

THE LOCKED ROOM

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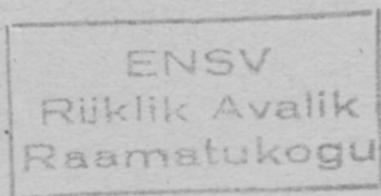
A True Story of Experiences
in Spiritualism

By

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CHAPTER I

LEAFDENE HALL lay bathed in summer sunshine, a beautiful Queen Anne house, standing secluded in the midst of its gardens, lawns and park. Far away the road wound, a white thread over the sloping ground, from the distant town to the far-off villages and farms ; but this remote road commanded no view of Leafdene. Belts of carefully tended trees around the park formed, and still form, a complete screen. The gardens, secluded within this protecting line, were all gorgeous with flowers, for it was midsummer, and in "my lady's garden" (a warm retreat surrounded by a thick and fragrant hedge of sweet-briar) swans glided on a shining stream beneath overhanging branches of rose trees ; and rose petals fell on the water and floated away. It was all dream-like in its beauty and silence, and in the warmth of the golden sunshine. No figures of human beings were to be seen anywhere ; no one walked, or gardened, or picked flowers ; and the road was still and its dust undisturbed, as though

none ever passed that way. Yet the great front door of Leafdene stood open, according to time-honoured custom. The shadow of a great yew fell on the wide steps and across the door making the oak-panelled hall cool and pleasant. The hall looked as though it were lived in; books and newspapers lay on the round table in the centre, and a silver salver stood there heaped with a quantity of unopened letters.

It was afternoon, and the servants were having a comfortable and protracted tea in the cool servants' hall. Nobody else, it seemed, wanted any tea. The master was busy, closeted with a gentleman from London, who had been brought from the station in time for lunch. Miss Lily had been seen to go away across the park directly after lunch.

"She won't come in," said cook, "till that person master's got in there has gone back to town. She do hate those queer people he's so fond of!"

These statements being all well-known facts nobody said anything. Cook went to sleep in her rocking-chair, the housekeeper rustled in her silk dress down the corridor to her own sitting-room, the door of which she shut firmly. The afternoon wore on in sleepy, contented silence.

Lily Leafdene had crossed the park intending to go and see some of her queer old peasant friends

in the hamlet called Leafdene village, but when she reached the road she paused, seeing the approach of a welcome visitor. It was a young man, riding slowly up the long ascent, on a beautiful black mare. When he saw Lily standing by the roadside he dismounted, for, though they had only met twice, they were on friendly terms and he supposed that she wished to speak to him.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Keane,” she said, “are you coming to see Didie?”

“Yes, when the coachman came into the station this morning he told me Diana was not so well, and asked me to come up and see her to-day.”

“Oh, Mr. Keane!” said the girl, quick tears rising into her violet eyes. “I didn’t know she was worse. You know father says she will have to be killed. You won’t agree to that, will you?”

“No, indeed!” answered James Keane with his pleasant smile. “She is all right, fit for some years yet, if I can only get your old coachman to have some sense.”

“He hasn’t got much,” said Lily simply. “He can’t help that. I will come up to the stables with you.”

They walked on along the roadside, by the screen of trees that hid Leafdene from the common gaze.

Diana was one of the old, fat carriage horses; and James Keane was the new young veterinary

surgeon who had lately come and settled in the nearest town—a small, sleepy market town—and who was speedily forming a good practice among the farmers, and the county families. Lily Leafdene made his acquaintance in the stables when he first came to see Diana, and she regarded him as the only really intelligent person she had ever met in her eighteen years' experience.

She was patting the sleek black coat of the pretty mare as they walked along.

“What is her name?” she asked.

Mr. Keane blushed. He was an athlete, six feet two, strong and hardy, and tanned with his out-of-door life. But all the same he blushed like a girl, and the fact could not be disguised.

“I am ashamed to tell you,” he said; “I am so afraid you won't believe me if I tell you I named her when I bought her, before I came here.”

Lily looked at him in amused surprise. “But what can be the matter with her name?” she asked.

“It is Lily,” he muttered.

The girl burst out laughing.

“I'm delighted!” she said. “Dear Lily—I feel as if I am your godmother or something. She *is* pretty,” for the mare had turned her intelligent face on hearing her name.

“You called her that because she is quite black, I suppose,” said Lily Leafdene. Mr. Keane

nodded, still rather shamefaced. "Well, my Aunt Isabella would say that's why I am called Lily—because I'm quite black and hopeless. I haven't any religion, you see. She is a Baptist and lives near London, in a dull, dull suburb, and she is very good and kind, and a dear. I have never been anywhere else away from home, and father doesn't like me to go there because he and Aunt Isabella are not very good friends. He doesn't mind quite so much as he did, perhaps, because if I'm not here he feels free to have séances every day."

"To have *what*?" exclaimed Mr. Keane, carried away by genuine perplexity and surprise.

"Séances," she repeated in a matter-of-fact tone. "Didn't you know father is a spiritualist?"

Keane muttered something unintelligible, and he stared blankly at her. His life had been lived chiefly in the open, and amongst animals and very ordinary people. He did not know what she was talking about, although he fancied he had seen or heard the words she used. She glanced up at him amused.

"You are evidently all in the dark, Mr. Keane," she said smiling. "Fancy my knowing something you don't know! Spiritualists are people who call spirits from the vasty deep, but, as Aunt Isabella always adds, 'Will they come when you

do call for them ? ’ I have learnt the quotation from her—not from father, who is hopelessly in earnest—and if you are in the dark, so are they. They are having a dark séance in there now.”

She stood, slim and graceful, in her plain, white dress, in the blaze of the sun, and pointed to a great shuttered window at the back of Leafdene Hall. They had just come into sight of it, on their way to the stables, which were a little distance from the house at its rear.

“What *do* you mean ? ” asked Mr. Keane in utter confusion, “and who are ‘they’ ? ”

“Would you really like to know ? ” asked the girl, glancing at him curiously. “It’s all so old and stale to me. I can’t imagine any one being interested.”

Seeing from the expression of Mr. Keane’s good-looking face and of his bright, grey eyes that he was transfixed with curiosity, she smiled and went on talking. There was a stile near by, admitting to a field path ; she went to it, sat down on the step, and leaned against the bar, forming an exquisite picture. Her hair was black, with a violet tinge in it where the sun shone full upon it ; her skin was white—creamy, opaque white—in spite of the out-of-door life she led. She was a true Leafdene, as any one might know by looking at the old portraits in the hall.

“I’ll tell you all about it if it interests you,”

she said. "Everybody here knows it. You are so busy, I suppose, no one has had the chance to tell you stories. You see that great window, with all the tiny little panes of glass in it—you see how black it is? The shutters are shut on the other side, and thick curtains are drawn across it. It is always shut like that. Do you see the square walled garden outside the window, all wild and overgrown? No gardener ever goes in there. It is shut up like the room, and the gate is locked as the door of the room is locked. And my father keeps both keys on a chain round his neck."

Mr. Keane stared at her, and stared at the great dark window, looking from the one to the other. Lily felt surprised at his evident interest in what was to her such a dreary old tale.

"Of course you know," she went on, her face shadowing with sadness as she spoke, "that my father never goes anywhere outside the gates of the park. Sometimes he doesn't leave the house for weeks. It is really dreadful then. If he would go away sometimes, or see people, he would not trouble over the past so much perhaps——"

"That was my mother's room," she continued after a little pause, seeing that her listener hoped to hear more. "She was born there—so was I. You see the little walled-in garden has a gate into 'my lady's garden.' My grandmother was 'my lady' and there will never be another of our name

and race. The title is extinct because a woman inherited; there was no male heir. My grandfather married twice, and there was an heir—a dear, dear little boy, so the old people in the village tell me. They all loved him. They loved my mother, too—she was his step-sister—my grandfather married twice, you must understand, and she was the only child of his first marriage. Her mother died young and my grandfather married again. The little boy was the favourite with the villagers and the tenants because they wanted a man to inherit and they did not want the title to become extinct. My grandfather idolised him. He was afraid to send him away to any school, almost afraid to let him out of his sight. They lived very quietly here, and my mother was almost buried alive——” she had been going to say “as I am,” but decided not to, and went on. “My grandfather got a tutor for the little lord, as the people called him; after trying several, one secured his confidence, and he let him go out with him riding and bathing, though he would never trust him even with one of the old servants. My mother and the tutor were secretly engaged, and my mother was willing to run away with him, her life was so dull—but he seemed not so willing, so she herself has told me. Then there came an awful day when there was a bathing accident, in the great lake beyond that dark belt of trees. The

boy loved bathing there, and as the tutor was an expert swimmer he was allowed to go with him. One day the child went out too far—his strength became exhausted. It is a lonely place, but a woodman was up among the trees and he said the tutor did not swim out to him at once, but let him sink. My poor grandfather went nearly mad with grief—he had to bear the loss alone, for the child's mother was dead—he shut himself up in that room and would see no one. My poor mother ran away with the tutor—yes," she went on after a pause, "he is my father. It was not till after they had gone that the woodman told his tale. My grandfather died in that room, cursing my father. He would have liked to deprive him of all benefit from his wicked act—if indeed he did do this thing, which none but himself can tell for certain—but the property is entailed, so the last Lord Leafdene died in misery. Then my father and mother came back here to live, and he took her name and I was born here. And now you see us!"

"I tell you all this," she went on after a moment, "as you have really come to settle here—for you will be told all sorts of stories, and you may as well know the true one to start with. My father once spoke to me of the child's death, and I don't believe in his guilt—but the people do. He told me he was startled when the boy cried

out, by a dark form which suddenly rose before him and waved him back. I suppose that is what has made him a spiritualist, for he believed it to be an evil spirit, and believes so still. He used to say it was that which came into the locked room when he was alone there, and tormented him, and terrified my mother so when she was dying. But of late years he has declared it is my grandfather's spirit, angry with him and determined to punish him, and that is what the servants and the villagers believe. They think it is he who talks so loud when dark séances are held there with these spiritualists who come from London. They think it is he who makes the strange noises when all is still and there is not even a wind stirring; and that it is he who throws things about in the night."

Two great scalding tears had risen to her eyes and were trembling on the long dark lashes; she brushed them away impatiently.

"Throws things about in the night!" repeated Mr. Keane, in the tone of one stupefied by surprise.

"Oh, yes, there are certainly strange noises heard, generally on dark nights, and they say my grandfather has been seen standing by the box tree in the walled garden, terrifying those who caught a glimpse of him—and all this because he was angry with my father and quarrelled with

him. But I have heard a great deal about my grandfather from his old servants and tenants, and he was a dear, kind man, and I don't believe he would frighten people so. Because it is not my father he frightens—my father says it is my mother's spirit shut in there—that she was afraid to die and afraid to go away, and said at the last she would always stay in that room and that my father must guard it and keep it locked. Things were better, and he was more cheerful and nicer while he did keep it locked, but since the day my last governess left and he went in there very angry it has all been horrid. He began to have spiritualists to come from London and to sit in there in the dark with them, and these horrid people say they see and hear my mother. That's what they call a dark séance ; they are having one now, as I told you."

There was a silence ; the two young people stood still in the flower-scented summer air and gazed down at the dark, shuttered window. At last the man spoke, rather timidly, but in a very serious and anxious tone.

"*You* don't believe your mother's spirit is shut in that room ? " he asked.

" No," she answered at once, " I do not." She added, after a moment's hesitation, " I could imagine her out here in the sun, among the flowers, but not in that horrid dark room."

“I suppose it’s all been servants’ gossip and senseless scares,” said the practical young man. “There isn’t anything there, of course—it’s all imagination.”

“Yes,” answered Lily. “Of course it’s all imagination. But I wish the key was lost—there’s always a dreadful feeling in the house when that door has been opened. There! I’ve thought enough about it for one day! Let us go on now and see Diana.”

She rose and went on down the road towards the stables, looking no longer at the house, but away at the distant stretch of the wondrous fens. But Keane looked again and again at the dark, shuttered window and the little walled-in garden with the box tree standing straight in the midst of it, as he followed her.

Diana was pronounced to be certainly not so well, and everything else was forgotten for the time being by her loving mistress and her doctor.

Lily stayed in the stable while the horse was treated, and then she walked a little way down the road beside her namesake.

“I’ve told you a lot about my family, Mr. Keane,” she said with her simple frankness; “tell me something about yours. Why do you come into such an out-of-the-way place as this?”

“My brothers don’t like my being a vet.,” he said, “so I thought I’d better not be near any of

them. We are a medical family—all doctors—my brothers, my father and grandfather. I don't a bit like being a doctor, and I'm rather clever with horses, so I determined to go my own way. My father is dead and my brothers are all married, so mother has stood by me and decided to live with me here. I wonder if you would come and see her? I know we can't be visited by county families, but you might come just as you go to the cottages!"

"Oh, Mr. Keane!" exclaimed Lily. Keane laughed.

At that moment the brougham could be seen coming down the carriage-drive from the house, taking the professor of spiritualism back to the station. So Keane mounted, and, taking off his hat to the girl, galloped down the road. Lily stood still, watching him go, and watching the carriage. As it passed she bowed to the man who looked out at her—a dark, greasy-skinned man, to whom she had taken a great dislike during the meal at which she had been required to act as his hostess. She had found him looking furtively at her several times, and she resented this. She was glad when lunch was over and she was released; for she was never expected to have anything to do with the proceedings in the locked room, into which she was never allowed to go. Sometimes she had a great longing to throw the

door and the window wide open. But she might as well have thought of opening her mother's grave or committing any other extreme act of sacrilege. And, moreover, she had not the power, for her father carried the key himself. Sometimes she had a wilder thought still—to burn down that side of the house. No lives would be lost if it was done in the night. But she laughed at herself when such ideas came to her; she was too wholesome and natural to entertain them. They came sometimes from sheer impatience at what seemed to her the absurdity of the whole thing. But it was, unfortunately, more than absurd in its results. It affected her father's life and changed her own. This was increasingly the case, and with the clear-sightedness of youth she saw it plainly. At first the locked room and her father's gloom seemed excusable after his wife's death—an especially painful death for the watchers, for she was pitifully afraid. It had seemed to Lily sometimes that such fear could only arise from guilt. But she had loved her mother and drove the thought away. Her father's morose, frigid temper seemed more like the result of guilt than grief—but no! surrounded by sombre thoughts as she was, she refused to give way to them. She knew that her father believed all their neighbours credited him with having caused the death of the little heir while in his charge—or, at all events,

with not having made a sufficient effort to prevent it. This had been his first original reason for not going out. He was safe in the seclusion of his beautiful home, and he would not go out, or go into society, to be looked at with suspicion. The habit grew upon him. He passed his life on his own ground, and seldom went even into the park by daylight. He saw no one who called ; he responded with the coldest civility to any kind of overture. This was when Lily was a little girl, passing her childish life in the gardens, or in the big nursery facing south. She saw very little of the lonely, frigid man who was the master. Of course he was an interloper ; not a scullerymaid or a farm labourer but knew and understood that, and showed it, too, by the covert insolence they gave him. He was no Leafdene, though he had stepped into their Leafdene's place and was enjoying their inheritance. He had taken the name when he married the heiress ; Lily had learned very little of what went on at that time—that dreadful time, as some of the villagers called it, of her mother's marriage. No one cared to describe to her the fury of her grandfather when he found his daughter, the one and only representative of the family to follow him, determined to marry the tutor—that “low fellow,” that “nobody,” as the old lord called him—and the man who was responsible for the heir's death. He

had left Leafdene some time when this climax came, and the squire had tried to forget his existence. Then he discovered that he was lodging near, and meeting "Miss Leafdene of the Hall" every day; and, when angrily taxed with this, Miss Leafdene avowed her resolve to marry him. Lily had heard how her beautiful young mother had faced Lord Leafdene's anger with her head held high, and had said: "You may suspect and despise him, father, but I have no one to compare with him. You have brought me up like a nun and I know no other men. You never thought of me while you had my brother, and you have not thought of me since. You lost him! I am going to be free. I am going away; I will not be shut up here all my life." It was all too true—her father had no answer. He had been utterly wrapped up and absorbed in the little boy. So the defiant young beauty, longing simply for pleasure and change, and caring nothing for social position or the opinion of her class, married and went abroad. She was well provided for, having her mother's fortune; but she was just a little surprised when she found she had to keep her husband altogether. They lived abroad entirely till the news came of Lord Leafdene's sudden death, and then they returned and took possession. The "low fellow," the "nobody," became the squire, the lord of the manor, and ruled even while his wife lived. When

she died in agony and terror, the one satisfaction he appeared to have was that of ruling. He was a little Czar in his own domain, and, later on, even Lily, fearless and loving young creature, was sometimes in fear of him. He was a stern, hard master and man of business. This seemed natural; he had craved power and possessions, and he had got them. They were absolutely his own now his wife was gone until his daughter came of age. Of course he suffered at the thought that if he went among the friends and the equals of his wife's family he would be despised and looked down upon—perhaps even secretly believed to be guilty of crime—but he got over that difficulty by never facing the ordeal. He lived in a safe and luxurious seclusion from which he could afford to regard the opinions of the world with complete indifference. But was not this a colossal selfishness? Even to Lily's inexperience it seemed as if history might repeat itself in a lamentable manner, and that just as her mother had never seen any man of a marriageable age but her brother's tutor, so she herself might never see one but Diana's doctor. She laughed as this thought came to her there as she stood by the roadside, and decided, "No! I'll go and stay with Aunt Isabella and get her to ask the Baptist minister to tea."

