is sufficiently common and even commonplace.

"In short," the Governor was saying, "I believe the Government scheme is admirably adapted to meet a somewhat difficult situation. Extremists of both types will object to it, but extremists object to everything."

"Quite so," answered the other, "the question isn't so much whether they object as whether they can make themselves objectionable."

Barbara, with her new and nervous political interests, found herself interrupted in her attempt to listen to the political conversation by the unwelcome discovery that there were other people present. There was a very beautifully dressed young gentleman, with hair like black satin, who seemed to be the local secretary of the Governor; his name was Arthur Meade. There was an old man with a very obvious chestnut wig and a very unobvious, not to say inscrutable yellow face, who was an eminent financier known by the name of Morse. There were various ladies of the official circle who were duly scattered among these gentlemen. It seemed to be the tail-end of a sort of afternoon tea, which made all the more odd and suspicious the strange behaviour of the only hostess, in straying to the other garden and tearing up the flowers. Barbara found herself set down beside a pleasant old clergyman with smooth, silver hair, and an equally smooth, silver voice, who talked to her about the Bible and the Pyramids. She found herself committed to the highly uncomfortable experience of pretending to conduct one conversation while trying to listen to another.

This was the more difficult because the Rev. Ernest Snow, the clergyman in question, had (for all his mildness) not a little gentle pertinacity. She received a confused impression that he held very strong views on the meaning of certain Prophecies in connection with the end of the world and especially with the destiny of the British Empire. He had that habit of suddenly asking questions which is so unkind to the inattentive listener. Thus, she would manage to hear a scrap of the talk between the two rulers of the province; the Governor would say, balancing his sentences with his swaying hands:

"There are two considerations and by this method we meet them both. On the one hand, it is impossible entirely to repudiate our pledge. On the other hand, it is absurd to suppose that the recent atrocious crime does not necessarily modify the nature of that pledge. We can still make sure that our proclamation is a proclamation of a reasonable liberty. We have therefore decided—"

And then, at that particular moment, the poor clergyman would pierce her consciousness with the pathetic question:

"Now how many cubits do you think that would be?"

A little while later she managed to hear Smythe, who talked much less than his companion, say curtly: "For my part, I don't believe it makes much difference what proclamations you make. There are

rows here when we haven't got sufficient forces, and there are no rows when we have got sufficient forces. That's all."

"And what is our position at present?" asked the Governor gravely.

"Our position is damned bad, if you ask me," grumbled the other in a low voice. "Nothing has been done to train the men; why, I found the rifle practice consisted of a sort of parlour game with a pea-shooter about twice a year. I've put up proper rifle butts beyond the olive walk there now, but there are other things. The munitions are not—"

"But in that case," came the mild but penetrating voice of Mr. Snow, "in that case what becomes of the Shunamites?"

Barbara had not the least idea what became of them, but in this case she felt she could treat it as a rhetorical question. She forced herself to listen a little more closely to the views of the venerable mystic, and she only heard one more fragment of the political conversation.

"Shall we really want all these military preparations?" asked Lord Tallboys rather anxiously. "When do you think we shall want them?"

"I can tell you," said Smythe with a certain grimness. "We shall want them when you publish your proclamation of reasonable liberty."

Lord Tallboys made an abrupt movement in the garden chair, like one breaking up a conference in some irritation; then he made a diversion by lifting a finger and signalling to his secretary Mr. Meade, who slid up to him and after a brief colloquy slid into the house. Released from the strain of State affairs, Barbara fell once more under the spell of the Church and the Prophetical Office. She still had only a confused idea of what the old clergyman was saying, but she began to feel a vague element of poetry in it. At least it was full of things that pleased her fancy like the dark drawings of Blake, prehistoric cities and blind and stony seers and kings who seemed clad in stone like their sepulchres the Pyramids. In a dim way she understood why all that stony and starry wilderness has been the playground of so many cranks. She softened a little towards the clerical crank and even accepted an invitation to his house on the day after the following, to see the documents and the definite proof about the Shunamites. But she was still very vague about what it was supposed to prove.

He thanked her and said gravely: "If the prophecy is fulfilled now, there will be a grave calamity."

"I suppose," she said with a rather dreary flippancy, "if the prophecy were not fulfilled, it would be an even greater calamity."

Even as she spoke there was a stir behind some of the garden palms and the pale and slightly gaping face of her brother appeared above the palm-leaves. The next moment she saw just behind him the secretary and the tutor; it was evident that his uncle had sent for him. Tom Traill had the look of being too big for his clothes, which is not uncommon in the otherwise undeveloped; the gloomy good looks which he would otherwise have shared with his branch of the family were marred by his dark, straight hair being brushed crooked and his habit of looking out the corner of his eye at the corner of the carpet. His tutor was a big man of a dull and dusty exterior, apparently having the name of Hume. His broad shoulders were a little bowed like those of a drudge, though he was as yet hardly middle-aged. His plain and rugged face had a rather tired expression, as well it might. Teaching the defective is not always a hilarious parlour game.

Lord Tallboys had a brief and kindly conversation with the tutor. Lord Tallboys asked a few simple questions. Lord Tallboys gave a little lecture on education, still very kindly, but accompanied by the waving of the hands in rotation. On the one hand, the power to work was a necessity of life and could never be wholly evaded. On the other hand, without a reasonable proportion of pleasure and repose even work would suffer. On the one hand . . . it was at this point that the Prophecy was apparently fulfilled and a highly regrettable Calamity occurred at the Governor's tea-party.

For the boy burst out abruptly into a sort of high, gurgling crow and began to flap his hands about like the wings of a penguin, repeating over and over again, "On the one hand. On the other hand. On the one hand. On the other hand. On the one hand. On the other hand. . . . Golly!"

"Tom!" cried Olive on a sharp accent of agony and there was a ghastly silence over all the garden.

"Well," said the tutor in a reasonable undertone, which was as clear as a bell in that stillness, "you can't expect to have three hands, can you?"

"Three hands?" repeated the boy, and then after a long silence, "Why, how could you?"

"One would have to be in the middle, like an elephant's trunk," went on the tutor in the same colourless, conversational tone. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a long nose like an elephant so that you could turn it this way and that and pick up things on the breakfast-table, and never let go of your knife and fork?"

"Oh, you're *mad*!" ejaculated Tom with a sort of explosion that had a queer touch of exultation.

"I'm not the only mad person in the world, old boy," said Mr. Hume.

Barbara stood staring as she listened to this extraordinary conversation in that deadly silence and that highly unsuitable social setting. The most extraordinary thing about it was that the tutor said these crazy and incongruous things with an absolutely blank face.

"Didn't I ever tell you," he said in the same heavy and indifferent voice, "about the clever dentist who could pull out his own teeth with his own nose? I'll tell you tomorrow."

He was still quite dull and serious; but he had done the trick. The boy was distracted from his dislike of his uncle by the absurd image, just as a child in a temper is distracted by a new toy. Tom was now only looking at the tutor and followed him everywhere with his eyes. Perhaps he was not the only member of his family who did so. For the tutor, Barbara thought, was certainly a very odd person.