Aunt Isabella was the sister of Lily's father,

who objected to Lily's occasional visits to her. She was a grocer's widow, quite well off for her walk in life, and very kind-hearted; but what could she do for Lily, the representative of an old Lincolnshire family? But for her, Lily would not have known what streets and shops and theatres were like, and she was grateful to her and fond of her, though no two persons could have less in common than these two. Their only basis for conversation was that of a kindly feeling on both sides.

Lily thought over all these things as she walked slowly back to the house. She recalled very clearly a complete change which had taken place in her father about four years earlier. She had been the victim of a series of governesses, all of whom objected to the locked room, and to strange sounds which some of them declared they heard there in the night. One or two went away without notice or remuneration, simply saying they were afraid to stay. The squire fell into a violent rage on the last of these occasions; an unusual thing with him, for his was a usually quiet and reserved anger. In a passion he strode to the door of the locked room, opened it wide and went in, leaving it open. In a few moments he came out again into an empty hall, for every one had fled to distant corners of the house. He shut and locked the door and, with the key held tight

in his hand, staggered to a chair and sat down heavily as if stupefied. He was a long time alone, but at last an old manservant came into the hall and, at the sight of the master's white face, went and got brandy for him which he drank without apparently knowing that he did so. After this he was ill for some time. He was different after that—irritable, unreasonable, sometimes a bully, and with a cold glare in his eyes that Lily saw as something new. She accepted all this as the result of illness. Then he took up spiritualism, and his one interest was to have some professor in the art visit him and to hold séances in the dark, locked room. Since that phase set in Lily became of no account at all ; he scarcely noticed her.

“ These people all cheat him,” thought Lily, in her youthful wisdom ; “ his wits must be going. That was a dreadful man that came to-day. Of course he is a cheat, and father pays them lots of money and believes in them I suppose ! I wonder why he does it ? I must tell somebody all about it. I'll get him to let me go for a week to Aunt Isabella and I will tell her. I wish he would have her here, and she could judge for herself. I'll ask him.”

So thinking, she ran up the broad stone steps of the house of her ancestors, and went into the shaded, pleasant hall—a very lonely girl. The old manservant met her.

“Father has not looked at his letters yet!” she said to herself, noticing the silver salver, where they lay unopened still.

“I’ve sent for the doctor, Miss Lily,” said the man. “The squire is not well.”

“Sent for the doctor! Oh, Thomas! What is the matter? Where is father?”

“In his own room, miss; and I think, miss, you’d best not go to him. He’s in a very strange temper, is the squire, and I think, as I’ve got him all he wants, we’d better wait till Dr. Ash comes before disturbing him any more.”

Lily looked at the man in dismay.

“It’s always horrid after one of these séances, as I said to Mr. Keane,” she murmured to herself. And then she found herself wishing Mr. Keane was the doctor coming instead of Dr. Ash.

CHAPTER II

WHEN the present squire assumed the position of master at Leafdene Hall he had been in great fear of the servants and retainers, most of whom had been there long enough to remember him as the tutor. He managed to dispense with the services of those who made him most uneasy, and to retain those who showed him what he considered to be proper respect. Thomas held his place and improved upon it by this means. Dr. Ash had been called in to attend a servant, and showed himself so profoundly respectful when he chanced to meet the master of the Hall, that he was installed in the coveted position of medical attendant to the family. Squire Leafdene would allow no one else to be sent for under any circumstances. He would no more receive a visit from one of the smart "first-rate men," who went to the big houses in their motor cars, than a call from any of the county people who lived in those big houses. This was well understood, and Dr. Ash was sent for as a matter of course to come up to Leafdene in his old-fashioned gig. He was very proud of being the Hall doctor, but, as Lily had never been ill in her life, and the staff of servants was not

large, it did not make much difference to his income. He was a plump little man, with a button of a mouth and twinkling eyes, which prevented his ever seeming to be quite in earnest.

Mr. Leafdene seemed to be made very angry by the mere sight of him on this occasion, and glared at him in a most unfriendly manner.

“I did not tell you to send for Dr. Ash, Thomas.”

“No, sir, I acted on my own responsibility. You’re feverish, sir, that’s what you are; I’m sure of it.”

Mr. Leafdene turned from the doctor and rested his cold, glittering eyes on the servant.

“What! because I told you I know quite well what an old liar and thief you are? It’s a fact, that’s all, and I’ve been a great deal too easy with you.”

Dr. Ash had now succeeded in feeling his patient’s pulse, and Thomas slipped away. He was waiting in the corridor when Dr. Ash came out.

“There’s nothing whatever the matter with him,” said the doctor brusquely; the smile and the twinkle were less apparent than usual.

“But, doctor, he told me he had gone to bed for good, and was never going to leave his room again!”

“Yes, he’s very odd. It’s that spiritualistic

stuff. I wish Miss Lily were of age ; but as she isn't we shall have to find some relation to come and take charge if this kind of thing goes on."

"You haven't said so to him!" asked Thomas in an awe-struck whisper.

"No—no! I've just told him to keep quiet. He's just in a very bad temper. Don't go near him except when you are obliged to."

Lily waylaid the doctor in the hall—the poor man had been hoping to evade her.

"It's just the mental strain of these—these practices of his that's upset him, I conclude, Miss Leafdene. There's nothing wrong physically."

Lily regarded the doctor with surprise.

"Mental strain?" she repeated in a questioning tone.

The doctor hesitated as to whether he should say any more then and decided not to.

"I'll come to-morrow," he said. "Good morning, Miss Leafdene. And pray don't be anxious; the squire is not really ill."

He went off, glad to get out of the house. In the few moments he had been alone with his patient he had received some severe shocks. He had never had such rude things said to him before. He did not feel at all sure about coming to-morrow if he was to be treated in that way.

Lily sat down in the hall and tried to think what she could do. It seemed to her that she

could only wait and see what happened. Suddenly the bell that rang from her father's room pealed loudly and Thomas went upstairs, but not very fast. He soon returned, carrying a telegraph form with a message written on it in pencil.

"The squire orders me to send this to the post office at once, miss," he said, laying it down in front of her on the table by which she was sitting. She looked at it in perplexity.

"It's to the dark gentleman that came to lunch and then went into the locked room with master," explained Thomas.

Lily took it up and read it. "*Return at once diamond ring you took from table in locked room.*"

"Oh!" was all Lily could find to say. Thoughts of the most confused kind rushed through her brain.

"I don't think, miss," said Thomas, "that this can be sent by telegram. If you was to put it in an envelope and address it to that there dark gentleman it might be better."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Lily.

Thomas, having recently been called a thief himself, did not stoop to explain.

"I heard master muttering to himself, miss, that it was your mother's ring, and that he'd have to account to you for it later, and that this dark gentleman had gone too far. He was to have

taken something to make a link, miss, he was saying, and what he means, miss, I cannot tell. Anyhow, the dark man took more than master meant, that's clear. But what puzzles me is how master knows. I'm sure he's not been out of his room."

"Well," suggested Lily, who was practical even in the most confusing moments, "probably papa thought he had got it himself and found he hadn't."

Thomas said nothing as the explanation seemed reasonable.

"Well, miss, shall I send this telegram?"

The bell rang again very loudly. Thomas answered it, and soon returned.

"I shall have to, miss. One of the stable boys is to go at once on the pony. Master's very angry."

Lily made no remark. The whole thing puzzled her too much. When Thomas had gone she rose slowly and went out into the corridor in which was the locked door. She stood close to it and placed one hand on it.

"How I wish I knew what to do!" she said to herself. Then it occurred to her to do something amazingly unusual and daring in that house, yet quite practical and commonplace. She went straight up to her father's room and spoke at once with the courage of youth.

“ I’m sorry you are ill, father,” she said ; “ as you can’t go down, let me have the key of the locked room and I will look for the ring that is missing. As it was on the table very likely it was knocked down—for you were there in the dark, weren’t you ? ”

She had not looked at him while she spoke, but busied herself with putting straight some things on a writing-table which stood near the door. Her father did not reply, and after a moment she felt surprised and startled by the silence and looked towards the great bed, with its carved oak pillars and beautiful old canopy. The squire had evidently been propped up by a great pile of square pillows ; but he was leaning forward from them now, looking very gaunt and tall. A long chain hung from his neck, and his two hands clasped tightly what was suspended upon it. Lily knew it was the key of the locked room. He was looking intently at her, and as her eyes travelled from the chain and the clasped hands to his face she met his gaze full and started violently. He was looking steadily at her with a regard that made her shudder—cold, cruel, evil, yes, evil—she recognised that there was hatred in this look. It was the gaze of a stranger ; there was something horribly unfamiliar in it—more than unfamiliar—it was absolutely strange. They stared upon each other thus for a full long dreadful moment,

and then Lily turned slowly away and left the room. She closed the door quietly, went downstairs and across the hall out into the air. She suddenly realised her absolute loneliness. She stood in the soft air of the summer evening at a loss. Presently the longing for some feeling of friendship carried her almost unconsciously round to the stables, and she comforted herself by laying her head against Diana's soft neck. The old horse turned her head and breathed softly on her young mistress's fair neck. Tears started to Lily's eyes, but they did not fall—they dried on the long lashes. She was too perplexed, too startled to weep. And she was too overcome by the sudden complete realisation of her loneliness and isolation. Had she indeed no friend in the world but the old carriage horse ?

The wonderful and mysterious forces in human life which bring people together in a manner perfectly inexplicable to those who think things happen by chance, were just then, as the girl stood alone and knew it, bringing unknown friends and enemies towards her from different parts of the world. One who had never heard her name, and did not know of her existence, was at that very moment considering a course of action which must inevitably bring them together if carried out. She was a girl of about Lily's age, perhaps a year older; a plain, unattractive girl, with a bad complexion,

narrow eyes set close together, and a thin-lipped, hard mouth. She had had to fight for herself in a very unsympathetic world ever since she could remember and she showed the effects of it.

Her name was Sarah Langley; she was the cashier in a hosiery shop in Cheapside. She had done her day's work and had her supper at an X.Y.Z., and had just come into the room in which she slept, holding a newspaper in her hand. She had a room-mate, who had returned earlier, and was lying in her narrow little bed looking utterly tired out. The room these two shared at night was one in a house of such rooms. Girls employed in shops where "living-in" was not possible occupied them. They were sleeping-rooms only, and no tenant was expected to be in them during the day at all. Not even a kettle could be boiled on a spirit lamp, and the tenants must go out to every meal—even on holidays. A good deal of health and strength is required for such a life.

"Tired, Alice?" said Sarah Langley to her room-mate, sitting down and opening out her newspaper.

"Dead tired," answered Alice, without troubling to open her eyes.

"I'm sick of the whole thing," said Sarah. "The manageress told me I was getting stout to-day. I know what that means. I shall get

the sack soon. It's my wretched waist. Pulling in's no good. They told me at the hospital I must have an operation. I haven't the pluck for it. And one doctor told me he believed I only wanted fresh air and good food."

Alice had raised her weary eyelids now and her kind, dark brown eyes rested on Sarah.

"I am very sorry," she said simply.

"I'm *mad*," answered Sarah fiercely; "life's too hard for girls like me. I ain't strong enough to do like some, and walk about all the evening with a feller's arm round my waist, looking out for luck. *No!*" with sudden energy, "I'm after something different."

Alice's tired eyes closed again. "Something different" was beyond the reach of her weary mind. Sarah looked again at her newspaper, which was dirty and worn in the folds.

"Do you know about spiritualism?" she asked.

"No," answered Alice sleepily.

"There's been a feller from the post office in once or twice lately buying new things, and he told me he was after something different from his present job. Of course I wanted to know what it might be, and he let out at last that it's spiritualism, and to-day he gave me this paper to look at, which has got lots about it. Some people want to get messages from their dead relations, and the job is to get them for them. That's about

the whole of it. But you've got to get at the people. This feller's got some one to have him in the evenings with some of these people, and he's been practising up in his attic with a little table. He says he's getting on, and took a guinea the other day. Think of that ! ”

“ Does he make up the messages ? ” asked Alice sleepily.

“ I—don't know,” said Sarah with some awkwardness. “ I—suppose so.”

“ Seems cheaty,” observed Alice.

“ There's a lot in this paper,” went on Sarah, “ about a grand house in the country where there's a locked room with a ghost in it. And spiritualists, which I understand is their name, go down there and get paid to go into the dark room and get messages from the ghost. I don't believe I should be frightened,” she said thoughtfully.

There was no response, Alice was asleep. At that moment the gas was turned off at the meter, and Sarah had to undress hastily in the dark, wondering whether she would be frightened if the locked room was dark. If she had been anywhere near that locked room during this night she probably would have been frightened. Other persons were, at all events, persons who should have been used to what the cook called the “ goings-on.” A steady thumping, like a steam engine at work, persisted during the small hours.

Thomas, after much perturbation of mind, went to his master's room and softly opened it, telling himself that he would not find any one there. But he did ; Squire Leafdene was sitting up against his pile of pillows listening. Thomas withdrew hastily to find Lily behind him. She had peeped through the crack of the door and seen that her father was in his room.

“ Thomas,” she whispered, “ what is it ? ”

“ I don't know, miss,” answered the scared servant, “ unless it's the devil ! ”

Lily turned away without reply and went back to her own room.

“ This must be stopped somehow,” she said to herself. “ I am not of age for two long years. This house is mine then, and I will have that room opened. But we may all be driven out of our senses before then. I will send for Aunt Isabella in the morning. At all events, it would be some one to speak to.”

In the morning the housekeeper, who was a comparative newcomer, and two housemaids commissioned Thomas to inform the master that they were leaving at once unless some satisfactory explanation could be offered of the noises in the night. Thomas returned from his errand to say that the master only said they were a pack of fools. He was thinking of nothing, so Thomas said, but a telegram the early morning postman

had brought, which was a reply from the professor of spiritualism, denying all knowledge of the diamond ring. Later in the morning another telegram came. After reading it several times the squire threw it aside, and presently Thomas took an opportunity to look at it.

“Ring materialised at séance at Balham. I was not present, but description tallies. Marvelous test if so. Will get permission to bring it you to-morrow.”

Thomas took the liberty of reassuring his young mistress as to the safety of her ring when he next met with her.

“It’s been found, miss, he says—materialised, he calls it. I wonder what he means. Can you tell me, miss?”

“No, Thomas, I cannot,” answered Lily. Neither of them knowing anything of the jargon of the cult, the young mistress and the old servant were both genuinely mystified.

Lily gathered that her father had not asked for her, that he had made an excellent breakfast, and had got everything that could be thought of to please him, yet that he did not appear to be pleased; so she did not go to his room. She wrote to her aunt, asking her to come and visit them, merely saying that her father seemed out of sorts. She decided to post the letter herself, and so great was her indecision about sending it after all that

she walked right into the town post office, turning things over in her mind meanwhile. As she stood before the wide mouth of the box in the post office wall, holding the letter in a hesitating hand, she heard a pleasant voice say, "Good morning, Miss Leafdene. Is Diana better, do you know?"

Mr. Keane was posting letters, and his went into the letter-box so decidedly and promptly that she felt impelled to follow his example—so she dropped hers in quickly. She turned and saw a handsome, well-dressed woman standing by Mr. Keane. The likeness was so strong that no introduction was needed to tell her that this was his mother. In a moment she found herself walking along the High Street in very pleasant companionship. Mrs. Keane stopped at a big, square, stone house which stood wedged among the shops, right in the street.

"Will you come in and rest a little while, Miss Leafdene?" she said. "It is a long walk for so hot a morning."

Lily assented gladly, and followed her hostess up the low steps into a little entrance hall that reminded her of Aunt Isabella's suburban house, and then into a square parlour which looked to her small and simple and rather like the house-keeper's room at Leafdene. But she noticed something at once which she had not seen anywhere else in her limited experience—quantities

of books and magazines, not on shelves or put away, but all scattered on a centre table, evidently in constant use. Mrs. Keane smiled at Lily's glance of surprise.

"Sit down here," she said, giving the girl a low cane rocking-chair, which she at once discovered to be more comfortable than any of the chairs at Leafdene. "That's my reading-chair; I like to sit close by the table and to change my book without moving. I never had time to read while the boys were growing up, so now I am enjoying it. I have books down from two or three libraries in London, so you will know where to come when you want anything to read. These will all be gone by the end of the week and a new lot in their place. If there is anything there you like take it, for Jim can easily fetch it back."

Lily turned over some of the books, and, as she did so, the morning paper, which had been thrown carelessly on the top, fell before her, with a paragraph uppermost which caught her attention. She paused to read it. It described, vaguely and with discretion, but unmistakably, an historic mansion which contained a locked room in which a ghost was said to be shut up. She uttered a little cry: "Oh! do they mean Leafdene?" she said in distress. "There can't be another!"

Mrs. Keane looked over and saw what she was reading.

“I had not seen that,” she said gravely. “I am sorry you should have seen it here. But I have heard about it. Of course people will talk about anything unusual. And Jim told me what you said to him yesterday about it.”

Lily sank back in her chair.

“Things are much worse to-day,” she said in a low voice. “Father seems quite changed.”

“Quite changed!” exclaimed Mrs. Keane.

“Yes, he is not a bit like himself; and he has gone to bed and says he is going to stay there always. Dr. Ash has been to see him and says he is perfectly well.”

“How very extraordinary!”

“It seems so odd in this lovely weather if he is not really ill. He has always been out in the gardens so much. He had a fire last night and said he was chilly. Oh, Mrs. Keane,” she burst out suddenly, “if only I could get that locked room opened! I will when I’m of age; but it is such a long time to wait—two years! All the mischief comes from that room, though I don’t know why it should.”

Mrs. Keane looked at her with great interest while she spoke, and with sympathy. There was a little pause while she considered what Lily had been saying.

“Your father is a spiritualist?” she said at last.

“ Yes,” replied Lily.

“ And I understand from my son that you don’t believe in spiritualism ? ”

“ I don’t know anything about it,” answered Lily simply.

“ Then you have never had anything to do with these séances ? ”

“ Oh, no ! I have no idea what goes on. But I know they make us all miserable—and it’s horrid. Father says he promised mother nothing should ever be moved in that room and that she didn’t want it opened, and for years he didn’t go in ; then he went in, and something seemed to happen to him, and he’s always wanting to go in and to take these strange people there who get messages for him. I hate the whole thing ! May I really borrow some of these books ? I see some I would love to read. We don’t get new books—and we never go away anywhere. I wish father would take me abroad, like he did mother—but it’s no use wishing ! There’s a book here about Italy—I know we were there a great deal when I was a baby, and I would love to read about it.”

Carrying books that she looked into as she walked, and cheered by having had a little outburst, Lily went home as quickly as her light feet would carry her. For, as she explained to Mrs. Keane, there was no knowing what might have

happened while she had been out. She found a sleepy, quiet house, beautiful in its apparent peace, when she ran across the lawn and up the steps. Thomas, who had been watching for her return, came to meet her.

“ Since you’ve been gone, miss,” he said, clearly implying in his tone that he had been left to bear very heavy responsibilities alone, “ master has sent a telegram to that Mr. Murk to tell him not to come to-morrow, that he will not see him——” Lily gave a little cry of relief, “ and he has ordered Diana to be shot.”

“ What ! ”

“ Yes, miss ; it’s as much as I have dared to do to delay till you came back.”

“ But what can he mean, Thomas ? Why ? ”

“ Master says, miss, that he isn’t going out ever any more, and that the carriage and pair won’t be wanted again at all, and that Diana is only an expense and trouble, and he won’t have that vet. coming here and running up a bill for her.”

“ He’s got to reckon with *me*,” said Lily, her cheeks flaming. “ Now, Thomas, get a boy ready on a pony to gallop down to Mr. Keane while I write him a note. Not a moment’s delay ; he must take Diana down to his own stables and take care of her there.”

“ But—miss—— ” stammered Thomas, thoroughly frightened by this sudden rebellion.

Lily stamped her little foot with impatience. All the imperiousness of her race came out in her.

“Make haste!” she said. “Here, I’ll bring pencil and paper,” snatching them up from the table, “and come and stand by Diana while I write—and I’ll see no one touches her. I won’t leave her till she’s safe away out of this place.”

“But—master must be told——” still stammered and hesitated the bewildered servant.

“No!” cried Lily, “not till Diana’s gone. Then I’ll go and talk to him.”

She carried out her fierce resolution by means of high-handed haste; a boy galloped down to the town and arrived at the veterinary surgeon’s door just as he and his mother were sitting down to a quiet mid-day dinner, for at this hour the sleepy market town was generally very silent, engaged upon meals. The clatter of the pony’s hoofs attracted Keane’s attention; he went out to the door and took the note from the boy.

“So sorry, mother!” he said, looking back into the dining-room for a moment, “I must go; Miss Leafdene wants the sick mare fetched away instantly. The squire seems off his head; he has ordered her to be shot and it’s absurd, she’s getting on well.”

He hurried out to the stables, and had his horse-cart got ready and sent it off, telling his man to

drive quickly ; while he himself saddled Black Lily (as she was now called) and followed.

Mrs. Keane sat quietly at the table, deep in thought. She had given up a pleasant home, and the society of valued friends, to live with her boy Jim. She had never regretted it ; to-day she was glad to be there, though left alone thus unceremoniously.

Up at Leafdene there was great excitement among the diminished staff of servants. When the horse ambulance was driven into the stable-yard amazed and interested faces peered out from the back windows. Even Thomas came from time to time to look out, returning to listen for any summons from his master's room.

None came ; all was very quiet in the house.

“ Master thinks we've taken her out to the meadow to shoot her,” said Thomas to himself, “ and he's just listening for the shot. Miss Lily herself will have to tell him what's she done—not me. She's as wilful as him any day, and better, for she's a Leafdene—and what's he ? ” thought the man scornfully. Thus did he refresh himself after years of servility.

Black Lily's galloping hoofs were heard at last, and White Lily, standing with her arm on Diana's neck, heaved a great sigh of relief.

“ I'm so glad you've come,” she said simply. “ Please take Diana with you now and keep her

at your stables. I will come and see her as soon as I can."

The vet. said nothing, but obeyed orders without hesitation. With his skilful attendant's help the horse was got into the cart, and was driven away out of the stable-yard down the road. Mr. Keane, taking off his hat to Lily, mounted and rode after it.

"Oh, thank you!" said Lily, in the most heartfelt tones; but he did not hear her, for his horse was clattering over the stones of the yard.

The gate was shut, the stable-boy and the pony respectively refreshed and rested after their hard and hasty work; the servants went to dinner and to talk. Lily, with drooping head, feeling tired again, went into the house and began to go upstairs.

"If you please, miss," said Thomas, using great diplomacy for the furtherance of his genuine desire that she should get the best of the battle before her, "master's taking his luncheon, and won't wish to be disturbed. I have just taken your luncheon into the dining-room. You must be tired, miss."

Lily said nothing, but showed gratitude by turning back into the dining-room. She sank into a chair by the big oak table where a single place was laid for her, lonely in the broad expanse, and ate a little of what was provided for her. Sud-

denly it occurred to her to say, "Cook is doing the housekeeping, I suppose, Thomas?"

"Yes, miss. She asked me to say she would like to speak to you this afternoon. The housekeeper gave master the keys of the store cupboard and cellar when she left, and it's just a little awkward."

Lily finished her meal in thoughtful silence. It was clear that there was a good deal for her to do.

CHAPTER III

SARAH LANGLEY was hurriedly packing, in the little sleeping-room which she hoped she would never enter again. It was time for Alice to come in, and she was eager to see her and say good-bye and be off. Just as she had fastened her little trunk and was putting on her coat Alice came in and looked round in amazement.

“Yes,” said Sarah bitterly, answering her look, “I got the sack this morning and my money. No reason given. I know the reason. What’s the good of me going anywhere else? I ain’t got a figure now, and I ain’t got no looks either.” She was putting on her hat at the little mirror while she spoke, and regarding herself critically. “But I’ve got my wits still.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Alice—always tired, but very sorry and anxious.

“I’m going to try my luck at a better job. I went straight off to that spiritualist, Mr. Murk, and paid the fee for what he calls a séance. It was fun when he began, floundering about with dark young men and fair young men. I said, at last: ‘Stop, you’re all in the dark,’ and we came to an understanding before long. I shouldn’t like

his business," she observed thoughtfully. "It must be very hard when you don't know anything about people."

"But what are you going to do?" again demanded Alice.

"What I'm going to do in the long run I don't quite know yet," answered Sarah Langley, "but I've got a job to do for Mr. Murk now that'll take up a day or so, and then I'll see how the land lies."

"Do tell me," said Alice.

"I'm going down to Lincolnshire by the night train," said Sarah. "I'm taking something from Mr. Murk to that queer house where there's the locked room."

"Oh, Sarah! won't you be frightened?"

"I don't think so," answered Sarah; "it's all stuff and nonsense, you know. Mr. Murk just makes things up."

"And are you going to make things up?" asked Alice; "it doesn't sound right."

"Oh—*right!*" repeated Sarah.

"But Mr. Murk didn't lock up that room, did he, Sarah?"

"Oh—no! It's been locked up for years and years."

"Seems queer," said Alice.

"Yes, it does," admitted Sarah. "Well, I'm going to see what it's all like."

“And you are going now?”

“Yes—I’ve paid up here and must go or I shall be let in for paying for another night.”

“And where are you going to sleep?” asked Alice anxiously—she was so tired that this was the first idea that occurred to her in connection with her friend’s bold enterprise.

“On the train,” answered Sarah; “so I shan’t have to pay for a lodging anywhere. Now I must go or I shall be turned out. I’ve arranged to leave my box a day or two.”

“And have you the money to go?”

“Yes——” said Sarah, in a very anxious tone, “though it’s an awful gamble. Good-bye,” and the room-mates exchanged a perfunctory kiss of farewell without any promise of writing, such as would have been exchanged between girls of easier fortune. Alice never wrote to anybody. She was too busy and too tired and could not afford a stamp. And as for Sarah, she knew so little of what her future would be that it seemed to her as if a door must shut between now and then—between to-day and to-morrow.

“You *have* got a nerve, Sarah,” said Alice, looking after her in doubtful admiration.

While this conversation was going on, and an entirely unexpected new factor was preparing to intrude itself into the already disturbed peace of beautiful Leafdene, Lily was going through a most

surprising and painful experience. For the first time in her life she was being absolutely bullied.

The afternoon had been a busy one for her, as the servants had no one to go to for orders, and there were not enough of them to do the work, and it was necessary for her to make many arrangements which were quite new to her. The cook was a cheerful and affectionate Irishwoman, very fond of Lily, and well pleased with her place. She had settled down like a comfortable cat, and as her room was so situated that she did not hear any of the mysterious midnight noises—or perhaps she slept too soundly to be disturbed—she declared that she didn't mind about ghosts. But what she did want was the cellar key, and orders sent into the town, food and drink being the all-important things in her view of life; also she wanted notice sent to the servants' registry office in the town that several servants were wanted. All these things had to be done by the young mistress, with cook's assistance, and most of the afternoon was spent over it, owing to cook's talkativeness and Lily's inexperience. Thomas managed to avoid the question of Diana with his master by keeping away as much as possible and hastily introducing other subjects when he had to be in his room. Rather later than usual Lily was begged by Thomas to partake of a little dinner which cook had prepared for her.

“Oh—but father!” she said hastily. “What about his dinner?”

“The master’s dinner has been served, miss, and the master is now having it, and he gave me the cellar key so as to get him a bottle of champagne and some brandy to have in his coffee—as a liqueur, miss—so I took the opportunity to get the beer for the servants’ hall supper at the same time—though I was very much hurried, miss, as the master called to me from the top of the stairs, miss—you were with cook in the housekeeper’s room, miss, and I shut the door between—if he had rung his bell you would have heard; but he hadn’t patience enough for that, miss—begging your pardon—and I must ask you to get the key for the servants’ hall beer in the morning—they like it at eleven, miss.”

Lily listened in amazement. All these things were new to her. She had dined with her father for years and had never known him drink wine. Everything seemed changed. “I wish Aunt Isabella would come to-morrow,” she thought in her perplexity over all these details.

Then, suddenly, she heard what seemed to her like a lion’s roar upstairs. It was her father’s voice—and *not* his voice—

“Lily—what do I hear? Come up to me at once!”

She went up at once and found that her father

had retreated from the landing, from which he had called to her, and was walking up and down in his room. He wore a dressing-gown of a deep red colour ; a wood fire burned on the hearth. His dinner had been set on a table by this fire, and an armchair had been drawn up to the table. He had finished, and was now smoking a cigar as he paced to and fro. He had never been a smoker, and Lily had never seen him with a cigar in his mouth before. She stood at the open door, surprised.

“ So ! ” he said, “ you defy me, do you ? You dare to give contrary orders to mine ? We will see who rules here. I have two more years, at all events, and for that time I will be obeyed ! Diana will be brought back to-morrow morning and shot, as I directed.”

“ *She will not !* ” cried Lily, standing splendid and resolute by the door.

Bitter words followed—Lily was never able to remember what was said on either side ; she left the room at last in impotent defiance, and without the cellar key, as Thomas, to his regret, discovered immediately. This was a dreadful night for her. She went to her room and stood looking out of the window upon the lovely garden for a long time. She was here, in her own home, in the house of her ancestors, secure, safe !—yet she felt to be alone, an alien, an outcast. Her father held

the reins. And he had strangely and suddenly become unlike her father, something different, something terrible, something to be defied with all the strength of her pure, proud, young body and her untried, active brain. Yet how could this be so? Little as they had been in sympathy of late there had never been a dreadful crisis like this, an outburst of violent feeling on both sides. A fierce enmity, a strong hatred, had suddenly risen between them. There were two long years before she could choose her own way—but even now Diana should not be shot! She clenched her hands tight. She could trust James Keane for that, no matter what orders the squire might send to the despised vet.! For long hours she walked about her room, unable to settle down; sleep came only at the dawn, and it was late when at last Polly, the under-housemaid, came with tea and drew the blinds, letting in the glorious sunshine.

“Please, miss,” said Polly, “there’s a person in the hall that’s come up from the station in the fly; she says Mr. Murk has given her a message, or something, for master. And please, miss, cook says what are we to do with her?”

“Send her back,” said Lily sleepily.

“Please, miss, she paid the cab and sent it away. And she says she will wait.”

Lily said nothing; she was not equal to con-

sidering Mr. Murk or anything connected with him. She drank the tea Polly presented to her and went to sleep again. So Sarah Langley sat in a hall chair, holding a sealed packet firmly in her hands, until Thomas, in a strange striped morning jacket, was able to contend with her.

“Master’s not had breakfast,” he said curtly; “I couldn’t take on me to tell him there’s any one to see him yet.”

“I will wait,” said Sarah. And she waited, with an air of such deep resignation that at last Thomas relented a little and offered her some tea and toast from what he described as the servants’ early breakfast.

“Thank you,” said Sarah, “I do feel tired,” and she resolved that if ever she got “her foot in,” as she described it to herself, to this land of plenty, she would remember him without undue harshness. Not so cook, who had come to the baize door which separated the servants’ quarters from the hall, and regarded her suspiciously. Still less would Sarah have considered this queen of the kitchen kindly for the future had she known that she said to Thomas: “Tea and toast for that baggage! The master was always against giving to tramps!” Sarah was quite well aware that she did not get her breakfast by cook’s goodwill. She waited patiently in the hall without a word of inquiry or protest, and let the time slip by. It

made no difference to her, as she philosophically reflected, how long she had to wait ; perhaps the longer the better, for she wished to contrive matters so that she could not be sent back to town that night. It was early hours to be considering such a contingency—but Sarah was a wary adventurer, looking ahead at all the possibilities.

At last Thomas said he would undertake to deliver a message to his master.

“Tell Mr. Leafdene,” said Sarah, “that I have come from Mr. Murk, bringing a packet which I promised Mr. Murk I would give into his own hands.”

“The ring, I s’pose,” said Thomas ; “quite time, too. I should have thought registered post would have brought it safe enough.”

Sarah made no reply, and the man went slowly upstairs. In a little while he came back.

“The master will see you in half-an-hour,” he said ; and without further remark went into the dining-room to set the table for Lily’s breakfast. She came downstairs in a few minutes, and, seeing Sarah, would have spoken to her had not Thomas come out of the dining-room and remarked in a low but audible voice :

“A person from Mr. Murk, miss, to see master. I have told him she is waiting.”

Lily and Sarah exchanged looks. Sarah’s expressed keen curiosity ; she was anxious as to

whether Mr. Murk's estimate of this young lady was likely to be correct. He had regarded her as of no account. Lily looked at the stranger in sheer surprise, wondering at the appearance of a visitor of this kind so early in the morning.

"Has she come from the station?" she asked Thomas as she went into the dining-room.

"Yes, miss," replied Thomas. Neither made any further remark, both being lost in perplexity as to what this visit might portend.

Presently the bell from upstairs rang and Thomas went up. In a little while he fetched Sarah, who followed him in considerable trepidation. The next few moments were of vital importance to her, and she was blind to the beauty of the oak staircase and the oak balcony commanding a view of the hall, which she passed on her way to the squire's room. When she observed these things afterwards she realised how intent and absorbed she had been on this occasion.

Mr. Leafdene was out of bed, wearing his dark silk dressing-gown, sitting in a big armchair by the open window. The view from the window and the scented, soft air which entered through it, were both exquisite. He looked up when Sarah entered, and seeing that she was what Thomas described as "a person," did not trouble to apologise for not rising to receive her. He merely bowed his head rather stiffly and said:

“ Mr. Murk has sent you with something which he had to return to me, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” said Sarah, and she handed him the small sealed packet. He took it and opened it. There was a flashing ring within, which he took out, examined closely, and then laid on a small table that stood beside him. Sarah then said :

“ I have a letter also to give you, sir,” and she proffered it. Mr. Leafdene took it, read it quickly, then looked it over again. He laid it down on the table and directed a searching, scrutinising gaze upon Sarah, before which she shrank. She knew what was in the letter. It informed the squire that the lady entrusted to bring back the ring which had been so marvellously transported through space, and put upon a séance room table at Balham, was a new and remarkable medium who might prove of great value to any one engaged upon serious investigation.