There was no more political talk that day, but there was not a little political news on the next. On the following morning proclamations were posted everywhere announcing the just, reasonable and even generous compromise which His Majesty's Government was now offering as a fair and final settlement of the serious social problems of Polybia and eastern Egypt. And on the following evening the news went through the town in one blast, like the wind of the desert, that Viscount Tallboys, Governor of Polybia, had been shot down by the last of the line of olives, at the corner of the wall.

III. THE MAN WHO COULD NOT HATE

Immediately after leaving the little garden-party, Tom and his tutor parted for the evening, for the former lived at the Governorate, while the latter had a sort of lodge or little bungalow higher up on the hill behind amid the taller trees. The tutor said in private what everybody had indignantly expected him to say in public, and remonstrated with the youth for his display of imitative drama.

"Well, I won't like him," said Tom warningly. "I'd like to kill him. His nose sticks out."

"You can hardly expect it to stick in," said Mr. Hume mildly. "I wonder whether there's an old story about the man whose nose stuck in."

"Is there?" demanded the other in the literal spirit of infancy.

"There may be tomorrow," replied the tutor and began to climb the steep path to his abode.

It was a lodge built mostly of bamboo and light timber with a gallery running round outside, from which could be seen the whole district spread out like a map. The grey and green squares of the Governorate building and grounds; the path running straight under the low garden wall and parallel to the line of villas; the solitary sycamore breaking the line at one point and farther along the closer rank of the olive-trees, like a broken cloister, and then another gap and then the corner of the wall, beyond which spread brown slopes of desert, patched here and there with green, where the ground was being turfed as part of some new public works or the Deputy Governor's rapid reforms in military organization. The whole hung under him like a vast coloured cloud in the brief afterglow of the Eastern sunset; then it was rapidly rolled in the purple gloom in which the strong stars stood out over his head and seemed nearer than the things of earth.

He stood for some moments on the gallery looking down on the darkening landscape, his blunt features knotted in a frown of curious reflection. Then he went back into the room where he and his pupil had worked all day, or where he had worked to induce his pupil to consider the idea of working. It was a rather bare room and the few objects in it rather odd and varied. A few bookshelves showed very large and gaily coloured books containing the verses of Mr. Edward Lear, and very small and shabby books containing the verses of the principal French and Latin poets. A rack of pipes, all hanging crooked, gave the inevitable touch of the bachelor; a fishing-rod and an old double-barrelled gun leaned dusty

and disused in a corner; for it was long ago that this man, in other ways so remote from the sports of his countrymen, had indulged those two hobbies, chiefly because they were unsociable. But what was perhaps most curious of all, the desk and the floor were littered with geometrical diagrams treated in a manner unusual among geometers, for the figures were adorned with absurd faces or capering legs, such as a schoolboy adds to the squares and triangles on the blackboard. But the diagrams were drawn very precisely, as if the draughtsman had an exact eye and excelled in anything depending on that organ.

John Hume sat down at his desk and began to draw more diagrams. A little later he lit a pipe, and began to study those he had drawn, but he did not leave his desk or his preoccupations. So the hours went by amid an unfathomable stillness around that hillside hermitage, until the distant strains of a more or less lively band floated up from below, as a signal that a dance at the Governorate was already in progress. He knew there was a dance that night and took no notice of it; he was not sentimental, but some of the tunes stirred almost mechanical memories. The Tallboys family was a little old-fashioned, even for this rather earlier time. They were old-fashioned in not pretending to be any more democratic than they were. Their dependents were dependents, decently treated; they did not call themselves liberal because they dragged their sycophants into society. It had therefore never crossed the mind of the secretary or the tutor that the dance at the Governorate was any concern of theirs. They were also old-fashioned in the arrangements of the dance itself, and the date must also be allowed for. The new dances had only just begun to pierce, and nobody had dreamed of the wild and varied freedom of our new fashion, by which a person has to walk about all night with the same partner to the same tune. All this sense of distance, material and moral, in the old swaying waltzes moved through his subconsciousness and must be allowed for in estimating what he suddenly looked up and saw.

It seems for one instant as if, in rising through the mist, the tune had taken outline and colour and burst into his room with the bodily presence of a song, for the blues and greens of her patterned dress were like notes of music and her amazing face came to him like a cry; a cry out of the old youth he had lost or never known. A princess flying out of fairyland would not have seemed more impossible than that girl from that ballroom, though he knew her well enough as the younger sister of his charge; and the ball was a few hundred yards away. Her face was like a pale face burning through a dream and itself as unconscious as a dreamer's; for Barbara Traill was curiously unconscious of that mask of beauty fixed on her brooding boyish soul. She had been counted less attractive than her sisters and her sulks had marked her almost as the ugly duckling. Nothing in the solid man before her told of the shock of realization in his mind. She did not even smile. It was also characteristic of her that she blurted out what she had to say at once, almost as crudely as her brother:

"I'm afraid Tom is very rude to you," she said. "I'm very sorry. How do you think he is getting on?"

"I think most people would say," he said slowly at last, "that I ought to apologize for his schooling more than you for his family. I'm sorry about his uncle, but it's always a choice of evils. Tallboys is a very distinguished man and can look after his own dignity, but I've got to look after my charge. And I know that is the right way with him. Don't you be worried about him. He's perfectly all right if you understand him, and it's only a matter of making up for lost time."

She was listening, or not listening, with her characteristic frown of abstraction; she had taken the chair he offered her apparently without noticing it and was staring at the comical diagrams, apparently without seeing them. Indeed, it might well have been supposed that she was not listening at all; for the next remark she made appeared to be about a totally different subject. But she often had a habit of thus showing fragments of her mind; and there was more plan in the jigsaw puzzle than many people understood. Anyhow, she said suddenly, without lifting her eyes from the ludicrous drawing in front of her:

"I met a man going to the Governorate today. A big man with a long, fair beard and a single eyeglass. Do you know who he is? He said all sorts of horrid things against England."

Hume got to his feet with his hands in his pockets and the expression of one about to whistle. He stared at the girl and said softly:

"Hullo! Has he turned up again? I thought there was some trouble coming. Yes, I know him—they call him Dr. Gregory, but I believe he comes from Germany, though he often passes for English. He is a stormy petrel, anyhow; and wherever he goes there's a row. Some say we ought to have used him

ourselves; I believe he once offered his talents to our Government. He's a very clever fellow and knows a frightful lot of the facts about these parts."

"Do you mean," she said sharply, "that I'm to believe that man and all the things he said?"

"No," said Hume. "I shouldn't believe that man; not even if you believe all the things he said."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Frankly, I think he is a thoroughly bad egg," said the tutor. "He's got a pretty rotten reputation about women; I won't go into details, but he'd have gone to prison twice but for suborning perjury. I only say, whatever you may come to believe, don't believe in him."

"He dared to say that our Government broke its word," said Barbara indignantly.

John Hume was silent. Something in his silence affected her like a strain, and she said quite irrationally:

"Oh, for the Lord's sake say something! Do you know he dared to say that somebody on Lord Jaffray's expedition shot a child? I don't mind their saying England's cold and hard and all that; I suppose that's natural prejudice. But can't we stop these wild, wicked lies?"

"Well," replied Hume rather wearily, "nobody can say that Jaffray is cold and hard. The excuse for the whole thing was that he was blind drunk."

"Then I am to take the word of that liar!" she said fiercely.

"He's a liar all right," said the tutor gloomily. "And it's a very dangerous condition of the Press and the public, when only the liars tell the truth."

Something of a massive gravity in his grim humour for the moment overpowered her breathless resentment, and she said in a quieter tone: "Do you believe in this demand for self-government?"

"I'm not very good at believing," he said. "I find it very hard to believe that these people cannot live or breathe without votes, when they lived contentedly without them for fifty centuries when they had the whole country in their own hands. A Parliament may be a good thing; a top-hat may be a good thing; your uncle certainly thinks so. We may like or dislike our top-hats. But if a wild Turk tells me he has a natural born right to a top-hat, I can't help answering: 'Then why the devil didn't you make one for yourself?'"

"You don't seem to care much for the Nationalists either," she said.

"Their politicians are often frauds, but they're not alone in that. That's why I find myself forced into an intermediate position, a sort of benevolent neutrality. It simply seems to be a choice between a lot of blasted blackguards and a lot of damned drivelling, doddering idiots. You see I'm a Moderate."

He laughed a little for the first time, and his plain face was suddenly altered for the better. She was moved to say in a more friendly tone:

"Well, we must prevent a real outbreak. You don't want all our people murdered."

"Only a little murdered," he said, still smiling. "Yes, I think I should like some of them *rather* murdered. Not too much, of course; it's a question of a sense of proportion."

"Now you're talking nonsense," she said, "and people in our position can't stand any nonsense. Harry says we may have to make an example."

"I know," he said. "He made several examples when he was in command here, before Lord Tallboys came out. It was vigorous—very vigorous. But I think I know what would be better than making an example."

"And what is that?"

"Setting an example," said Hume. "What about our own politicians?"

She said suddenly: "Well, why don't you do something yourself?"

There was a silence. Then he drew a deep breath. "Ah, there you have me. I can't do anything myself. I am futile; naturally and inevitably futile. I suffer from a deadly weakness."

She felt suddenly rather frightened; she had encountered his blank and empty eyes.

"I cannot hate," he said. "I cannot be angry."

Something in his heavy voice seemed full of quality, like the fall of a slab of stone on a sarcophagus; she did not protest, and in her subconsciousness yawned a disappointment. She half realized the depth of her strange reliance and felt like one who had dug in the desert and found a very deep well, and found it dry.

When she went out on to the veranda the steep garden and plantation were grey in the moon, and a certain greyness spread over her own spirit, a mood of fatalism and of dull fear. For the first time she

realized something of what strikes a Western eye in Eastern places as the unnaturalness of nature. The squat, limbless growth of the prickly pear was not like the green growths of home, springing on light stalks to lovely flowers like butterflies captured out of air. It was more like the dead blind bubbling of some green, squalid slime: a world of plants that were as plain and flat as stones. She hated the hairy surface of some of the squat and swollen trees of that grotesque garden; the tufts here and there irritated her fancy as they might have tickled her face. She felt that even the big, folded flowers, if they opened, would have a foul fragrance. She had a latent sense of the savour of faint horror, lying over all as lightly as the faint moonshine. Just as it had chilled her most deeply, she looked up and saw something that was neither plant nor tree, though it hung as still in the stillness, but it had the unique horror of a human face. It was a very white face, but bearded with gold like the Greek statues of gold and ivory, and at the temples were two golden curls, that might have been the horns of Pan.

For the moment that motionless head might indeed have been that of some terminal god of gardens. But the next moment it had found legs and came to life, springing out upon the pathway behind her. She had already gone some distance from the hut and was not far from the illuminated grounds of the Governorate, whence the music swelled louder as she went. Nevertheless, she swung round and faced the other way, looking desperately at the figure she recognized. He had abandoned his red fez and black frock-coat and was clad completely in white, like many tropical trippers, but it gave him in the moonlight something of the silver touch of a spectral harlequin. As he advanced he screwed the shining disk into his eye and it revealed in a flash the faint memory that had always escaped her. His face in repose was calm and classic and might have been the stone mask of Jove rather than Pan. But the monocle gathered up his features into a sneer and seemed to draw his eyes closer together; and she suddenly saw that he was no more a German than an Englishman. And though she had no Anti-Semitic prejudice in particular, she felt somehow that in that scene there was something sinister in a fair Jew, as in a white negro.

"We meet under a yet more beautiful sky," he said; she hardly heard what else he said. Broken phrases from what she had heard recently tumbled through her mind, mere words like "reputation" and "prison", and she stepped back to increase the distance, but moving in the opposite direction from which she had come. Afterwards she hardly remembered what had happened; he had said other things; he had tried to stop her, and an instantaneous impression of crushing and startling strength, like a chimpanzee, surprised her into a cry. Then she stumbled and ran, but not in the direction of the house of her own people.

Mr. John Hume got out of his chair more quickly than was his wont and went to meet someone who stumbled up the stair without.

"My dear child," he said, and put a hand on her shaking shoulder, giving and receiving a queer thrill like a dull electric shock. Then he went, moving quickly past her. He had seen something in the moonlight beyond and without descending the steps, sprang over the rail to the ground below, standing waist-high in the wild and tangled vegetation. There was a screen of large leaves waving to and fro between Barbara and the rapid drama that followed, but she saw, as in flashes of moonlight, the tutor dart across the path of the figure in white and heard the shock of blows and saw a kick like a catapult. There was a wheel of silver legs like the arms of the Isle of Man, and then out of the dense depth of the lower thicket a spout of curses in a tongue that was not English, nor wholly German, but which shrieked and chattered in all the Ghettoes of the world. But one strange thing remained even in her disordered memory; that when the figure in white had risen tottering and turned to plunge down the hill, the white face and the furious gesture of malediction were turned, not towards the assailant, but towards the house of the Governor.

The tutor was frowning ponderously as he came again up the veranda steps, as if over some of his geometrical problems. She asked him rather wildly what he had done and he answered in his heavy voice: "I hope I half killed him. You know I am in favour of half measures."

She laughed rather hysterically and cried: "You said you could not be angry."

Then they suddenly became very stiff and silent and it was with an almost fatuous formality that he escorted her down the slope to the very doors of the dancing-rooms. The sky behind the green pergolas of foliage was a vivid violet or some sort of blue that seemed warmer than any red; and the furry filaments of the great tree-trunks seemed like the quaint sea-beasts of childhood, which could be

stroked and which unfolded their fingers. There was something upon them both beyond speech or even silence. He even went so far as to say it was a fine night.

"Yes," she answered, "it is a fine night"; and felt instantly as if she had betrayed some secret.

They went through the inner gardens to the gate of the vestibule, which was crowded with people in uniform and evening dress. They parted with the utmost formality; and that night neither of them slept.