“ Miss Langley,” said the squire, referring to the letter for her name. He looked at her again, and the character of his gaze made her feel afraid. “ So you are a spiritualist, Mr. Murk tells me ? ” he went on.

“ Yes, sir,” said Sarah.

“ More than that, a medium,” said the squire, and he looked at her while she answered in the

affirmative. She added a phrase Mr. Murk had taught her, "I have had some strange experiences."

Mr. Leafdene's eyes rested on her while she spoke, and she knew that he did not believe her. "Mr. Murk's took him for a fool," she said to herself, "but it's Mr. Murk's the fool." She began to think about her return journey and what she should do when she got to town. Mr. Leafdene's next words amazed her.

"I have no doubt you will be of great use to me," he said quietly, "and on Mr. Murk's recommendation I will ask you to remain here a few days and see whether this is the case. If you agree to that please go downstairs now and tell Thomas I wish to speak to him."

She did as she was told without any thought of acting otherwise. She found herself helpless before the keen gaze of those glittering eyes. She sat down in the hall again while Thomas went up to his master.

"Thomas," said Mr. Leafdene, "this young woman, Miss Langley, has come to me with excellent recommendations. We are very short of servants, and my impression is that she will be quite useful. It is possible she may be fitted to fill the post of housekeeper. Will you tell cook, or any housemaid we still have, that I wish Miss Langley to have the housekeeper's bedroom and

sitting-room, and that they are to be put in order for her at once."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas automatically, and retired. He began calculating as he went downstairs whether his savings justified him in leaving without notice, if he felt things became unbearable. For, in spite of his long service under the squire and his genuine affection for Miss Lily, he felt that a housekeeper recommended by Mr. Murk would be likely to be more than he could endure. He went straight to the kitchen and gave the order.

"But she ain't from the registry office, is she?" asked cook.

"No," said Thomas, "from Mr. Murk."

"What! one o' them spiritualist people!" cried cook. "Well! that's a nice look out. There'll be noises and ghosteses all the time. Does Miss Lily know?"

"No," said Thomas feelingly, "I've not broke it to Miss Lily yet. I'd better bring the person to the housekeeper's room, hadn't I, cook? I don't think I can bear her sitting in the hall any longer. She'd be better somewhere by herself where one didn't have to look at her all the time."

Lily had gone into the gardens as had always been her habit in the summer after breakfast. Presently, carrying some flowers, she returned, and noted with relief that Sarah was gone from

the chair she had filled so long. She decided to go and see her father and went upstairs carrying her flowers.

“Good morning,” she said, knocking at his door and then pushing it open. “Won’t you come out? It is lovely in the garden.”

Mr. Leafdene turned in his chair and looked at her. She quailed before his gaze.

“I have told you,” he said coldly, “that I shall never leave this room again.”

“But,” faltered Lily, “Dr. Ash thinks you could, if you would make the effort, and that it would not hurt you.”

Mr. Leafdene made no reply to this; it appeared to be beneath his notice.

“I am glad to say,” he went on after a moment, “that a person has come this morning, with excellent recommendations, who I expect will be able to fill the double position of housekeeper and companion to yourself. It is evident that, as I cannot any longer go about with you, there must be some one to be with you, and account to me for what you do. You are not to go into the town, remember that. Your defiant action in respect to Diana will not enable you to go down to that veterinary surgeon, of whose society you seem so fond. Miss Langley, the person of whom I have told you, has been shown to the housekeeper’s room. I have decided that I will put her in

charge of the keys ; and presently I will introduce her to you. Please understand that you are not to go beyond the gardens."

He turned away, and Lily, her eyes fixed on him as if she were fascinated, could find no words in which to express herself. Eventually, after some moments of amazed silence, she left the room, still with the flowers in her hand which she had brought for her father, and went slowly downstairs. She put the flowers down on the hall table and stood leaning on it with both hands for a moment.

"A prisoner!" she said to herself. "That's what he means. He's going to make me a prisoner. Oh, father! father! are you going mad?"

Just then Thomas came in, and stood silent, the picture of respectful misery. She looked at him.

"Thomas," she said, "I must send a telegram."

"Yes, miss," he said eagerly, "I'll manage it."

Some telegram forms lay on the table and she drew them towards her, hastily writing out a desperate appeal to Aunt Isabella to come to her. She gave it to Thomas and was glad soon to hear a pony's hoofs clattering out of the yard. Instantly Mr. Leafdene's bell rang and she

heard Thomas go slowly up the stairs in response to it.

“Poor Thomas!” she thought, with compunction. Then came a strange thought into her mind. “Thomas is free—he can go away. I can’t—for two long years!”

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Lily's wire reached her Aunt Isabella she was sitting thinking, with Lily's letter before her. She read the wire thoughtfully.

"This decides me," she said to herself. "I'll go and try to see Lady Janet now. Better go this very minute before my courage leaves me—I'll take the letter and wire with me. If I can't see Lady Janet I'll go again when I can see her."

Thus firmly resolved, Aunt Isabella went to her room and dressed herself in the same spirit as that in which a knight puts on his armour to go to the wars. She was going to do something she detested for the sake of one she loved and pitied. She looked again at the morning paper before she went out, to make sure of the information on which her expedition was based. Yes, there was the paragraph stating that Lady Janet Graham was in town for a day or two, in connection with the work of a charity which she organised, and asking that gifts should be sent to her private address. Mrs. Williams went out and walked to a tramcar, travelling thereon to Westminster; she then went to Park Lane, and by this little journey she had gone from one world into another

as completely as though she had found her way to Mars. She went direct to the house she wanted, having often looked upon it, and pressed the electric bell at the side of a beautiful blue-enamelled door. It was not necessary for her to raise the old-fashioned brass knocker, the polish on which filled her with admiration, for the door was opened instantly by a footman, who was evidently waiting just inside to usher in expected business visitors. Mrs. Williams was admitted without demur, and her card was taken in at once to Lady Janet, in a room where she was busy with a secretary. Mrs. Williams had written two or three words on the card, and when Lady Janet had read them, first with a little perplexity and the second time with understanding, she told the servant to show this visitor into "the small drawing-room." She hastily finished dictating a letter and then went to her, greeting her with a pleasant smile, a keen glance, and a friendly shake of a firm little hand. She was a little woman altogether, but firm in manner and character, and exceedingly pleasant and popular. Mrs. Williams felt better able to speak after they had been together for a few minutes. Lady Janet was the daughter of a Marquess, and had married a distinguished commoner. She adored her husband, but she never forgot that she had married beneath her, and during most of her time she was consciously

making herself agreeable to her social inferiors, so that she had now acquired the art to perfection.

“ I suppose, my lady,” began poor Mrs. Williams, much concerned as to how best to carry out her self-imposed task and introduce her subject, “ you have seen things in the papers lately about Leafdene Hall ? ”

“ Yes, I have,” said Lady Janet, looking earnestly at Mrs. Williams with her kind, bright blue eyes. She did not add anything, and there was a moment’s pause.

“ I have had a letter, and a telegram,” said Mrs. Williams, “ from Lily Leafdene, asking me to go to her. She is my niece, as, of course, you know, my lady ? ”

“ And she is my second cousin,” observed Lady Janet quietly.

“ I am her nearest relation in the world, after her father,” said Mrs. Williams ; “ but what can I do for her ? ”

She did not enlarge on this point, which showed good taste and wisdom ; and Lady Janet made no remark.

“ I would do anything in the world that I could,” went on Aunt Isabella, “ and the only thing I could think of that would be the slightest use was to come and ask your ladyship to put out a hand to her.”

“ I wrote a week ago,” said Lady Janet, “ to

ask your brother if he would let Lily come to me at the Towers, where I shall be for the next month."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, unable to suppress an exclamation of pleasure.

"It is absurd for her to be kept there without any society, as if she were in the schoolroom still," said Lady Janet. She had to be careful how she spoke, for she would not have considered it at all well bred to allow herself to show her opinion of Lily's father, the interloper in the Leafdene family, to his own sister.

"I'm afraid it is worse than that now," said Mrs. Williams. "She says my brother has become so changed since he took to this spiritualism, that it clearly isn't really right for her to be shut up there. He was always hard and determined, and I never had any influence with him; but it's more than that now, I gather from what Lily says."

"Do you mean," asked Lady Janet in an alarmed tone, "that his mind——"

"Well," said Mrs. Williams, "Lily says he's changed and she is afraid of him."

"Something must be done at once," said Lady Janet. "Of course it is known that these practices do sometimes produce most unfortunate results. I had no answer to my letter to him."

"Lily says he does not open his letters now," said Mrs. Williams.

“Oh, is that so? Well, that accounts for it. You are very fond of Lily?” she asked.

“She is a dear girl,” said Mrs. Williams. “And she is a Leafdene,” she added, “just like her mother, and like some of the old portraits.”

“Yes,” said Lady Janet, smiling, “that is so. I don’t know Lily as you do, for she has never been allowed to come to me, but I have seen her and noticed the likeness. I knew her mother, poor girl. She was kept shut up in that dreary place; I have been in that room that has been locked up since her death.”

She spoke in a lower voice as she referred to this, and she glanced up at Mrs. Williams. For a moment the two women looked earnestly at each other, each trying to read the mind of the other. At last Lady Janet said quietly:

“I expect you think spiritualism is all imagination, or all cheating, or, as many people think, a mixture of the two?”

“I do,” answered Mrs. Williams, solemnly and sadly.

“Then you must think your brother is out of his mind, for there don’t seem to be people there to cheat him all the time.”

“He must be very altered,” said Mrs. Williams, “for he was always clever, and I shouldn’t have supposed he’d give way to fancies or allow himself to be cheated.”

There was a little silence, and then Lady Janet said :

“ I am a Roman Catholic.”

“ Yes, my lady,” said Mrs. Williams.

“ We Roman Catholics believe, and are taught, that there is a reality in this strange thing called spiritualism, besides what arises from people getting fancies, and being taken in—— ”

She paused, as if expecting Mrs. Williams to say something ; but Mrs. Williams only looked at her and listened in respectful surprise.

“ And that reality,” went on Lady Janet, “ we believe comes from the devil.”

“ The devil ! ” exclaimed the visitor, her respect no less, but her surprise greater.

“ We regard the whole matter very seriously,” said Lady Janet. “ I am going to stay with the Lexingtons for a few days almost immediately, and I will get them to motor me over to Leafdene, and I will pay a surprise visit. Father Kingslake, a priest whose name I daresay you know, although you are not a Catholic, for he is a famous author also, will be there one day, I know, and I will ask his advice.”

Mrs. Williams found nothing to say ; she required time to think over all this, which was quite as a revelation to her of other people’s ways of regarding things.

“ I will do this,” said Lady Janet. “ I am so

thankful you came to me, for I was quite at a loss as I got no answer to my letter, and I had begun to think it must be very bad for Lily to be in the house with this spiritualism going on, although I had no idea things were as bad as you say."

Mrs. Williams rose to go ; she had heard several visitors admitted while they had been talking.

"Your ladyship is very busy, I know," she said. "You use your power and position for true charity." She said this with a little sigh, for she rather envied the power.

"I like to do something," said Lady Janet, "and I must say that I feel what we both want to do for Lily Leafdene is as important—if not more important—than anything at the moment. She needs to be in a wholesome and religious atmosphere. I would like you to know that whenever she likes, or can, she may come and live with me. When she is of age, if the position has not changed, she may wish to do so ; and I will bring her out, and present her, and take her about."

"You will be doing a truly good deed," said Mrs. Williams slowly, "in taking her into the world she rightfully belongs to."

Lady Janet smiled—a smile that went to the other woman's heart, and which she often thought of afterwards.

"I have no daughters, and only one son left—two have been killed in the war. It should not

be for nothing that Lily's great-aunt married a marquess. My father and Lord Leafdene quarrelled, and I fear Lily's grandfather died in great loneliness, from what I have heard. He was hard, and it may have been inevitable—but this girl must have help, and I will act at once. I will see her within a few days. And will you not go down yourself in answer to her entreaty?"

"I don't think I will go to Leafdene," said Mrs. Williams. "No—my mind's made up against that. I might only make matters worse. But I may go and stay somewhere near."

"That would be a good thing to do," said Lady Janet, in such a tone of conviction that Mrs. Williams at once decided to go as soon as she could get off.

The two women, so different that they might have belonged to different races as they did belong to different worlds, parted the best of friends, each reflecting what a good sort the other was. And meanwhile Lily, knowing nothing of the forces gathering up around her to protect her young life and open out her future, sat by a window, pretending to read. She would not go out in the garden, lest orders had been given for her to be watched. Her father was as a stranger, and she knew not what to look for from him.

While she sat thus, waiting for something to happen, a car came up to the house door, and from

it descended a certain Mr. Cullen, a solicitor in the neighbouring town, who attended to Mr. Leafdene's local legal business. He called now and again to consult with him about the lease of a farm, or some such matter. Lily knew him slightly, and she decided at once that she would speak to him. Before Thomas could reach the open door she was there herself.

"Good-morning, Mr. Cullen," she said. "Do you want to see my father? He is in his own room. While Thomas is telling him you are here will you come into the drawing-room a moment?" She drew him into the room that was furthest from the staircase and closed the door.

"Mr. Cullen," she demanded, "has my father the power to keep me a prisoner if he wishes to?"

"Surely, Miss Leafdene," said the lawyer, stuttering a little in his surprise, "he would never think of doing such a thing while he is in his right mind."

"That's just it," said Lily; "it doesn't seem to me as if he can be, he is so unlike himself!"

"Don't say such a thing, Miss Leafdene, I beg of you. It is very serious."

"It is this dreadful spiritualism," went on Lily; "can't it be stopped as witchcraft or something? Oh! Mr. Cullen, do try and think, and see if you can't help me. He's got a woman here to-day, another of these spiritualists, who is to stay here

and keep house and watch me, and I'm not to go beyond the garden."

"Surely you can't have understood the squire rightly!" said Mr. Cullen.

"Go and ask him yourself, then," said Lily, "and come and tell me afterwards. Surely he can't have that power over me?"

"He is absolutely your guardian till you are of age, Miss Leafdene, and it will be much better if you can keep on good terms. There must have been some misunderstanding."

"Till I am of age!—two years—well—if I can stand it till then I shall be free!"

"Yes," said Mr. Cullen, "and one of the richest young ladies in the country."

"Shall I be that?" exclaimed Lily in surprise. She had benefited in one way from the seclusion in which she had been reared.

"Yes, Miss Leafdene, you will be an heiress. Your father has only a life interest in the estate to enable him to live as your guardian until you come of age. The Hall and the estate will all be yours, and the large income from capital which is safely secured. So there is plenty of freedom before you."

"I shall not know how to use it," said Lily. "I see nothing of the world outside this place."

"It is not right, I do agree with you, Miss Leafdene, that you should live quite so quiet a life, but

I fear your father can decide about this. We must try to get him to see things differently."

At that moment Thomas appeared to say that the squire wished to see Mr. Cullen at once. That gentleman went upstairs, carrying some documents which required Mr. Leafdene's signature. He was gone a considerable time; Lily went into the hall so that she should not miss him when he left. He came down the stairs rather suddenly, looking excited.

"The squire is certainly in a strange and unreasonable mood to-day," he said to Lily.

"Did you say anything about me?" she asked.

"To tell the truth," said the poor man, "I did not venture to introduce the subject. The squire seemed so in opposition about everything and made so many difficulties—quite unlike him—he is generally quick about these matters, sees through the details directly, and settles things without delay. But to-day he seems to wish to dispute everything."

At that moment Sarah came down the stairs. She had been waiting about outside the squire's door while Mr. Cullen was there, and Mr. Leafdene had noticed her when the door was thrown open for the solicitor's rather hurried exit, and had called to her.

"That's right, Miss Langley. I'm glad to have

you within call—I need some one to think of my wants, for Thomas has plenty to do. Will you please go and see whether Miss Leafdene is talking to that lawyer, and if so, ask her to come to me at once ? ”

“ And if she is not, sir ? ”

“ Then leave her alone. I only want to prevent their talking.”

Sarah went on her errand ; but Mr. Cullen, who did not wish to give Lily time to make any more requests to him, had gone outside the door when she appeared on the scene. She went back, saying nothing, and it was so evident that she had been sent to see what was going on that Mr. Cullen and Lily both understood it so.

“ What on earth’s the matter with the man ? ” asked the lawyer of himself—but he could not answer his own question. He had had a most disagreeable interview, and had received contradictory orders which would cause needless delay, and he could not guess the reason.

“ Thomas,” said Lily, “ can you send down to Mr. Keane to know how Diana is ? ”

“ Yes, miss, I can do that,” answered Thomas, “ for I have to send in to the town some orders this person, the new housekeeper or whatever she is, has been making out with master.”

Lily said nothing about this information. “ I will write a note for Mr. Keane,” she said. “ Be

sure and come for it, and, mind, I am to have an answer."

Mr. Keane was standing in the open door of his house talking to his mother when the boy from Leafdene rode up and gave him a letter. He opened and read it as he stood there, and his mother saw him flush deeply and then turn pale.

"Call again for the answer when you've done the other errands," he said to the boy, who rode on. He closed the front door and spoke in agitation.

"The squire seems very strange; Miss Leafdene says I am to keep Diana safe, for he intends to have her fetched back and shot. And she trusts me not to allow this to happen—trusts me!"