IV. THE DETECTIVE AND THE PARSON

It was not until the following evening, as already noted, that the news came that the Governor had fallen by a shot from an unknown hand. And Barbara Traill received the news later than most of her friends, because she had departed rather abruptly that morning for a long ramble amid the ruins and plantations of palm, in the immediate neighbourhood. She took a sort of picnic basket with her, but light as was her visible luggage, it would be true to say that she went away to unpack upon a large scale. She went to unfold a sort of invisible *impedimenta* which had accumulated in her memories, especially her memories of the night before. This sort of impetuous solitude was characteristic of her, but it had an immediate effect which was rather fortunate in her case. For the first news was the worst, and when she returned the worst had been much modified. It was first reported that her uncle was dead; then that he was dying; finally that he had only been wounded and had every prospect of recovery. She walked with her empty basket straight into the hubbub of discussion about these things, and soon found that the police operations for the discovery and pursuit of the criminal were already far advanced. The inquiry was in the hands of a hard-headed, hatchet-faced officer named Hayter, the chief of the detective force; who was being actively seconded by young Meade, the secretary of the Governor. But she was rather more surprised to find her friend the tutor in the very centre of the group, being questioned about his own recent experiences.

The next moment she felt a strange sort of surge of subconscious annoyance, as she realized the subject-matter of the questions. The questioners were Meade and Hayter; but it was significant that they had just received the news that Sir Harry Smythe, with characteristic energy, had arrested Dr. Paulus Gregory, the dubious foreigner with the big beard. The tutor was being examined about his own last glimpse of that questionable public character, and Barbara felt a secret fury at finding the affair of the night before turned into a public problem of police. She felt as if she had come down in the morning to find the whole breakfast-table talking about some very intimate dream she had had in the middle of the night. For though she had carried that picture with her as she wandered among the tombs and the green thickets, she had felt it as something as much peculiar to herself as if she had had a vision in the wilderness. The bland, black-haired Mr. Meade was especially insinuating in his curiosity. She told herself, in a highly unreasonable fashion, that she had always hated Arthur Meade.

"I gather," the secretary was saying, "that you have excellent reasons of your own for regarding this man as a dangerous character."

"I regard him as a rotter and I always did," replied Hume in a rather sulky and reluctant manner. "I did have a bit of a kick up with him last night, but it didn't make any difference to my views, nor to his either, I should think."

"It seems to me it might make a considerable difference," persisted Meade. "Isn't it true that he went away cursing not only you but especially the Governor? And he went away down the hill towards the place where the Governor was shot. It's true he wasn't shot till a good time after, and nobody seems to have seen his assailant; but he might have hung about in the woods and then crept out along the wall at dusk."

"Having helped himself to a gun from the gun-tree that grows wild in these woods, I suppose," said the tutor sardonically. "I swear he had no gun or pistol on him when I threw him into the prickly pear."

"You seem to be making the speech for the defence," said the secretary with a faint sneer. "But you yourself said he was a pretty doubtful character."

"I don't think he is in the least a doubtful character," replied the tutor in his stolid way. "I haven't the least doubt about him myself. I think he is a loose, lying, vicious braggart and humbug; a selfish, sensual mountebank. So I'm pretty sure that he didn't shoot the Governor, whoever else did."

Colonel Hayter cocked a shrewd eye at the speaker and spoke himself for the first time.

"Ah—and what do you mean by that exactly?"

"I mean what I say," answered Hume. "It's exactly because he's that sort of rascal that he didn't commit that sort of rascality. Agitators of his type never do things themselves; they incite other people; they hold meetings and send round the hat and then vanish, to do the same thing somewhere else. It's a jolly different sort of person that's left to take the risks of playing Brutus or Charlotte Corday. But I confess there are two other little bits of evidence, which I think clear the fellow completely."

He put two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and slowly and thoughtfully drew out a round, flat piece of glass with a broken string.

"I picked this up on the spot where we struggled," he said. "It's Gregory's eyeglass; and if you look through it you won't see anything, except the fact that a man who wanted a lens as strong as that could see next to nothing without it. He certainly couldn't see to shoot as far as the end of the wall from the sycamore, which is whereabouts they think the shot must have been fired from."

"There may be something in that," said Hayter, "though the man might have had another glass, of course. You said you had a second reason for thinking him innocent."

"The second reason," said Hume, "is that Sir Harry Smythe has just arrested him."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Meade sharply. "Why, you brought us the message from Sir Harry yourself."

"I'm afraid I brought it rather imperfectly," said the other, in a dull voice. "It's quite true Sir Harry has arrested the doctor, but he'd arrested him before he heard of the attempt on Lord Tallboys. He had just arrested him for holding a seditious meeting five miles away at Pentapolis, at which he made an eloquent speech, which must have reached its beautiful peroration about the time when Tallboys was being shot at, here at the corner of the road."

"Good Lord!" cried Meade, staring, "you seem to know a lot about this business."

The rather sullen tutor lifted his head and looked straight at the secretary with a steady but rather baffling gaze.

"Perhaps I do know a little about it," he said. "Anyhow, I'm quite sure Gregory's got a good alibi."

Barbara had listened to this curious conversation with a confused and rather painful attention; but as the case against Gregory seemed to be crumbling away, a new emotion of her own began to work its way to the surface. She began to realize that she had wanted Gregory to be made responsible, not out of any particular malice towards him, but because it would explain and dispose of the whole incident, and dismiss it from her mind along with another disturbing but hardly conscious thought. Now that the criminal had again become a nameless shadow, he began to haunt her mind with dreadful hints of identity and she had spasms of fear, in which that shadowy figure was suddenly fitted with a face.

As has been already noted, Barbara Traill was a little morbid about her brother and the tragedy of the Traills. She was an omnivorous reader; she had been the sort of schoolgirl who is always found in a corner with a book. And this means generally, under modern conditions, that she read everything she could not understand some time before she read anything that she could. Her mind was a hotch-potch of popular science about heredity and psycho-analysis, and the whole trend of her culture tended to make her pessimistic about everything. People in this mood never have any difficulty in finding reasons for their worst fears. And it was enough for her that, the very morning before her uncle was shot, he had been publicly insulted, and even crazily threatened, by her brother.

That sort of psychological poison works itself deeper and deeper into the brain. Barbara's broodings branched and thickened like a dark forest; and did not stop with the thought that a dull, undeveloped schoolboy was really a maniac and a murderer. The unnatural generalizations of the books she had read pushed her farther and farther. If her brother, why not her sister? If her sister, why not herself? Here memory exaggerated and distorted the distracted demeanour of her sister in the flower-garden, till she could almost fancy that Olive had torn up the flowers with her teeth. As is always the case in such unbalanced worry, all sorts of accidents took on a terrible significance. Her sister had said, "Is there not something the matter with all of us?" What could that mean but such a family curse? Hume himself had said he was not the only mad person present. What else could that mean? Even Dr. Gregory had

declared after talking to her, that her race was degenerate; did he mean that her family was degenerate? After all, he was a doctor, if he was a wicked one. Each of these hateful coincidences gave her a spiritual shock, so that she almost cried aloud when she thought of it. Meanwhile the rest of her mind went round and round in the iron circle of all such logic from hell. She told herself again and again that she was being morbid, and then told herself again and again that she was only morbid because she was mad. But she was not in the least mad, she was only young, and thousands of young people go through such a phase of nightmare, and nobody knows or helps.

But she was moved with a curious impulse in the search for help, and it was the same impulse that had driven her back across the moonlit glade to the wooden hut upon the hill. She was actually mounting that hill again, when she met John Hume coming down.

She poured out all her domestic terrors and suspicions in a flood, as she had poured out all her patriotic doubts and protests, with a confused confidence which rested on no defined reason or relation and yet was sure of itself.

"So there it is," she said at the end of her impetuous monologue. "I began by being quite sure that poor Tom had done it. But by this time I feel as if I might have done it myself."

"Well, that's logical enough," agreed Hume. "It's about as sensible to say that you are guilty as that Tom is. And about as sensible to say the Archbishop of Canterbury is guilty as either of you."

She attempted to explain her highly scientific guesses about heredity, and their effect was more marked. They succeeded at least in arousing this large and slow person to a sort of animation.

"Now the devil take all doctors and scientists," he cried, "or rather the devil take all novelists and newspaper-men who talk about what even the doctors don't understand! People abuse the old nurses for frightening children with bogies which pretty soon became a joke. What about the new nurses who let children frighten themselves with all the black bogies they are supposed to take seriously? My dear girl, there is nothing the matter with your brother, any more than with you. He's only what they call a protected neurotic, which is their long-winded way of saying he has an extra skin that the Public School varnish won't stick on, but runs off like water off a duck's back. So much the better for him, as likely as not, in the long run. But even suppose he did remain a little more like a child than the rest of us. Is there anything particularly horrible about a child? Do you shudder when you think of your dog, merely because he's happy and fond of you and yet can't do the forty-eighth proposition of Euclid? Being a dog is not a disease. Being a child is not a disease. Even remaining a child is not a disease; don't you sometimes wish we could all remain children?"

She was of the sort that grapples with notions and suggestions one after another, as they come, and she stood silent, but her mind was busy like a mill. It was he who spoke again, and more lightly.

"It's like what we were saying about making examples. I think the world is much too solemn and severe about punishments; it would be far better if it were ruled like a nursery. People don't want penal servitude and execution and all the rest. What most people want is to have their ears boxed or be sent to bed. What fun it would be to take an unscrupulous millionaire and make him stand in the corner! Such an appropriate penalty."

When she spoke again there was in her tones something of relief and a renewed curiosity.

"What do you do with Tom?" she asked, "and what's the meaning of all those funny triangles?"

"I play the fool," he replied gravely. "What he wants is to have his attention aroused and fixed; and foolery always does that for children; very obvious foolery. Don't you know how they have always liked such images as the cow jumping over the moon? It's the educational effect of riddles. Well, I have to be the riddle. I have to keep him wondering what I mean or what I shall do next. It means being an ass; but it's the only way."

"Yes," she answered slowly, "there's something awfully rousing about riddles . . . all sorts of riddles. Even that old parson with his riddles out of Revelations makes you feel he has something to live for . . . by the way, I believe we promised to go to tea there this afternoon; I've been in a state to forget everything."

Even as she spoke she saw her sister Olive coming up the path attired in the unmistakable insignia of one paying calls, and accompanied by her sturdy husband, the Deputy Governor, who did not often attend these social functions.

They all went down the road together and Barbara was vaguely surprised to see ahead of them on the same road, not only the sleek and varnished figure of Mr. Meade the secretary, but also the more angular outline of Colonel Hayter. The clergyman's invitation had evidently been a comprehensive one.

The Rev. Ernest Snow lived in a very modest manner in one of the little houses that had been erected in a row for the minor officials of the Governorate. It was at the back of this line of villas that the path ran along the garden wall and past the sycamore to the bunch of olives and finally to the corner where the Governor had fallen by the mysterious bullet. That path fringed the open desert and had all the character of a rude, beaten path for the desert pilgrims. But walking on the other side, in front of the row of houses, a traveller might well have imagined himself in any London suburb, so regular were the ornamental railings and so identical the porticos and the small front-garden plots. Nothing but a number distinguished the house of the clergyman, and the entrance to it was so prim and narrow that the group of guests from the Governorate had some difficulty in squeezing through it.

Mr. Snow bowed over Olive's hand with a ceremony that seemed to make his white hair a ghost of eighteenth-century powder, but also with something else that seemed at first a shade more difficult to define. It was something that went with the lowered voice and lifted hand of his profession at certain moments. His face was composed, but it would almost seem deliberately composed; and in spite of his grieved tone his eyes were very bright and steady. Barbara suddenly realized that he was conducting a funeral, and she was not far out.

"I need not tell you, Lady Smythe," he said in the same soft accents, "what sympathy we all feel in this terrible hour. If only from a public standpoint, the death of your distinguished uncle—"

Olive Smythe struck in with a rather wild stare.

"But my uncle isn't dead, Mr. Snow. I know they said so at first, but he only got a shot in his leg and he is trying to limp about already."

A shock of transformation passed over the clergyman's face, too quick for most eyes to follow; it seemed to Barbara that his jaw dropped and when it readjusted itself, it was in a grin of utterly artificial congratulation.

"My dear lady," he breathed, "for this relief—"

He looked round a little vacantly at the furniture. Whether the Rev. Ernest Snow had remembered to prepare tea at tea-time, was not yet quite clear, but the preparations he had made seemed to be of a less assuaging sort. The little tables were loaded with large books, many of them lying open, and these were mostly traced with sprawling plans and designs, mostly architectural or generally archæological, in some cases apparently astronomical or astrological, but giving as a whole a hazy impression of a magician's spells or a library of the black art.

"Apocalyptic studies," he stammered, "a hobby of mine. I believed that my calculations . . . . These things are written for our instruction."

And then Barbara felt a final stab of astonishment and alarm. For two facts became instantly and simultaneously vivid to her consciousness. The first was that the Rev. Ernest Snow had been reposing upon the fact of the Governor's death with something very like a solemn satisfaction, and had heard of his recovery with something quite other than relief. And the second was that he spoke with the same voice that had once uttered the same words, out of the shadow of the sycamore, that sounded in her ears like a wild cry for blood.

V. THE THEORY OF MODERATE MURDER

Colonel Hayter, the Chief of the Police, was moving towards the inner rooms with a motion that was casual but not accidental. Barbara indeed had rather wondered why such an official had accompanied them on a purely social visit, and she now began to entertain dim and rather incredible possibilities. The clergyman had turned away to one of the bookstands and was turning over the leaves of a volume with feverish excitement; it seemed almost that he was muttering to himself. He was a little like a man looking up a quotation on which he has been challenged.

"I hear you have a very nice garden here, Mr. Snow," said Hayter. "I should rather like to look at your garden."

Snow turned a startled face over his shoulder; he seemed at first unable to detach his mind from his preoccupation; then he said sharply but a little shakily, "There's nothing to see in my garden; nothing at all. I was just wondering—"

"Do you mind if I have a squint at it?" asked Hayter indifferently, and shouldered his way to the back door. There was something resolute about his action that made the others trail vaguely after him, hardly knowing what they did. Hume, who was just behind the detective, said to him in an undertone: "What do you expect to find growing in the old man's garden?"