He repeated the words in such a tone of emotion that his mother almost involuntarily broke the silence she had determined to keep as long as possible on this subject.

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" she exclaimed. "Don't fall in love with her! Look at the misery it has brought to her that her mother married beneath her! She is in a terrible position, in that solitude. I do hope she can trust you—that I can trust you!"

He stood still, looking at her as if she had called up before his vision an amazing and undreamed-of picture. He was very white.

“ Yes—you can——” Then he went into his office and wrote to Lily, a curt little business note on a printed bill-head, to say he would obey her orders implicitly about Diana, as he did not think the squire had had an opportunity of seeing the horse—which was decidedly better.

Sarah Langley, sitting in the housekeeper's room at Leafdene, was deep in thought. She was considering what to do next, and when any one is in the position of being positively obliged to act in some way, and is uncertain which way to act, the consideration is absorbing. The universe is shut out ; there are only the alternative steps to be seen, between which the choice lies. She found the situation at Leafdene quite different from what she had expected. Her opinion of Mr. Murk, the celebrated medium, had therefore fallen very low, so that she did not think it worth while to consult him as to what she should do. Yet in this judgment she did that clever person an injustice, though it was impossible for her to guess this. The situation had changed since he had been there, short though the time was. Mr. Leafdene was changed ; from a credulous and eager spiritualist he had become a violent and egotistical bully. Under this change his daughter had sprung into being as a factor in the situation. Her interview with Mr. Cullen, her determined action about Diana, amazed every

one, old Thomas, who knew her so well, most of all.

Sarah found an employer of quite a different type and character from that which Mr. Murk had led her to expect. She had prepared herself to be a ready "medium," to brave the dust and darkness of the locked room, and find there messages written, in what Mr. Murk told her to call the astral light. Instead of that, she found that the spiritualist seemed more anxious for physical comforts than anything else, and that what he required, and was ready to take on any sort of recommendation, was some one who would obey all his capricious orders without demur. And he looked at her so strangely—as if he read her thoughts—so that she was afraid to say or do anything but just obey him. And yet—was that wise? Might not all this be just a test? Might he not be much cleverer than Mr. Murk had thought, and be just waiting to see whether she really was a medium or not? And if he found she was not, he might just turn her out, and she would not be able to complain because she had come as a spiritualist, introduced as one, and by one. She knew she could make no appeal in any court or to any magistrate; if she failed to find the right way to get to work with Mr. Leafdene she must just go away and disappear. She was determined to do her utmost to remain where she

was ; there was everything here that she had so much desired—comfort, fresh air, good food, and the blessed relief from having to stand all day. She decided that it was too great a risk to sink merely into a housekeeper and a spy. Any moment her new master might turn on her, saying that she showed none of the powers she had been said to possess, and that she must go. So she thought over the various “ messages ” which had been suggested to her as being pretty safe to try, and went upstairs to see what mood Mr. Leafdene might be in, and what opportunity presented itself.

The door of his room stood wide open, as well as the window, for the afternoon was very warm. Thomas was in the room ; he had been fetching some books which his master had told him to get from the library downstairs, and had arranged them on a table by the side of the bed. For into the great old four-poster Mr. Leafdene had again retired, and sat up against a pile of square pillows, lace-edged and lavender-scented. A box of cigars stood on the table, as well as a number of books, a spirit decanter and a syphon of soda water. Sarah appeared hesitatingly in the doorway, gazing in mystified amazement at the scene before her. It was so entirely unlike what she had been led to expect.

“ Ah—— ” said Mr. Leafdene, as he caught

sight of her. "Now, Miss Langley, you can do a little secretarial work for me. I've been in the habit of doing it for myself, but I need not continue it as you have come. I want the stores' catalogue, Thomas; fetch it here. You, Miss Langley, make out a stores' list for me. You can add up bills and accounts, I hope; my daughter is not much good at it, and I dislike it."

"Yes, sir," said Sarah, with relief at being asked to do something which to her was very easy from training and long habit.

"Then sit down at that table where the writing materials are, and get to work. Here's the stores' list. Look up cigars first; I find we have only a box or two for visitors, and I don't consider they are a very good brand. Read me out the different kinds."

Thomas handed over the stores' list to Sarah, and stood staring in amazement for a moment; then he departed, as mystified as Sarah herself. She spent an hour of close work, at the end of which a list was written out, and the amount added up, and Mr. Leafdene's cheque-book found in a drawer in the writing-table, and a cheque drawn out and signed by him.

"Now," he said, "that letter is to go at once to catch the post. Take it to Thomas and tell him to send one of the stable boys with it to the letter-box in the road."

She did so, and then slowly returned upstairs. She had had an hour's reprieve. It was necessary, she believed, to carry out the plan she had decided upon. So she returned to the room and stood hesitatingly by the writing-table, putting the things upon it into order. Mr. Leafdene took no notice of her; he had had some whiskey and soda during her absence and was now lighting a cigar.

Resolutely she made her effort, feeling that there could not be a better opportunity.

"I ought to tell you, sir," she said, in a low voice that shook a good deal, "that I am impressed with the sense that there's something for you in the locked room—a message. If you like me to go in I think I should be able to read it. I will do so if you like. Of course Mr. Murk has told you that I am clairvoyant——"

She was interrupted and startled inexpressibly by a roar like that of an angry bull. As the door stood wide open still, Thomas heard it in his pantry and jumped; Lily, who was idling in the hall, heard it with dismay. Sarah Langley turned and stared in stupefied surprise at the furious countenance which looked upon her from the background of white pillows and carved oak. The eyes were glittering and terrible which glared at her out of that countenance.

"I will not have the locked room interfered

with," he exclaimed, speaking violently; "it's all as I want it now. Don't you go fooling about that room. You do as I tell you, and you can stop here; if you don't, you can go away." He opened a book and took no further notice of her, evidently trying to control himself.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah, quite inaudibly, and fled. She hurried back to the housekeeper's room, thankful for its shelter, and sat down there to recover herself. She thought of writing to Mr. Murk, but decided that it was useless, besides being dangerous. She must just watch events and decide for herself what step to take as each unexpected situation arose.

So the summer evening wore away; Lily had a little dinner by herself, and Sarah a dreary supper in the housekeeper's room, and the servants a depressed supper in the kitchen. Every one went to bed early, tired out.

In the midst of the deep stillness of the warm night a strange noise arose. It was louder and more insistent than ever before, as though an angry demon smote the floor of the locked room with an iron bar. Sarah, startled from an uneasy sleep, lay listening in terror. "That man is mad," she said to herself; "he has gone to the room and is doing this to frighten us all."

But the others who heard knew this was not so;

Thomas had told cook, and cook had told the others how, the last time the sound was heard, he and Lily had both seen the squire in his own room. They felt no doubt he was there now, but none felt inclined to go and see.

CHAPTER V

IN the morning Lily wandered out into the garden after breakfast without going into her father's room. She knew he would send for her if he wanted her, and she remained on the lawn in full view of the windows, so that there should be no doubt as to where she was. She was paler and more listless than ever before in her fresh young life. Since the day when she had told Mr. Keane about the locked room and the strange thing called spiritualism it seemed to her as if a dark cloud had come out of that place and enveloped the whole house. It lay upon the sunlit lawn, to her fancy, and dimmed the colour of the flowers. She was disappointed at having had no answer from her Aunt Isabella, but, after all, she reflected, what could that poor lady do if she came?—she had always been afraid of her brother; she would simply tremble before him in his present easily-angered frame of mind. So Lily tried to interest herself in a book, but found it very difficult to do so. She did not consider it necessary to attend to any housekeeping details, as it was understood that Sarah was to do that. New servants were coming in this morning,

obtained from a distance by the registry office in the town. No one had noticed these words: "obtained from a distance" in the letter from the office, which was intended to convey delicately that local servants were hard to get for the Hall. As a matter of fact, it was no longer possible to get them to come to it, for the newspaper paragraphs had brought the gossip in the town into great activity. Lily thought of none of this, and was not troubled by it. Hers was a languor born of a deep anxiety, for she knew not what to do; and of a dreadful feeling of superhuman mystery. She glanced up from the scarcely-understood words of the book she held, attracted by the sound of wheels, and saw Dr. Ash's old-fashioned carriage approaching. Some one was seated beside him—a lady, clearly. This was sufficiently unusual to cause a faint feeling of interest in Lily's mind. Suddenly she recognised her Aunt Isabella, and, springing up, ran quickly across the grass. Dr. Ash drew up as she came towards them, and Mrs. Williams descended with some haste. Dr. Ash then drove on to the house.

"I'm so glad, dear, to find you here, and to have a talk outside, for I'm not sure it's any good for me to go into the house."

"Oh, Aunt Isabella, how lovely to see you!" cried Lily, midway between laughter and tears.

“ I went to call on Dr. Ash,” said Mrs. Williams, “ to ask what he thought of my brother’s state of health, and he very kindly brought me up. What puzzles me, dear, is that he doesn’t think there’s anything the matter with James ! ”

“ Yes, auntie, I know ! ”

“ Then why in the world does he go to bed or stop in his room in such weather as this and with a lovely garden to come out into ? ”

“ I can’t imagine,” said Lily despairingly.

“ I expect it would only make him angry to see me,” said Mrs. Williams, “ but I felt I must see you. Poor child ! you look very pale. Well, I’ve done something which may be some use. I’ve been to see Lady Janet, and we’ve talked it all over, and she may come any time. I wanted to prepare you for that.”

“ Lady Janet ! ” exclaimed Lily ; “ oh, how good of you both ! ”

“ She is coming to stay somewhere not very far off, and she thought she could motor over. And I want to tell you she may try to take you away for a short visit.”

“ Father won’t let me go,” said Lily. “ She would have been very kind to me if he would have let her ; but he wouldn’t then, when he was like himself—I am certain he will not now ! ”

“ Like himself ! ” repeated Mrs. Williams. “ What a curious expression ! ”

“He is not like himself now,” said Lily; “there’s no doubt of it.”

“Well——” said Mrs. Williams hesitatingly, “I believe Dr. Ash thinks his mind is affected by all these séances and queer doings, but he can only hint it; it’s a very serious thing to say so plainly. It isn’t a bit right for you to be moped here alone under such circumstances, and serious or not, Dr. Ash will have to speak plainly if this goes on. I must tell you another thing. Lady Janet may bring a Catholic priest with her.”

“A Catholic priest! Why should she do that?”

“Father Kingslake is staying at the same house, and she said she should ask his advice. You know Roman Catholics believe in spiritualism, and Lady Janet told me they think it is the devil.”

There was a moment’s intense silence after these words, spoken in a very low voice. They were walking slowly across the beautiful lawn. At last Lily spoke.

“Well,” she said, “that really seems possible. I must say it feels like it.”

They walked on in silence again, and then, suddenly, Lily said: “Then wouldn’t it have been mother’s spirit at all that father talked to in the locked room?”

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Williams, in a very

distressed and troubled voice. "You see, my state of mind is that I've never believed in any of it. I thought it was all just trickery and fancies."

"It isn't—all," said Lily slowly. "I can't think what those noises can be in the locked room at night."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Williams, stopping suddenly and looking in the greatest distress at her niece. "You must be got away. I wish Lady Janet would come! I don't think there's a chance till to-morrow. Do get all ready to be able to go away with her if she can manage your father. I am sure she will ask the people she is staying with to have you if he will let you go. If it were only for a night—or two nights—away from this! Noises! What can they be—rats?"

Lily smiled and shook her head.

"No," she answered, and then added: "They are horrid! I wish it was possible to understand anything about it all!"

Mrs. Williams made no reply. Her practical mind was looking round for explanations and finding none that were satisfactory.

"There must be some reason for the noises," she said; "somebody makes them, I suppose. Is there any one here among the servants who would do it?"

"I thought last night of that new house-keeper," said Lily—little knowing how poor

Sarah had lain trembling in her bed!—"but it does not account for things, as there were the noises before she came."

"New housekeeper?" repeated Mrs. Williams, in the tone of a question.

"Yes. And it's absurd to suspect her of the noises—the last housekeeper went because of them. I only thought of her because she came from Mr. Murk, the medium."

"Oh!" said Aunt Isabella, a world of meaning in the monosyllable.

"She brought back my ring."

"*Your* ring?"

"It really is mine. My mother's diamond ring, one of the family heirlooms which she was fond of and always wore. Since her death it lay on a table in the locked room, with some other things she valued very much. It disappeared the last time Mr. Murk was in that room."

"He stole it, I suppose," said Mrs. Williams, in a matter-of-fact way.

"He told my father that the spirits dematerialised it, whatever that means, and materialised it at once at a séance at Balham. This Miss Langley brought it back."

"Have you got it?" asked Mrs. Williams sharply.

"No, but it's in my father's room. It's all right—I have seen it."

“ I’d take it and put it on next time you see it,” said Mrs. Williams.

“ Yes, but unless father sends for me I don’t want to go into his room,” said Lily. “ He is so strange I don’t know what mood I shall find him in.”

“ Who’s this ? ” asked Mrs. Williams. Lily looked up and saw that Sarah was approaching them across the lawn.

“ That’s the new housekeeper,” said Lily. “ My father has made her a sort of confidential servant and secretary combined, already. One of her tasks is to watch me and see I don’t go out. I haven’t had time to tell you about that yet.”

“ Mercy on us ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Williams, in reply to the last part of the speech. Then, after a moment’s severe scrutiny of the approaching figure, “ She looks to me a very undesirable, not to say objectionable, kind of young person ! She is too young for a housekeeper—cannot have had any experience—most unsuitable ! ”

Under the disapproving gaze of Mrs. Williams’ sharp eyes Sarah drew near, feeling at a great disadvantage and quite out of place. This feeling made her more disagreeable in manner than she would have been otherwise.

“ If you please, Miss Leafdene,” she said, “ the master requests you to come into the house. He wishes to speak to you.”

She appeared not to see Mrs. Williams, and remained standing near, as if expecting Lily to go with her.

“ Well!—of all the impudence ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Williams. She was about to say more, when Dr. Ash came to the door of the house and descended the steps. He did not get into his carriage but came towards the very uncomfortable group on the lawn. He himself approached with an air as of embarrassment. For a fleeting moment Lily and Mrs. Williams both saw Mr. Leafdene at the open window of his room ; then his figure disappeared again.

“ Well, Dr. Ash,” said Mrs. Williams, as the doctor drew near, perplexity plainly written on his face, “ shall I go in and see my brother ? Is he well enough ? ”

Dr. Ash looked from one to another. Sarah stood a little distance away, but she remained ; she had been told to wait for Lily, as Dr. Ash knew.

“ I think, madam,” he said ceremoniously, “ it would be better to see Mr. Leafdene at another time. He is very much excited. I am returning to the town—shall I drive you back to your hotel ? ”

“ I can't bear to leave you, Lily,” said Mrs. Williams to her niece. But the same thought crossed both their minds, and they interchanged

glances. It might be well to see if Dr. Ash had anything to say after his interview with his patient.

“I am all right, auntie,” said Lily. “Why shouldn’t you come up to tea with me this afternoon? We will have tea out here. I will tell Thomas to send down the brougham for you. We can’t use the open carriage while Diana is ill—Diana is one of the bay pair. She is down at Mr. Keane’s, the veterinary surgeon’s, being treated. I hope she will soon be well.”

All this was open defiance of the angry figure in the big bedroom—a figure which, while Lily was speaking, made another impatient, fleeting appearance at the window. They all perceived it, and Sarah was alarmed by it. She felt sure she would be made to suffer for all this delay. She was simply frightened—afraid to go in and afraid to stay. To the others she appeared aggressive and objectionable.

“Yes, dear, I’ll come,” said Mrs. Williams; “I am at the Queen’s. Such a funny old-fashioned place! I like it. I see the veterinary surgeon’s place is just opposite. Shall I go and ask how the horse is getting on?”

“Oh, please do!” cried Lily, delighted. They now all went towards the house. Dr. Ash and Lily helped Mrs. Williams up into the gig; there was a very affectionate leave-taking between aunt

and niece, and Lily stood watching the carriage till it was out of sight. Sarah, meanwhile, went up the steps and stood waiting at the hall door. When Lily came up the steps she came forward and spoke to her, deferentially.

“If you please, miss,” she said, “I am so sorry to seem intrusive. The master told me to wait for you.”

Lily looked at her with a scrutinising, doubtful gaze.

“Of course,” said Sarah to herself bitterly, “she must believe me a bad lot, coming from that Murk!”

Without replying, Lily passed her and went slowly upstairs. She went straight to her father’s room. She found him sitting in a chair with his elbows on the writing-table and his face buried in his hands. He heard her step and leaned back wearily. He looked haggard, broken, old.

“Good-morning, dear,” he said. “I thought you were never coming!” He drew her to him and kissed her, and she felt sure a tear was on his face. “Was that Isabella with you in the garden?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Lily, quite taken aback by his manner, which was more gentle and deprecating than she had ever known it, but was his own—he was himself, as she expressed it.

“Is she not coming to see me?” he asked. “Is she offended?”

“She is coming to tea in the garden this afternoon,” said Lily, tremblingly joyful. “Oh, father! she would love to see you!”