Hayter looked over his shoulder with a grim geniality.

"Only a particular sort of tree you were talking of lately," he said.

But when they went out into the neat and narrow strip of back garden, the only tree in sight was the sycamore spreading over the desert path, and Barbara remembered with another subconscious thrill that this was the spot from which, as the experts calculated, the bullet had been fired.

Hayter strode across the lawn and was seen stooping over something in the tangle of tropical plants under the wall. When he straightened himself again he was seen to be holding a long and heavy cylindrical object.

"Here is something fallen from the gun-tree you said grew in these parts," he said grimly. "Funny that the gun should be found in Mr. Snow's back-garden, isn't it? Especially as it's a double-barrelled gun with one barrel discharged."

Hume was staring at the big gun in the detective's hand, and for the first time his usually stolid face wore an expression of amazement and even consternation.

"Damn it all!" he said softly, "I forgot about that. What a rotten fool I am!"

Few except Barbara even heard his strange whisper, and nobody could make any sense of it. Suddenly he swung round and addressed the whole company aloud, almost as if they were a public meeting.

"Look here," he said, "do you know what this means? This means that poor old Snow, who is probably still fussing over his hieroglyphics, is going to be charged with attempted murder."

"It's a bit premature," said Hayter, "and some would say you were interfering in our job, Mr. Hume. But I owe you something for putting us right about the other fellow, when I admit we were wrong."

"You were wrong about the other fellow and you are wrong about this fellow," said Hume, frowning savagely. "But I happened to be able to offer you evidence in the other case. What evidence can I give now?"

"Why should you have any evidence to give?" asked the other, very much puzzled.

"Well, I have," said Hume, "and I jolly well don't want to give it." He was silent for a moment and then broke out in a sort of fury: "Blast it all, can't you see how silly it is to drag in that silly old man? Don't you see he'd only fallen in love with his own prophecies of disaster, and was a bit put off when they didn't come true after all?"

"There are a good many more suspicious circumstances," cut in Smythe curtly. "There's the gun in the garden and the position of the sycamore."

There was a long silence during which Hume stood with huge hunched shoulders frowning resentfully at his boots. Then he suddenly threw up his head and spoke with a sort of explosive lightness.

"Oh, well then, I must give my evidence," he said, with a smile that was almost gay: "I shot the Governor myself."

There was a stillness as if the place had been full of statues, and for a few seconds nobody moved or spoke. Then Barbara heard her own voice in the silence, crying out:

"Oh, you didn't!"

A moment later the Chief of Police was speaking with a new and much more official voice:

"I should like to know whether you are joking," he said, "or whether you really mean to give yourself up for the attempted murder of Lord Tallboys."

Hume held up one hand in an arresting gesture, almost like a public speaker. He was still smiling slightly, but his manner had grown more grave.

"Pardon me," he said. "Pardon me. Let us distinguish. The distinction is of great value to my self-esteem. I did not try to murder the Governor. I tried to shoot him in the leg and I did shoot him in the leg."

"What is the sense of all this?" cried Smythe with impatience.

"I am sorry to appear punctilious," said Hume calmly. "Imputations on my morals I must bear, like other members of the criminal class. But imputations on my marksmanship I cannot tolerate; it is the only sport in which I excel." He picked up the double-barrelled gun before they could stop him and went on rapidly: "And may I draw attention to one technical point? This gun has two barrels and one is still undischarged. If any fool had shot Tallboys at that distance and not killed him, don't you think even a fool would have shot again, if that was what he wanted to do? Only, you see, it was not what I wanted to do."

"You seem to fancy yourself a lot as a marksman," said the Deputy Governor rudely.

"Ah, you are sceptical," replied the tutor in the same airy tone. "Well, Sir Harry, you have yourself provided the apparatus of demonstration, and it will not take a moment. The targets which we owe to your patriotic efficiency are already set up, I think, on the slope just beyond the end of the wall." Before anybody could move he had hopped up on to the low garden wall, just under the shadow of the sycamore. From that perch he could see the long line of the butts stretching along the border of the desert.

"Suppose we say," he said pleasantly, in the tone of a popular lecturer, "that I put this bullet about an inch inside the white on the second target."

The group awoke from its paralysis of surprise; Hayter ran forward and Smythe burst out with: "Of all the damned tomfoolery—"

His sentence was drowned in the deafening explosion, and amid the echoes of it the tutor dropped serenely from the wall.

"If anybody cares to go and look," he said, "I think he will find the demonstration of my innocence—not indeed of shooting the Governor, but of wanting to shoot him anywhere else but where I did shoot him."

There was another silence, and then this comedy of unexpected happenings was crowned with another that was still more unexpected; coming from the one person whom everybody had naturally forgotten.

Tom's high, crowing voice was suddenly heard above the crowd.

"Who's going to look?" he cried. "Well, why don't you go and look?"

It was almost as if a tree in the garden had spoken. And indeed the excitement of events had worked upon that vegetating brain till it unfolded rapidly, as do some vegetables at the touch of chemistry. Nor was this all, for the next moment the vegetable had taken on a highly animal energy and hurled itself across the garden. They saw a whirl of lanky limbs against the sky as Tom Traill cleared the garden wall and went plunging away through the sand towards the targets.

"Is this place a lunatic asylum?" cried Sir Harry Smythe, his face still more congested with colour and a baleful light in his eyes, as if a big but buried temper was working its way to the surface.

"Come, Mr. Hume," said Hayter in a cooler tone, "everybody regards you as a very sensible man. Do you mean to tell me seriously that you put a bullet in the Governor's leg for no reason at all, not even murder?"

"I did it for an excellent reason," answered the tutor, still beaming at him in a rather baffling manner. "I did it because I am a sensible man. In fact, I am a Moderate Murderer."

"And what the blazes may that be?"

"The philosophy of moderation in murder," continued the tutor blandly, "is one to which I have given some little attention. I was saying only the other day that what most people want is to be rather murdered, especially persons in responsible political situations. As it is, the punishments on both sides are far too severe. The merest touch or *soupçon* of murder is all that is required for purposes of reform. The little more and how much it is; the little less and the Governor of Polybia gets clean away, as Browning said."

"Do you really ask me to believe," snorted the Chief of Police, "that you make a practice of potting every public man in the left leg?"

"No, no," said Hume, with a sort of hasty solemnity. "The treatment, I assure you, is marked with much more individual attention. Had it been the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I should perhaps have selected a portion of the left ear. In the case of the Prime Minister the tip of the nose would be indicated. But the point is the general principle that *something* should happen to these people, to arouse their dormant faculties by a little personal problem. Now if ever there was a man," he went on with delicate emphasis, as if it were a scientific demonstration, "if ever there was a man meant and marked out by nature to be rather murdered, it is Lord Tallboys. Other eminent men, very often, are just murdered, and everyone feels that the situation has been adequately met, that the incident is terminated. One just murders them and thinks no more about it. But Tallboys is a remarkable case; he is my employer and I know him pretty well. He is a good fellow, really. He is a gentleman, he is a patriot; what is more, he is really a liberal and reasonable man. But by being perpetually in office he has let that pompous manner get worse and worse, till it seems to grow on him, like his confounded top-hat. What is needed in such a case? A few days in bed, I decided. A few healthful weeks standing on one leg and meditating on that fine shade of distinction between oneself and God Almighty, which is so easily overlooked."

"Don't listen to any more of this rubbish," cried the Deputy-Governor. "If he says he shot Tallboys, we've got to take him up for it, I suppose. He ought to know."

"You've hit it at last, Sir Harry," said Hume heartily, "I'm arousing a lot of dormant intellects this afternoon."

"We won't have any more of your joking," cried Smythe with sudden fury; "I'm arresting you for attempted murder."

"I know," answered the smiling tutor, "that's the joke."

At this moment there was another leap and scurry by the sycamore and the boy Tom hurled himself back into the garden, panting aloud:

"It's quite right. It's just where he said."

For the rest of the interview, and until that strange group had broken up on the lawn, the boy continued to stare at Hume as only a boy can stare at somebody who has done something rather remarkable in a game. But as he and Barbara went back to the Governorate together, the latter indescribably dazed and bewildered, she found her companion curiously convinced of some view of his own, which he was hardly competent to describe. It was not exactly as if he disbelieved Hume or his story. It was rather as if he believed what Hume had not said, rather than what he had.

"It's a riddle," repeated Tom with stubborn solemnity. "He's awfully fond of riddles. He says silly things just to make you think. That's what we've got to do. He doesn't like you to give it up."

"What we've got to do?" repeated Barbara.

"Think what it really means," said Tom.

There was some truth perhaps in the suggestion that Mr. John Hume was fond of riddles, for he fired off one more of them at the Chief of Police, even as that official took him into custody.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "you can only half hang me because I'm only half a murderer. I suppose you have hanged people sometimes?"

"Occasionally, I'm sorry to say," replied Colonel Hayter.

"Did you ever hang somebody to prevent him being hanged?" asked the tutor with interest.

VI. THE THING THAT REALLY HAPPENED

It is not true that Lord Tallboys wore his top-hat in bed, during his brief indisposition. Nor is it true, as was more moderately alleged, that he sent for it as soon as he could stand upright and wore it as a finishing touch to a costume consisting of a green dressing-gown and red slippers. But it was quite true that he resumed his hat and his high official duties at the earliest possible opportunity; rather to the annoyance, it was said, of his subordinate the Deputy-Governor, who found himself for the second time checked in some of those vigorous military measures which are always more easily effected after the

shock of a political outrage. In plain words, the Deputy-Governor was rather sulky. He had relapsed into a red-faced and irritable silence, and when he broke it his friends rather wished he would relapse into it again. At the mention of the eccentric tutor, whom his department had taken into custody, he exploded with a special impatience and disgust. "Oh, for God's sake don't tell me about that beastly madman and mountebank!" he cried, almost in the voice of one tortured and unable to tolerate a moment more of human folly. "Why in the world we are cursed with such filthy fools . . . shooting him in the leg . . . moderate murderer . . . mouldy swine!"

"He's not a mouldy swine," said Barbara Traill emphatically, as if it were an exact point of natural history. "I don't believe a word of what you people are saying against him."

"Do you believe what he is saying against himself?" asked her uncle, looking at her with screwed-up eyes and a quizzical expression. Tallboys was leaning on a crutch; in marked contrast to the sullenness of Sir Harry Smythe, he carried his disablement in a very plucky and pleasant fashion. The necessity of attending to the interrupted rhythm of his legs had apparently arrested the oratorical rotation of his hands. His family felt that they had never liked him so much before. It seemed almost as if there were some truth in the theory of the Moderate Murderer.

On the other hand, Sir Harry Smythe, usually so much more good-humoured with his family, seemed to be in an increasingly bad humour. The dark red of his complexion deepened, until by contrast there was something almost alarming about the light of his pale eyes.

"I tell you of all these measly, meddlesome blighters," he began.

"And I tell you you know nothing about it," retorted his sister-in-law. "He isn't a bit like that; he—"

At this point, for some reason or other, it was Olive who intervened swiftly and quietly; she looked a little wan and worried.

"Don't let's talk about all that now," she said hastily. "Harry has got such a lot of things to do. . . ."

"I know what I'm going to do," said Barbara stubbornly. "I'm going to ask Lord Tallboys, as Governor of this place, if he will let me visit Mr. Hume and see if I can find out what it means."

She had become for some reason violently excited and her own voice sounded strangely in her ears. She had a dizzy impression of Harry Smythe's eyes standing out of his head in apoplectic anger and of Olive's face in the background growing more and more unnaturally pale and staring, and hovering over all, with something approaching to an elvish mockery, the benevolent amusement of her uncle. She felt as if he had let out too much, or that he had gained a new subtlety of perception.

Meanwhile John Hume was sitting in his place of detention, staring at a blank wall with an equally blank face. Accustomed as he was to solitude, he soon found something of a strain in two or three days and nights of the dehumanized solitude of imprisonment. Perhaps the fact most vivid to his immediate senses was being deprived of tobacco. But he had other and what some could call graver grounds of depression. He did not know what sort of sentence he would be likely to get for confessing to an attempt to wound the Governor. But he knew enough of political conditions and legal expedients to know that it would be easy to inflict heavy punishment immediately after the public scandal of the crime. He had lived in that outpost of civilization for the last ten years, till Tallboys had picked him up in Cairo; he remembered the violent reaction after the murder of the previous Governor, the way in which the Deputy-Governor had been able to turn himself into a despot and sweep the country with coercion acts and punitive expeditions, until his impulsive militarism had been a little moderated by the arrival of Tallboys with a compromise from the home Government. Tallboys was still alive and even, in a modified manner, kicking. But he was probably still under doctor's orders and could hardly be judge in his own cause; so that the autocratic Smythe would probably have another chance of riding the whirlwind and directing the storm. But the truth is that there was at the back of the prisoner's mind something that he feared much more than prison. The tiny point of panic, which had begun to worry and eat away even his rocky stolidity of mind and body, was the fear that his fantastic explanation had given his enemies another sort of opportunity. What he really feared was their saying he was mad and putting him under more humane and hygienic treatment.

And indeed, anyone watching his demeanour for the next hour or so might be excused for entertaining doubts and fancies on the point. He was still staring before him in a rather strange fashion. But he was no longer staring as if he saw nothing, but rather as if he saw something. It seemed to himself that, like a hermit in his cell, he was seeing visions.

"Well, I suppose I am, after all," he said aloud in a dead and distinct voice. "Didn't St. Paul say something? . . . Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. . . . I have seen that heavenly one coming in at the door like that several times, and rather hoped it was real. But real people can't come through prison doors like that. . . . Once it came so that the room might have been full of trumpets and once with a cry like the wind and there was a fight and I found out that I could hate and that I could love. Two miracles on one night. Don't you think that must have been a dream—that is supposing you weren't a dream and could think anything? But I did rather hope you were real then."