“I will come out to tea,” he said. “I feel very tired, but I am sure I could come out. Where is Isabella staying? She should be here—it is very lonely for you now I don’t go about. Ask her to come. I did not want her when I was able to be about and look after everything, for we never got on very well, Isabella and I. She has said hard things to me—but that’s past; I feel broken—and you need some one here besides servants. Ask her to come. I’ll try to go out with you now; I’m tired of this room—it smells so horribly of cigar smoke!”

He rose from the chair and staggered when he began to move. Lily sprang forward to his assistance, but he sank back in the chair and seemed utterly exhausted. He leaned his head back, staring at her in a frightened way and clutching at the arms of the chair. She stood in front of him in alarm, doubtful what to do. And suddenly she cried out for help, for she saw his eyes turn up as the eyes of one who is dying—so that nothing could be seen but the whites. The eyes themselves entirely disappeared. She screamed for Thomas, who came hurrying up the stairs, but

before he was in the room the eyes had come into place, and she saw the furious glittering gaze that had so filled her with terror that she dreaded her father's presence. He lifted his head and looked angrily at her.

"This is what comes of your wanting me to go out," he said in the loud bullying voice that the household had learned to fear in the last few days. "I'm not going out of this room. Thomas, give me some whisky; I am quite exhausted!"

Thomas obeyed, and Lily shrank away. As she moved she noticed the diamond ring which had had such a curious adventure, lying on the table. She took it up and put it on her finger.

"What are you doing?" demanded her father angrily.

"My mother meant me to have this," said Lily, holding on to her courage with some difficulty, and edging away towards the door. "Aunt Isabella said I'd better put it on when I next found it lying about." She used her aunt's name chiefly because her father had been speaking kindly of his sister.

"Isabella!" he cried in a roar, and started up, apparently quite strong; "who is she to come here interfering and laying down the law? I'm not obliged to give you anything yet, and I don't mean to till I am obliged. Put the ring down again and tell that Aunt Isabella of yours to keep

out of my way and out of the house—and out of the garden, too.”

The angry voice went on, but Lily had fled downstairs, terrified ; but she had got the ring on her finger. It seemed friendly to have it—a little memory of her pretty mother. She looked at it lovingly, and wished passionately that her mother still lived. Straight out of the house she went quickly, on to the soft turf of the lawn, and looked around her at the trees, dark with their summer green ; at the flowers, flaming with colour ; at the arc of the turquoise blue sky over which some delicate fleecy clouds drifted lightly.

“ How glorious the world is ! ” she whispered to herself. “ I feel as though I had come out of a tomb or a deadly prison. And yet I have only come from a bright room in my own old home ! Oh, what does it all mean ? ”

As she stood there, pondering over the mystery which shadowed her gay young life, she heard the hoot of a motor in the road. Her heart leaped high with hope. Could it—oh, could it be Lady Janet ? She flew with light feet across the grass and down the carriage-drive to the lodge gates. She hoped to see them flung open and the car turn in. But this did not happen. She saw nothing and heard nothing. The gate-keeper was busy in his little garden, quite absorbed in the digging up of potatoes. She hastily passed

through the gate, feeling a little like a prisoner out of bounds. She fancied no one in the house had noticed her rapid flight. So she boldly went out into the dusty road and looked down it. A little way off a big white car stood motionless. A tall young man was walking towards her. She decided to stay where she was and let him either pass her or speak to her. He did the latter, taking off his motor cap. He did not put it on again, and they both stood in the sunshine bare-headed, the strong light bringing out the blue in her bands of heavy hair and the gold in his, which, though cropped so close, yet contrived a little curl here and there. He was a total stranger to her ; a tall, well-built young man, with a pleasant and very sunburnt face and expressive grey eyes. She did not know enough to see that he was a soldier, but to more experienced eyes he showed it plainly, in spite of the motoring coat he wore.

“ Pardon me,” he said, “ I was going to ask at the lodge whether this is Leafdene Hall ? ”

“ Yes,” she said, smiling, “ it is.”

“ Are you from the Hall ? ” he ventured.

“ Yes,” she answered, more gravely, “ I am.”

“ Is it possible you are—my cousin, Miss Leafdene ? ”

“ I am Miss Leafdene—but I don't think I have any cousins.”

He laughed—an irresistible laugh which always delighted those who heard it.

“It may be a very distant cousinship—I suppose it is. I am Lady Janet Graham’s third son, just home from Egypt on leave. I am staying at Fallowfield—with the Lexingtons. My mother is coming to-night. I heard from her this morning that she would want to run over and see you, so as I had nothing to do to-day I thought I would find out the route. I am in luck!” he said expressively, without explaining why—his look of undisguised pleasure and admiration made it unnecessary. “Do you think,” he went on after a moment’s consideration, “that I might come in and call on your father? Is he well enough to see a caller?”

“No,” said Lily decidedly, “I am quite sure he would not see you.”

At that moment she perceived the figure of Sarah Langley approaching down the drive.

“I must go in at once,” she said. “I ran out thinking I heard a motor, and truly hoping it might be your mother come. I shall be so glad when she does!”

“I will bring her to-morrow,” said the young man. Lily bowed, and, with a parting smile which transfigured her face and made her truly beautiful, she ran in through the gate and across on to the lawn, in full view of Sarah, but without

meeting her. Sarah at once turned back, and the young man in the road, being dismissed, had turned back and returned to his car. Thus they did not even catch sight of each other. Lily desired they should not, and obtained her desire. She felt that she could not endure the indignity of this espionage if her new-found cousin became aware of it. On examining her motive, as she did after she had reached the lawn and sunk into her favourite seat, she found that she did not at all mind Sarah seeing her talking to a stranger in the road and reporting the incident to her father. What she minded was that he should witness what she regarded as an unbearable indignity—her being followed and watched.

She sat still a long time slowly recovering from the startling experiences she had been through. She took no notice of the gong for luncheon, and Thomas came out to her and entreated her plaintively to come in and eat.

“I’m sure, miss, we all need all the strength we’ve got,” he said by way of inducement.

“Yes, Thomas,” she agreed; “I think we do, and I’ll come.”

CHAPTER VI

“IF you please, Miss Lily,” said Thomas, later on, having been upstairs to answer a summons to his master’s room, “I am to tell you master does not wish Mrs. Williams to come here this afternoon.”

Lily, who was sitting at her solitary meal, busy with some delicious wall fruit from the old kitchen garden she knew and loved so well, looked up at him in surprise.

“What made him expect her?” she asked.

“I think, miss,” said Thomas, with a little embarrassed cough, “that the new housekeeper—Miss Langley—was by when you arranged it.”

“Oh, I see; she told him what she heard.”

“I think, miss,” he answered, with another little cough, “that she tells the master everything she hears, and that she hears everything.” He turned quickly, and very softly went to the dining-room door, which he had shut on coming in, and opened it quickly.

“Did you want anything, Miss Langley?” he asked, in a very unfriendly tone. As he had expected, Sarah was close to the door. She

replied smoothly and without visible embarrassment.

“Yes, the squire wishes a boy sent down at once to the Queen’s Hotel in the town with a note which he is now writing. Please give the order and then come and fetch the note.”

Thomas watched her retreat up the stairs, closed the door firmly, and then said: “Artful hussy!”

“It seems very strange,” said Lily thoughtfully, “how my father has taken her so quickly as—as a sort of——”

“As a spy, miss; that’s what she is. She’s born to it; it comes natural with her. And the master finds it useful just now when he wants to know all that is going on and won’t come out of his room to see for himself.”

“I *wonder*,” said Lily, with perplexed emphasis, “why he won’t come out of his room? Dr. Ash does not think he is ill. It seems like some strange fancy.”

“It all comes of that there spiritualism,” said Thomas grimly. “Things are always worse when there’s been the noises in the night. And they were awful last night. I hope you did not hear them, miss.”

“Oh, yes, I did,” said Lily. “I suppose this note father is writing is to tell Aunt Isabella not to come. It’s dreadfully rude and unkind. I

will write a note to go with it. Mind you come for mine, Thomas, and give the boy both to take. Poor, dear Aunt Isabella! It *is* a shame when she has come down here just to see how we are—it *is* a shame she should have to stop at an hotel!”

She went to a writing-table and wrote a warm-hearted, affectionate letter which Aunt Isabella cried over a little later in the afternoon. She had read her brother's first, and her face flushed with indignation.

“Wait till I'm asked! I'm glad I didn't go into the house,” she said to herself as she looked back over it. “This is a brutal letter—not a bit like James. He was always hard, but he was always a gentleman. This is like some stranger. I know now what Lily and Dr. Ash mean about his being changed. This letter makes me feel quite afraid. He must be going out of his mind!”

She wrote a brief reply to Lily, telling her that she had been to inquire for Diana, who was recovering rapidly under good care. She made no reference to her brother's letter, save what was implied by a regret that she could not come to tea. It was a dull and anxious day for her, as well as for Lily, and both were haunted by a nameless fear. Something inexplicable was happening in the beautiful old Hall, and both dreaded the next

development. Mrs. Williams looked again several times at the note she had received from the squire, and grew more and more uneasy.

“If his mind is going Lily ought not to be there with only servants,” she said to herself. “He may become dangerous—who can tell? If Lady Janet doesn’t succeed in getting Lily away I must talk to Dr. Ash again.”

The weary hours dragged on very sadly for Lily, who sat out on the lawn reading, or, rather, pretending to read, for she could not keep her attention to anything but what was happening around her, and which seemed to her stranger than anything she had read of. She was very anxious not to be summoned to her father’s room, so remained quietly within full view of his window. He kept out of sight, but she knew she was watched. She knew that if she went away to the lodge gates or round to the stables Sarah Langley would be sent to follow her and would come swiftly and softly down the wide staircase and out into the garden.

“The position is intolerable and absurd,” she said to herself. “If Lady Janet asks me I shall go with her, whatever father says. If she can’t arrange to ask me—I know she will if she can—I shall just go out of the gate and walk down to the town and stay with Aunt Isabella. What a talk that would make!” She smiled to herself; then her face clouded again. “I wonder if father

could have me brought back?—send the police or something! It doesn't seem possible. But I don't know, that's the worst of it. Mr. Cullen seemed to think I'd got to stop here—I don't know who else to ask. Well, I must get through to-night somehow—to-morrow Lady Janet will come. And who else?—a Catholic priest—and my cousin! It will be curious!”

So her thoughts flitted to and fro, sometimes utterly sad and hopeless, sometimes full of a vague expectation of relief and change; and all the while she was aware of being watched from that wide window on the first floor. Thomas brought tea out on to the lawn.

“Father has not asked for me, has he, Thomas?” she asked.

“No, miss,” answered the man.

“I can't remember ever being a day without seeing him,” she said, “but I will not go to his room to-day, I think, unless he asks for me.”

“No, miss,” said Thomas, with unwonted decision of manner; “I would not, miss, if I were you. I don't think master cares to have any one in his room to-day. The new housekeeper person is sitting on the landing where he can call to her if he wants her.”

“He would call to her if he saw me go away, and tell her to follow me!” thought Lily. “Then it is his eyes I feel on me all the time.” She re-

membered the angry glitter she had seen in them yesterday and shuddered. A cold chill seemed on her though she sat in the warm summer air on the beautiful lawn. She longed to wander, to go into the kitchen garden, to feed the swans, but she resisted all these temptations, knowing that no pleasure could compensate for the indignity of being followed by Sarah. And, besides, her father might then think he would like to see her, and her heart sank at the thought. Her quiet affection for him had changed into a keen fear. It seemed incredible it should have done so, but it had. She would sit there, a voluntary prisoner, all day, rather than rouse his curiosity or attract his attention. She went into the house at dusk and up to her own room, passing Sarah, who sat on the landing, as Thomas had said. She was glad he had prepared her. She was able to pass with composure and not to do more than glance at the unaccustomed sight. When Thomas summoned her to dinner she had cheered herself a little by making unobtrusive preparations for a possible hasty visit—preparations that would not be noticed, but which would enable her to get ready to go in a very short time. Her heart leaped at the thought of such a possibility—she was utterly weary of her strange position. And the dull evening, during which she sat alone, unable to read or fix her thoughts on anything but

the mystery of the change in her father, deepened the weariness. She found herself wondering whether he was mad, whether the man who came as a spiritualistic medium was a doctor in disguise, whether Sarah had come as a keeper. But the whole idea was absurd when she summoned her strong common sense to her aid. Why should a doctor come in disguise? And though Dr. Ash was not a very clever practitioner, he had charge of the case and would have been there during this man's visits, and would have given Sarah orders instead of regarding her with annoyance and surprise. No, there was some deeper mystery in it. A less healthy girl might have become hysterical, but Lily did not; she was essentially natural. At last she went to the safety of her own room, to begin a long night of anxious listening for strange sounds. And for the first time in her life she did so without seeing her father at all during the whole day. She felt a great sense of relief when she closed and fastened her door without having been summoned to him. This feeling of relief seemed to her dreadful. But she had a strange sense as if he were not there, as if he were not in the house at all.

"I suppose that is how it seems when people go mad," she said to herself; "and yet this cannot be madness."

It was a brilliant moonlight night, as light as

day, and she left her window wide open and the curtains drawn back in order to feel the friendliness of the familiar trees and the garden, where her happy childhood had been spent. The house seemed so strange! And as she lay alone in the silence she realised that she was really alone in the house, without a friend, unless she could regard old Thomas as one. The new servants might all go any day after a night of strange noises. At last she fell into a sleep of exhaustion, to be wakened by the sound she dreaded, the sounds like heavy blows, at regular intervals, in the locked room.

She shivered, though the air which came in at the open window was warm.

“If no help comes to-morrow I will certainly go away and risk the consequences,” she said to herself in her solitude.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER one of these weird nights when the quiet of the sleeping house had been broken horribly by unaccountable noises, the household at Leafdene Hall was always astir earlier than usual. If there had been a late party the servants would probably have slept late ; but the unearthly disturbances seemed to give them all the desire to get outside if possible, at all events, to gather about the open kitchen door, and regard the mysterious dark windows of the locked room from a safe distance. The new servants always heard full details of what was said to have happened in the past, and the story of things having been thrown out of the window, which yet remained closed, in the midst of some particularly disturbed nights, made them all prefer to view it from afar. Two of the new servants were packing and had told the new housekeeper that they intended to leave at once, so Thomas informed Lily when she passed out through the hall to the garden.

“ I’m sure I don’t wonder,” she said listlessly ; “ I only wish I could do the same ! Thomas, I will have my breakfast in the garden. I don’t

see how any one can eat anything in this house !”

“No, miss,” said Thomas gloomily, “that’s what the servants say.”

How was she to get through the long, silent morning ? It seemed to her unlikely that Lady Janet would come before the afternoon. A desperate feeling had come upon her that she would not and could not sleep another night in that house. She walked restlessly up and down on the lawn, within view of the house ; she would do nothing to bring Sarah out after her, for she felt to-day that she might lose her self-control if she was followed and watched by this stranger with her sly, unfriendly face.

It was barely ten o’clock when she heard the throb of a motor coming up the road from the town. She stood still, listening. Was it even possible that they could come so early ? It was not only possible—it was true. She heard the motor pause for the lodge gates to be opened, turn in and come throbbing up the drive. Oh, joy ! she stood still to see it come into view. Yes, a big white car—the one she had seen yesterday. Four persons were in it—a chauffeur, Lady Janet Graham’s unmistakable little upright figure she recognised instantly. The two others were unknown to her, but she saw at a glance that one was a priest and the other a very pretty girl.

Captain Graham was not there. After her first swift scrutiny she turned and ran quickly over the grass to meet the car as it reached the front door.

“Oh, dear, Cousin Janet!” she cried, in her high clear voice, which had in it the perfect notes of health and youth, “how glad—how glad I am to see you!”

Lady Janet sprang out like a girl herself and came to her.

“My dear,” she said, and that was all, but it contained all that Lily needed and was hungering for.

“I’ve come to pay a very early call on your father,” said Lady Janet briskly, “because I want to ask him to let you go back with us for a couple of days—and this afternoon there is a garden-party at Fallowfields which I think you would like. I hear your father is keeping his room and he cannot expect you to stay in the house in this wonderful weather.”

“I don’t think he would miss me,” said Lily slowly. “I did not see him at all all day yesterday. But I don’t know if he will let me go.”

Lady Janet drew her away a little distance on the lawn while the others got out of the car and awaited her.

“I have seen your Aunt Isabella,” she said in a low voice, “and she took me in to speak to Dr. Ash, who is on his way here now. He and I will

be responsible for persuading your father to let you go. But the first job will be to persuade him to see me and Father Kingslake, whom I have brought purposely to talk to him. I see your old manservant's alarmed face as he stands by the hall door. He thinks there's going to be a row. Perhaps there is. That pretty girl is Eve Lexington—a poor relation who makes herself useful at Fallowfields. She is a dear girl, and I thought she'd be a help, so asked for her to come. Now, my idea is for you and she to have a run in the motor while I and Father Kingslake see Mr. Leafdene. I've heard about your horse Diana—go down and see her. By the time you get back we shall have seen your father and persuaded him. It won't take you long to get ready, will it ? ”

“ Oh, no—a few minutes,” cried Lily. “ Oh, Cousin Janet, you are lovely—and you do such lovely things ! ”

Lady Janet smiled. She liked to have young people regard her as a kind of good fairy. She believed entirely in herself and her power, and felt sure she could carry through any difficult situation in her own high-handed way.

“ Now, come, I'll introduce you to the others. Need you go into the house ? Can't your maid bring you a hat ? ”

“ I haven't got a maid,” said Lily ; “ Thomas

can give me one I left in the hall." She called to him. He disappeared and a moment later came down the steps carrying a broad white straw hat, very unsuitable for motoring.

"If you please, miss, the master has sent down word that he is not well enough to receive any visitors this morning."

Lily looked in dismay at Lady Janet. That lady laughed reassuringly.

"I'm going to send him a series of messages," she said. "Trust me. Father Kingslake," she said, turning to the priest with great respect, "this is my cousin—Miss Lily Leafdene. Eve, dear, let me introduce you. I want you and Lily to go down into the town in the car and come back for me. Lily has an errand to do. Take my veil, Lily, you'll want it. Now, François, be off quick, and Miss Leafdene will tell you where to go when you get into the town."

She got the two girls into the car, and hurried its starting, to Lily's thankful delight, for Sarah Langley had just made her appearance beside Thomas. In a moment the car had swung round and was tearing out at the open lodge gates and in the road.

"Oh, freedom! freedom!" cried Lily, exultantly.

The pretty girl beside her regarded her with interest and wonder.

“I have heard about you so much,” she said; “you must long to get away. Captain Graham has talked of nothing else since he was here yesterday.”

“He said he was coming to-day,” said Lily, turning to look at the girl, whose gay, sympathetic voice pleased her. She saw a bright, eager face, sparkling blue eyes, crisp, waving, golden hair.

“Lady Janet told him not to come this morning,” said Eve with a laugh. “He gave me a message for you—that he obeyed under protest, and because he thought his mother had a reason.”

“And what was her reason?” asked Lily, a little downcast.

“Well—she told Captain Graham she wanted to bring Father Kingslake, and that it would be too much of an invasion, and that she thought he was too impetuous. So he said if she was determined to manage things her own way it was no use to try and interfere, and he made her promise to bring you back out of what he called that ‘gloomy house.’ It is a lovely house to look at!”

“It ought not to be gloomy,” said Lily wistfully; “but it is now. And what did Lady Janet say?”

“She said he might leave that to her, that she

was coming for the very purpose of taking you back."

"It is lovely out here!" said Lily with deep enjoyment, "and how good you all are to me!"

The chauffeur slackened speed as they came to the town and asked for orders.

"Please go to Mr. Keane's, veterinary surgeon," said Lily, "in the High Street, opposite the post office."

And so Jim Keane, who happened to be at work in his office, hearing a car stop at his door, looked out at the window and beheld a sight that made his heart beat fast, as it probably would have made the heart of any high-spirited, inflammable young man. A great white car, driven by a very smart chauffeur, and two girls within it, both beauties and extremely in contrast, so that each set off and enhanced the charm of the other. He heard his mother's step on the tiles of the hall, and he knew the front door was standing wide open, so he made no movement himself, but stood gazing—and feeling. He saw the girls get out—they came into the house, and he heard their merry voices as they followed Mrs. Keane into her parlour. She had been expecting them, for Mrs. Williams had come across to her after Lady Janet's visit to her at the hotel.

"Oh, my dear Miss Leafdene," Mrs. Keane was saying, "how I do hope your father will let you

have a little change. You do need it. There is Mrs. Williams——” she said, and went to bring in Aunt Isabella, to Lily’s delight. Keane made no sign but went on mixing a draught for a sick horse.

“May I see Diana?” asked Lily, and then his mother called him. The two girls went with him to the stables. Eve had received her instructions from Lady Janet and knew that she was not to lose sight of Lily while they were away from the Hall.

“She is as ignorant as a baby,” Lady Janet had said, “and one of the greatest heiresses in England. I am taking a great responsibility in interfering in her affairs, but I do it because I loved and pitied her mother—and I love and pity her. I must do what I can.”

Eve looked with intense interest at this girl, who was to her the embodiment of all good fortune; she herself had never had any money of her own in her life and never expected to have any. To be an heiress—a great heiress—dark, beautiful, with deep dark eyes!—what did a cross old father matter, even if he were a little bit mad? So thought Eve Lexington, in her gay young heart, which had received no injury from that struggle with poverty which had been with her all her life. She felt no jealousy of Lily’s wealth—she thought of it with wonder, unable to imagine

what it must feel like to be an heiress. Then suddenly, as they walked across the stones of the yard, she saw Keane look at the dark girl, who was pressing on in front, eager to see her dear horse, and a pang of jealousy shot through her. Eve paused a second, bewildered by her own feelings. She had never felt the agonising pang of jealousy before, but she knew it for what it was, unmistakably. Jealous! She had never seen Keane before. What was it, then? Simply Lily's dark, triumphant beauty? She asked herself these questions, but she could not answer them. She was embarking upon the mystery of life, and was in the dark as to her own feelings and their meaning. She hastened on and followed the others into the stable, there to find Lily with her arms round Diana's neck and the mare nuzzling her with joy. It was a pretty picture, and Eve recognised the full beauty of it. Lily was quite unconscious, save of joy in her freedom and in feeling her horse's love for her. Presently she looked up, flushed and with tears of pleasure in her eyes.

"Ought we to go back soon, do you think?" she said to Eve.

"Lady Janet said we had better give them about half-an-hour," replied Eve.

"That must be nearly gone," said Lily regretfully, "and I must go to one of the shops. I

haven't had a chance to buy anything for ages !”

She said “ Good-bye ” to Diana and they all went back to the house. It was evident that the horse was recovered from her illness, but nothing was said about her being returned to her home.

“ What is Father Kingslake like ? ” asked Aunt Isabella of Lily, as soon as they appeared at the parlour door. “ He didn't get out of the car when Lady Janet came to me and I did so want a look at him.”

“ I hardly noticed him,” confessed Lily. “ He is tall and dark and seemed stern.”

“ They say he is a celebrity,” said Aunt Isabella, who was consumed with curiosity ; “ that he writes books besides being a great preacher.”

“ Oh, yes,” said Eve, “ that is true. He was at Fallowfield before, when I was there—and I've heard a great deal about him. I can't say I've got to know him—he doesn't talk to people unless they are good Catholics, as Aunt Lexington and Lady Janet are. They have been talking a great deal about spiritualism, last night and this morning, in the car.”

“ Spiritualism ! ” said Mr. Keane, in surprise. “ Do they believe in it, then ?—treat it seriously ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Eve. “ I heard Father Kingslake say last night that it is one of the great menaces to true religion in the present day—and

that it is the most subtle of the devil's efforts of this century. I remembered those two things, for they sounded to me so awful !”

There was a little silence, every one looking serious and perhaps a little scared. Lily broke it by saying, with a shudder at the recollection :

“ Anybody who heard the noises would have thought the devil was in the house last night. They really are inexplicable—and so loud !”

“ Father Kingslake said when we came into sight of the Hall this morning that he could see a cloud on the house. He called it a psychic cloud !”

“ Then he is a spiritualist himself !” exclaimed Keane.

“ He says he has the gift and that for that reason he knows its dangers so well. He acts under orders in preaching against it and telling people how dangerous it is.”

“ We ought to be going,” said Lily dolefully. They said “ Good-bye,” went out and walked to the shop Lily wanted to visit, which was only a few doors off, and then got into the car. As the car went swiftly down the street they smiled at the three anxious and interested faces watching them from the doorway of the veterinary surgeon's house.

CHAPTER VIII

IT seemed to Lily that the white car whirled up the road and arrived back at the door of Leafdene Hall in a few minutes ; and, indeed, it did not take much longer, for there was no one in sight and the chauffeur put on the pace. He thought they had been too long ; he had to get his party back to Fallowfields in time for a rather early luncheon, as there was to be a garden party in the afternoon. And he knew he had to fetch one or two of the guests, so that he wished to have reasonable time for his own *déjeuner*. As soon as the car stopped at the steps Lily got out and ran in, followed, hesitatingly, by Eve, who realised that she had not been asked in. At the same time she also realised that she was not to lose sight of Lily till they found Lady Janet again. They therefore found her together, though Eve was in the background. Both stood still and silent for a moment, taken by surprise. The big drawing-room of Leafdene Hall was at the back of the house, its three large French windows looking on to " my lady's garden " and a most beautiful sweep of the park. It was seldom entered save by the housemaids, and the vases were not filled

with flowers, as they were in the entrance-hall and the little drawing-room. It was an exquisite room, with a lovely ceiling of clouds and cupids painted by a French artist, and a few valuable pictures on the walls, which were panelled in tapestry, with a white ground and a light pattern of delicate rose-buds. The room was full of beautiful things. Thomas had opened its door when he received Lady Janet, out of respect to a marquess's daughter, and she had waited there with Father Kingslake while he went upstairs to his master. She had returned there now, and sat at a table in the air from the centre window, which stood wide open. On the table was a silver salver, and on the salver a glass of sherry which she was drinking delicately like a bird. Her face, generally rather ruddy, was very white. Father Kingslake sat on a couch, sheltered by the heavy velvet curtain of the window, sombre and silent.

"Yes, my dear," said Lady Janet, "you may look surprised. I am a teetotaller. But your man could suggest nothing but this except brandy, which was too dreadful. There don't seem to be any maids, or if there are they hide. If you have any sal volatile I wish you'd get me some."

"I haven't," said Lily; "I'm sorry. But what has happened?"

"I hardly know. But I must try to tell you.

Come in and shut the door. Yes, come in, Eve; you've heard enough talk about this. You may as well hear it all. I'm dreadfully shaken. It took ever so long to persuade your father to see us, and when we went up he seemed to have worked himself into a fury. He really was alarming. We sat down and talked about the weather and his health and your looks, and he only grunted—or snorted—he used to be a gentleman but he seems just a fury now. At last, as we had arranged, we began to talk about spiritualism, and then he lost all control of himself, and told the saintly father he must go out of the room or be thrown out. And then Father Kingslake raised his hands to Heaven and asked for power to cast out the evil spirit—and my word, it was a sight! Your father, or the evil spirit that's him now, flew at Father Kingslake's throat, and so unexpectedly that I thought he had got the best of it and that it was all over—I did indeed."

The agitated lady wiped some tears off her face which she had shed unconsciously during this speech—she was evidently quite unnerved. The two girls had sunk down on chairs, one on each side of the door, and the strange party remained silent for a few moments. Lily glanced at the dark austere face of the priest, whose eyes remained downcast, and she came to the conclusion that he was praying.

Suddenly Lady Janet spoke again, with a brave attempt to recover her ordinary manner.

“Well, you must come away with us, Lily. Go and get what you want and have it put in the car.”

At that moment the door of the room was discreetly and quietly opened and Sarah Langley appeared. She addressed herself to Lily.

“If you please, miss, the master is asking for you. Will you kindly come to him for a few minutes?”

There was silence for a little while. Then Lily rose bravely.

“I must go to him,” she said. “I will come back as quickly as I can. There is Dr. Ash just coming in. I will go up with him.”

Lady Janet had been so thoroughly startled and frightened during the recent interview that, but for the arrival of the doctor, she would have prevented Lily from going up. She glanced at the priest, who gave no sign. If he had thought it should be prevented she supposed he would have spoken. She looked at him with a new awe, having seen him exercise an athletic power which she had never dreamed of his possessing. She had expected him to recoil before a physical attack, but when James Leafdene flew at his throat in such a manner that the marks were now growing purple upon it, Father Kingslake had

skilfully flung him upon his bed. And there the sick man lay and groaned.

Dr. Ash had been delayed on his way to the Hall, and he was desirous to see what was going on as quickly as possible. The front door stood open and there was no one in the hall, so he went on up the staircase. As he did so Lily came out of the drawing-room and followed him. He turned to greet her, and uttered a little exclamation.

“ You look very distressed, Miss Lily,” he said. “ What is it ? ”

“ There has been a dreadful scene,” she said falteringly ; “ father seems to have been quite—well—violent ! ”

“ Violent ! ” echoed the doctor, and went on up the stairs. “ If he begins that,” he muttered to himself, “ he’ll have to be placed under restraint.”

“ Lily ! Lily ! ” it was her father’s voice, faint and feeble, like one calling for help. And it sounded like the voice of one quite exhausted. Lily and Dr. Ash entered together and then parted and went to opposite sides of the bed to look down upon the apparently crushed and helpless figure which lay there. It seemed to Lily, as she met the appealing gaze of dim and weary eyes, which looked out from a drawn, pale face, that this was her father as she knew him once again, only very ill and weak. He slowly put

out a hand towards her and she took it in both her own.

“Stay by me, Lily,” he said feebly; “I have been through something dreadful. I feel as if I had had a fit. Do you think I have, doctor?”

Dr. Ash did not speak, only nodded to show he was attending. He had the patient’s other hand and was feeling the pulse. Presently he laid it down on the bed; he was surprised to have found for the first time a weak and irregular pulse.

“No, Mr. Leafdene,” he said, “I am sure you have not had a fit. But you have been very much over-excited in some way, I should think; you appear to be quite exhausted. I will give you a restorative.”

He mixed a draught from bottles which were standing on a shelf (ranged there by Thomas’s orderly hand) and administered it. Mr. Leafdene took it very meekly, like a tired child. He held Lily’s hands still, and she had sat down in a chair which stood by the bed.

“Lily,” he said, in the appealing, weary voice, which went to her heart, “some stranger got into my room. I don’t like it—I want to be quiet. I am tired and ill. Stay with me, Lily, and don’t let strangers come in. Will you promise?”

“Yes, father,” said Lily—the reluctant words forced from her by pity and old affection.

“Thank you,” he said with a pathetic sort of humility, and immediately closed his eyes. There was a profound stillness; Lily could hear the humming of the bees in the roses at the window and the chauffeur outside moving to and fro restlessly on the smooth gravel.

“Has he gone to sleep?” she asked Dr. Ash wonderingly.

“I think so,” said Dr. Ash. “He is quite worn out. And I am bound to tell you that for the first time he seems to me to be really ill.”

“I cannot leave him,” said Lily, with a strange mixture of conviction of a sense of duty and of passionate regret and rebellion. “Will you please tell Lady Janet when you go down?”

“Yes. I am afraid you are right. I will go now as he is asleep, but I will come again early in the afternoon. Send for me if you get anxious before I come.”

Lily looked up at the doctor and saw a new concern in his face. He went out of the room and quickly down the stairs. Lady Janet, Father Kingslake and Miss Lexington were standing in the hall, and the chauffeur, who stood on the front door steps, had evidently been asserting himself. Lady Janet spoke to Dr. Ash as he came down towards her.

“Is Lily ready?” she said; “François says we shall be very late as it is.”

“Miss Lily cannot leave her father,” said Dr. Ash. “I am truly sorry, for she needs a change ; but it is impossible. Something has occurred to change Mr. Leafdene’s condition altogether. He appears to be quite himself again, but he is weak to the last degree, and quite ill. He must not be left. I shall come again as soon as I can.”

Dr. Ash, in looking round at the surprised faces of the party, was arrested by the priest’s gaze, and stood still for a moment like one fascinated. The great, dark, sombre eyes fixed on him contained a look of unmistakable triumph. Suddenly the lids drooped, Father Kingslake turned away, and went quietly out to the car.

“I felt it impossible to leave Lily here,” said Lady Janet in great perplexity ; “but I must go now without any more delay, and if you say she must stay I suppose she must. François,” she said, turning to the chauffeur, “we’ll hurry off, but stop a moment at Mr. Keane’s in the town. I’ll ask him to drive Mrs. Williams up this afternoon and make inquiries and wire to me.”

“Would you like me to stay, Lady Janet ?” suddenly asked Eve. “It seems so lonely for her. And I could—I have done all I had to do for the garden party.”

“And shouldn’t you mind missing it ?” asked Lady Janet.

“Oh, no !” said Eve with a little laugh.

Clearly there was no special attraction for her at Fallowfield.

“It would be the greatest relief to me!” exclaimed Lady Janet. “And you will send me a telegram by Mr. Keane or Dr. Ash to say how things are going on?”

“Yes, I will,” said Eve. And so, all in a moment, it was settled, and the white car, with only three persons in it, was flying at a criminal pace down the road. Lady Janet and Father Kingslake exchanged scarcely a word on the way. The car stopped but for a moment at Mr. Keane’s, as the veterinary surgeon saw it coming and was outside his house. Breathlessly Lady Janet explained as much as it was necessary for him to know, and asked him to drive Mrs. Williams up to the Hall in the afternoon and to send her a wire if there was any new development. Then the car shot on. François managed to get it to the front door at Fallowfields while the house party was still at luncheon, and Lady Janet went straight into the dining-room and took her place, followed more slowly by the priest. Her hostess smiled at her, evidently relieved at her appearance. Nothing was said about Eve at the moment. Lady Janet endeavoured to eat some food, and to talk in her ordinary manner. But she had to struggle with great difficulties. She had by no means recovered from the very strange experience through which

she had passed. And she was being stared at by a very angry pair of blue eyes directly opposite her. Captain Graham had secured that place, which did not properly belong to him, because a seat next Lady Janet had been kept for Lily Leafdene.

“ You have not brought her ? ” he managed to ask at last, across the table.

“ I could not,” answered Lady Janet.

The young man relapsed into restless gloom. He was a very determined person, and it had taken all his mother’s decision of character to prevent his going with her to Leafdene.