"Don't!" said Barbara Trail, "I am real now."

"Do you mean to tell me in cold blood that I am not mad," asked Hume, still staring at her, "and you are here?"

"You are the only sane person I ever knew," she replied.

"Good Lord," he said, "then I've said a good deal just now that ought only to be said in lunatic asylums—or in heavenly visions."

"You have said so much," she said in a low voice, "that I want you to say much more. I mean about the whole of this trouble. After what you have said . . . don't you think I might be allowed to know?"

He frowned at the table and then said rather more abruptly:

"The trouble was that I thought you were the last person who ought to know. You see, there is your family, and you might be brought into it, and one might have to hold one's tongue for the sake of someone you would care about."

"Well," she said steadily, "I *have* been brought into it for the sake of someone I care about."

She paused a moment and went on: "The others never did anything for me. They would have let me go raving mad in a respectable flat, and so long as I was finished at a fashionable school, they wouldn't have cared if I'd finished myself with laudanum. I never really talked to anybody before. I don't want to talk to anybody else now."

He sprang to his feet; something like an earthquake had shaken him at last out of his long petrified incredulity about happiness. He caught her by both hands and words came out of him he had never dreamed were within. And she, who was younger in years, only stared at him with a steady smile and starry eyes, as if she were older and wiser; and at the end only said:

"You will tell me now."

"You must understand," he said at last more soberly, "that what I said was true. I was not making up fairy-tales to shield my long-lost brother from Australia, or any of that business in the novels. I really did put a bullet in your uncle, and I meant to put it there."

"I know," she said, "but for all that I'm sure I don't know everything. I'm sure there is some extraordinary story behind all this."

"No," he answered. "It isn't an extraordinary story, except an extraordinarily ordinary story."

He paused a moment reflectively and then went on:

"It's really a particularly plain and simple story. I wonder it hasn't happened hundreds of times before. I wonder it hasn't been told in hundreds of stories before. It might so easily happen anywhere, given certain conditions.

"In this case you know some of the conditions. You know that sort of balcony that runs round my bungalow, and how one looks down from it and sees the whole landscape like a map. Well, I was looking down and saw all that flat plan of the place; the row of villas and the wall and path running behind it and the sycamore, and farther on the olives and the end of the wall, and so out into the open slopes being laid out with turf and all the rest. But I saw what surprised me; that the rifle-range was already set up. It must have been a rush order; people must have worked all night. And even as I stared, I saw in the distance a dot that was a man standing by the nearest target, as if adding the last touches. Then he made a sort of signal to somebody away on the other side and moved very rapidly away from the place. Tiny as the figure looked, every gesture told me something; he was quite obviously clearing out just before the firing at the target was to begin. And almost at the same moment I saw something else. Well, I saw one thing, anyhow. I saw why Lady Smythe is worried, and wandered distracted in the garden."

Barbara stared, but he went on: "Travelling along the path from the Governorate and towards the sycamore was a familiar shape. It just showed above the long garden wall in sharp outline like a shape in a shadow pantomime. It was the top-hat of Lord Tallboys. Then I remembered that he always went for a constitutional along this path and out on to the slopes beyond; and I felt an overwhelming suspicion

that he did not know that the space beyond was already a firing-ground. You know he is very deaf, and I sometimes doubt whether he hears all the things officially told to him; sometimes I fear they are told so that he cannot hear. Anyhow, he had every appearance of marching straight across as usual, and there came over me in a cataract a solid, an overwhelming and a most shocking certainty.

"I will not say much about that now. I will say as little as I can for the rest of my life. But there were things I knew and you probably don't about the politics here and what had led up to that dreadful moment. Enough that I had good reason for my dread. Feeling vaguely that if things were interrupted there might be a fight, I snatched up my own gun and dashed down the slope towards the path, waving wildly and trying to hail or head him off. He didn't see me and couldn't hear me. I pounded along after him along the path, but he had too long a start. By the time I reached the sycamore, I knew I was too late. He was already half-way down the grove of olives and no mortal runner could reach him before he came to the corner.

"I felt a rage against the fool which a man looks against the background of fate. I saw his lean, pompous figure with the absurd top-hat riding on top of it; and the large ears standing out from his head . . . the large, useless ears. There was something agonizingly grotesque about that unconscious back outlined against the plains of death. For I was certain that the moment he passed the corner that field would be swept by the fire, which would cut across at right angles to his progress. I could think of only one thing to do and I did it. Hayter thought I was mad when I asked him if he had ever hanged a man to prevent his being hanged. That is the sort of practical joke I played. I shot a man to prevent his being shot.

"I put a bullet in his calf and he dropped, about two yards from the corner. I waited a moment and saw that people were coming out of the last houses to pick him up. I did the only thing I really regret. I had a vague idea the house by the sycamore was empty, so I threw the gun over the wall into the garden, and nearly got that poor old ass of a parson into trouble. Then I went home and waited till they summoned me to give evidence about Gregory."

He concluded with all his normal composure, but the girl was still staring at him with an abnormal attention and even alarm.

"But what was it all about?' she asked. "Who could have—?"

"It was one of the best planned things I ever knew," he said. "I don't believe I could have proved anything. It would have looked just like an accident."

"You mean," she said, "that it wouldn't have been."

"As I said before, I don't want to say much about that now, but . . . Look here, you are the sort of person who likes to think about things. I'll just ask you to take two things and think about them, and then you can get used to the idea in your own way.

"The first thing is this. I am a Moderate, as I told you; I really am against all the Extremists. But when journalists and jolly fellows in clubs say that, they generally forget that there really are different sorts of Extremists. In practice they think only of revolutionary Extremists. Believe me, the reactionary Extremists are quite as likely to go to extremes. The history of faction fights will show acts of violence by Patricians as well as Plebeians, by Ghibellines as well as Guelphs, by Orangemen as well as Fenians, by Fascists as well as Bolshevists, by the Ku-Klux-Klan as well as the Black Hand. And when a politician comes from London with a compromise in his pocket—it is not only Nationalists who see their plans frustrated.

"The other point is more personal, especially to you. You once told me you feared for the family sanity, merely because you had bad dreams and brooded over things of your own imagination. Believe me, it's not the imaginative people who become insane. It's not they who are mad, even when they are morbid. They can always be woken up from bad dreams by broader prospects and brighter visions—because they are imaginative. The men who go mad are unimaginative. The stubborn stoical men who had only room for one idea and take it literally. The sort of man who seems to be silent but stuffed to bursting, congested—"

"I know," she said hastily; "you needn't say it, because I believe I understand everything now. Let me tell you two things also; they are shorter; but they have to do with it. My uncle sent me here with an officer who has an order for your release . . . and the Deputy-Governor is going home . . . resignation on the grounds of ill-health."

"Tallboys is no fool," said John Hume; "he has guessed."

She laughed with a little air of embarrassment.

"I'm afraid he has guessed a good many things," she said.

What the other things were is no necessary part of this story, but Hume proceeded to talk about them at considerable length during the rest of the interview, until the lady herself was moved to a somewhat belated protest. She said she did not believe that he could really be a Moderate after all.