As soon as luncheon was over hostess and guests dispersed quickly, as it was to be a busy afternoon, and Captain Graham found no difficulty in waylaying his mother and securing a private conversation, although she tried her best to escape to her own room. He caught her on the stairs.

“ What do you want, Alec ? ” she asked, as nearly cross as she ever allowed herself to be. “ I am tired out.”

“ You have left that girl there with the old madman ? ” he demanded. “ How could you ? I shall go over myself this afternoon and get into the house somehow.”

Lady Janet felt grateful that she had said no word of the scene which she had witnessed.

“ Eve has stayed with her,” she said, “ and her

aunt, who is staying near, is going to the Hall this afternoon."

"I shall go over," said Captain Graham resolutely.

"Come in here," said Lady Janet, who had reached the door of her own room. Her maid was waiting for her; she sent her away and told her to come back in a quarter of an hour. Then she shut the door and locked it.

"Now, Alec," she said, "I've got to speak plainly. We're an impetuous family, and you are the worst of the lot for going off at a tangent, and for obstinacy, and getting your own way. Do, for Heaven's sake, listen to reason. I see quite well you've lost your head over that girl; you only want an excuse to go tearing away to Leafdene. She is a charming girl, and if you will bide your time you may get a chance. But I won't have you called a fortune-hunter, as you will be directly if you don't take care. Don't use the advantage you have unfairly. She has not come out, she knows no one, she has never seen any men—it's not fair to her."

"A fortune-hunter!" echoed Captain Graham in amazement.

"Yes. Perhaps you don't know that she is one of the greatest heiresses in England. I hope you don't know it. I didn't mean to say anything about it, in the hope you didn't."

"I hadn't the least idea," stammered Captain Graham, quite shaken out of his usual firm self-possession.

"Of course not," said Lady Janet, with a look of affection. "But now you will see that it would look bad to run after her too much while she is in that seclusion; we are so desperately poor. If you have a chance of winning her I'll wish you luck with all my heart; but you must use discretion."

"Yes," said Captain Graham, "I must go slow. Hang the money!"

A moment later he broke out violently. "I understand now! That's the meaning of the vision I had—*that's* the obstacle! It's the money. I thought it to be the mad father!"

"What *do* you mean, Alec?"

He was striding up and down the room and Lady Janet stood watching him.

"I saw her, in a vision I had one wonderful night in Egypt. I only went fooling over yesterday just for something to do, but the moment I saw her I knew her!"

Lady Janet sat down rather abruptly.

"I don't feel I can bear any more strange things at present," she said. "You know I am quite a normal person and all this wears me out. I think you will be reasonable. I have confidence in you. Promise me you won't go racing over

there and exposing us to all sorts of criticism—and when I have rested a little and dressed I will tell you what happened to-day.”

“ Oh—then—something *did* happen ? ”

“ Yes—but go now. I cannot talk any more now. I have done all I could for to-day for her, believe that.”

“ Yes, I do, mater, I have faith in you. I know you have done your best. You are a good sort.”

He went out, leaving her but a few moments in which to recover herself. “ Visions ! in Egypt ! ” she said to herself, as she sat in silence waiting for the moment when her maid would come in to dress her for the garden party. She was tired out, untidy, dusty ; yet she longed to remain as she was and to protract the moment of pause. Going downstairs meant not merely entering into the work of the afternoon, but encountering Captain Graham and reasoning with him.

When at last she left her room, quiet, cool, her normal self, she found her son loitering about the hall waiting for her.

“ I have heard Father Kingslake’s story,” he said abruptly, “ and I must talk to you.”

“ We had better go out on to the lawn,” she said. “ Mrs. Lexington will be expecting to see me there.”

They went out of the front door into the

blazing sunshine, and Lady Janet put up a blue parasol.

“You know, mater,” said her handsome son, walking close beside her, “I respect you Roman Catholics, though I am not one myself.”

“I cannot understand how you can be in opposition to the traditions and the religion of our family,” said Lady Janet.

“I cannot help it,” answered Captain Graham. “I have come in contact with an older religion, a teaching of which that of the Catholic Church is but a diluted modernism.”

Lady Janet made a little gesture which expressed disapproval and dismay. They had crossed the broad gravel space in front of the house and were slowly approaching the scattered groups on the lawn, which showed in the vivid light as spots of many colours on the background of deep green. Captain Graham walked still more slowly, for he saw that his time was very limited.

“Father Kingslake did well this morning, but he did not finally conquer. There will be a raving madman to deal with to-night, or to-morrow, according to how provocation arises. Roman Catholics have got hold of some of the truth about these things—they know that madness is obsession, except in the cases where there has been an injury to the brain itself. But they don’t know enough about obsessions. They think it is only

evil disembodied human spirits who take possession of these bodies whose owners, for some reason or other, cannot keep control of their own property. They don't realise that they may be fighting elementals, beings of much greater strength than human spirits. Father Kingslake did not stay to make such opposition to the return of the being he drove away as would prevent its return."

"He stayed quite long enough," said Lady Janet, closing her eyes as she thought of that moment when it seemed to her that the priest's life was forfeit. "It was noble—it was grand of him to do what he did."

"Oh, yes," agreed Captain Graham, "that is so—I have told him so. All that he lacks is knowledge."

Lady Janet looked at him in stupefied surprise. The impudence! The colossal impudence of these children! Captain Graham caught a side sparkle from her gleaming eyes, and went on in a tone of something like apology.

"You see, mater, I've met men who knew a lot about occultism, both in Egypt now and when I was in India. I haven't said much about it, there was no reason to talk till now, but truly I have learned a thing or two. And I honestly believe I can save Mr. Leafdene if I can have the chance to do it. Now, will you help me?"

“What do you want me to do?” asked Lady Janet, in the tone of one walking in the dark.

“Consent to my going over this afternoon and give me a note to Miss Leafdene.”

“Not this afternoon,” protested Lady Janet; “it is not necessary, and Mrs. Lexington will be justly offended. I have taken a liberty already in leaving Eve there. No, Alec, don’t be hasty, I implore you. We shall get a wire if there is any change—and that would make a reason for you to go. Now, do, for goodness’ sake, make yourself agreeable to some of these people.”

“These people” were a group of local guests who were approaching them, and whom they could not avoid without rudeness. They were immediately separated from each other and drawn into the general conversation which was being carried on. Captain Graham had to make a great effort to recover himself and play his part, but he did it gallantly. Lady Janet gave a little sigh of relief. She was quite perplexed by all he had said, and she was glad of a reprieve. She had not yet had an opportunity of explaining to Mrs. Lexington why she had left Eve at Leafdene; she had only been able to say as she left the luncheon table: “Eve offered to stay with my niece as she seemed so lonely. Her father is very ill—I do hope you don’t mind”; and Mrs. Lexington had looked concerned and said: “I want to hear

about it," but was immediately called away to decide on some urgent matter that had to be attended to. Lady Janet was glad of this postponement also ; she dreaded describing what had happened. All the afternoon, while she did her own part, she kept watch on Captain Graham. She saw that he remained among the guests, apparently in good humour, and evidently making himself popular. It was late when she went into the tea-tent—she had avoided it while it was very crowded. When there was room to sit down she went in with some of the house party who declared that they also desired a little peace and a respite from the chatter of the provincials. While she sat here a telegraph boy found her ; and on the instant Captain Graham also appeared in the tent. He came to her and put out his hand for the telegram.

"Let me see it," he said.

"Change for the worse. Dr. Ash staying in house.—EVE."

"I'd better go over and fetch both Eve and Miss Leafdene," said Captain Graham. Lady Janet rose and went out of the tent with him.

"We must speak to Mrs. Lexington," she said. They walked across a space of lawn towards where they saw their hostess.

Suddenly Captain Graham stopped. "Wait a minute, mother," he said. "While we are out of

hearing I want to tell you that I am positive I can drive out that being which is making hell at Leafdene. I know the trick. You see it has worked out just as I told you it would—Father Kingslake was not able to drive it away altogether. Get Mrs. Lexington to excuse me and to let me have the white car. Tell her I'm going to fetch Eve and to see how things are."

"Of course Eve needn't stay if Dr. Ash is there," said Lady Janet, "and if Mr. Leafdene is so ill as that I can't see what is to prevent Mrs. Williams from staying also."

"Just so," said Captain Graham.

"I'll go and speak to Mrs. Lexington," said Lady Janet, and went on. Captain Graham stayed in his conspicuous solitude for a few moments before he joined her, and a good many eyes rested admiringly on him, some of them conveying invitations which he did not even see. When he went towards Lady Janet she came to meet him.

"Mrs. Lexington is very sympathetic," she said, "but I think she will be glad to have Eve back to-night, as it seems there is a dinner-party and dance to-morrow and a great deal to do. So go and fetch her—and for the rest, I can only say I trust you."

"Thank you, mother," said Captain Graham, and was gone.

CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN GRAHAM went quickly to his room, took a small wooden object from a locked case and put it in his breast-coat pocket ; then he put on a motor-coat, and prepared himself with goggles for going at excess speed. Very soon he was away in the car, rushing along in the summer twilight, with a most determined look on his keen young face. He was firmly convinced that he knew what he had to do, and he was resolved to do it.

When the car stopped in front of the hall door at Leafdene Thomas appeared, looking scared and very white. Behind him came Eve ; she also looked strangely frightened.

“ What’s the matter ? ” Captain Graham asked her. “ Is Mr. Leafdene worse ? ”

“ Can’t you hear him ? ” she said in a low voice, putting her hand on his arm and almost clinging to him.

Yes—he heard something, indeed—a loud, raucous voice going on insistently.

“ Dr. Ash has sent one of the servants for another doctor. He says there must be two of them. He believes he’s quite mad now. He

hasn't told Mrs. Williams or Lily—but he said so to me.”

“Where is Lily?” asked Captain Graham—and no one noticed that he used the Christian name of a girl who, so far as any of those present knew, he had never seen.

“Mrs. Williams—Captain Graham; Mr. Keane—Captain Graham,” said Eve, as the others came out of the little drawing-room to see who the new-comer might be. “I expect I am wanted at Fallowfield?”

“I'm afraid so,” said Captain Graham. “Where is Miss Leafdene?”

“With her father and Dr. Ash,” answered Mrs. Williams. “Her father won't let her go out of his room.”

Captain Graham wheeled round on her.

“And you are allowing her to stay there—with a madman!”

“I can do nothing,” said poor Aunt Isabella piteously. “Dr. Ash is there. I daren't go into the room. James went into a perfect frenzy when I spoke to Lily at the door just now. But it's dreadful—he's holding her hand fast and no one dare go near. But the other doctor will be here soon.”

“I've no right to interfere,” said Mr. Keane, “or I'd soon overpower him. But Dr. Ash won't let me go in. Perhaps I make things worse by

being in the house. He seems to know who is here—and he had forbidden me to come.”

“Oh, don’t go away!” said Eve quickly. “I should be terrified if you went away!”

“Well,” said Captain Graham, “he shall soon know for certain that I’m here.”

He flung aside his motor-coat and cap, and went straight upstairs, without waiting for any permission. Following the sound of the strident voice he easily found the door of Mr. Leafdene’s room, which stood a little ajar. Sarah Langley, looking more dead than alive, stood on guard beside it.

“Are you the other doctor?” she asked in a terrified whisper. He made no answer, but went in and closed the door behind him. He saw the girl of his vision, as he had seen her in his vision, white, with wide eyes of fear and anxiety, her wrists held together as by a vice. His vision had not shown him what held those wrists—he had only known that she needed his help, and that he must give it. He saw now that what held her wrists was not an iron fetter, as he had thought it must be, but the immovable grip of her father’s hands.

“Go out of my room!” yelled Mr. Leafdene as he entered. “Ash, put that man out. I won’t have another doctor. You’re good enough for me. I can browbeat you and get what I want.

Put that young man out at once and lock the door."

Captain Graham coolly came to the foot of the great bed and taking the little wooden object from his coat pocket held it up. It was a carved cross, with four corners, so that however it might be held, or looked at, two arms faced the one who looked. Mr. Leafdene stared at it and suddenly fell silent.

"You know the power of the Cross!" said Captain Graham sternly. "Obey it!"

Mr. Leafdene had been sitting bolt upright in bed. He fell back against the pile of pillows behind him, staring fixedly at the cross. A little foam came upon his lips. Captain Graham looked intently at him.

"You are not human," he said, with sudden certainty. "It is as I thought, you are a cruel, wicked elemental playing havoc with human lives. You have never lived this life before. You do not know what is right conduct for a human being, and it will end by this body you have got possession of being taken to a mad-house. You must obey this symbol, which rules supreme in all the worlds—leave this body that you are destroying, and go back to your own place in the world you belong to!" As he spoke he raised the cross high in both hands. The sick man's eyes followed it with an awful fixity and then

turned upwards. Lily, watching him with an agonised fascination, knew that the dreadful change was coming which she had once seen, and then her own lids drooped heavily. Dr. Ash thought she fainted—perhaps she did. A moment later and the iron grip on her wrists relaxed and she fell back in her chair. Her father lay like one dead, yet with a flicker of consciousness under his quivering eyelids and on his slightly twitching lips. Lily moved a little, and her eyes opened upon him. “Father,” she said.

“My little girl,” came the murmured answer.

“He is himself again,” said Dr. Ash. As he spoke he bent over the bed and took the patient’s feeble, helpless hand, feeling for the pulse. Then he laid the hand down, carefully, as though it were a tender thing.

“We must take Miss Leafdene out of the room,” he said; “she needs air and restoratives.”

He went to her and touched her. She looked up and smiled faintly. “Father spoke to me,” she said.

“Come,” said Dr. Ash, “your father is better and does not need you just now. I want you to come downstairs, Miss Lily—your aunt is there. Let her give you some tea; you are exhausted; you have sat here so long.” While talking he lifted her, and held her, so that she steadied herself; and then he took one arm and Captain

Graham the other and they led her from the room. No sooner was she outside the door than her strength and self-possession left her—she broke out into a passion of weeping. The others were watching at the bottom of the staircase and came to her. Dr. Ash drew back. "I must return," he whispered to Mrs. Williams. "I am rather anxious about my patient. Miss Lily needs air, and eau de cologne, and smelling salts, and tea——"

So saying, he handed her over to the kindly hands held towards her.

"Dear child!" cried Mrs. Williams. "Oh, how tired you look!" exclaimed Eve. "Oh, Miss Leafdene, let me help you!" said Mr. Keane.

Captain Graham paused and turned towards Dr. Ash. "Shall I come back with you?" he asked.

Dr. Ash hesitated, looking curiously at him.

"I think not," he said, "and yet—you are directly responsible for this change which has taken place in my patient. What have you done to him?"

"I have released him from obsession," said Captain Graham; "from the control of a devil!"

"You believe that?" asked Dr. Ash.

"Of course, or I should not be here. I came here to do that, having heard from Father Kingslake that he had failed."

“I fancy,” said Dr. Ash thoughtfully, “that Father Kingslake thought he had succeeded.”

“Well,” said Captain Graham, with an expressive gesture, “we have seen that he had not.”

“Do you think *you* have ?” asked the doctor.

“I do.”

“Well—we shall see,” was the reply. Dr. Ash turned and went up the stairs. “If I want you,” he said as he went, “I will send for you.”

“Is he dying ?” asked Sarah Langley in an agonised whisper as the doctor passed her in the doorway of the sick man’s room.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “The night will show. He is very weak.”

The girl looked at him and her questioning gaze held him.

“He was strong enough a little while ago,” she said.

“Yes,” answered Dr. Ash, “the change is curious, I admit. But it is undeniable.”

He went into the room and leaned over the still form which lay on the bed. Sarah crept away. She was considering what she had best do. The night would show! Well, she must wait for that—she could not get away at this late hour. But she decided to make her preparations to go early in the morning. She must return to her old haunts, and take up her tiresome life where she had laid it down. She had had a holiday—in the country

—plenty of fresh air—plenty to eat. She surveyed herself in the glass in her room.

“ I look worse than ever,” she said to herself. “ What a misery it all is ! ” And she flung herself down on her bed and wept bitter tears. A solitary girl, alone in the world, an impostor, without hope or prospects !

In the little drawing-room the young mistress of the house, the beautiful heiress, surrounded by her friends, watched by the eager eyes of the man who loved her, wept bitter tears also.

“ Those dreadful words you said ! ” she cried to Captain Graham, who stood with downcast head like one accused. “ His hands relaxed as you said them. How *could* you ? How could you ? ”

“ It was my duty,” answered Captain Graham ; “ I did it for the best. I did it because I had to. Would you not rather have your own father, even weak and feeble, than that raving devil ? If I had not come when I did the doctors would have taken him away ! ”

At that moment a car came up to the door, and Thomas was heard answering a strange voice.

“ It is the other doctor,” said Mr. Keane, who had been looking out at the drawing-room door. Lily started up.

“ Oh ! ” she cried. “ Will they take him away ? ”

“No,” answered Captain Graham; “as he is now it would not be possible for any one to think him mad. The devil has been cast out!”

Afternoon tea stood on a table, where Thomas had arranged it, by one of the windows, and Mrs. Williams sat by the tea-tray—though no one wanted anything—as if she knew not what next to do. Her face expressed the utmost perplexity. She was lost amid circumstances and ideas which she was totally unable to understand. The prosaic comfort of the tea table had reassured her a little. She looked at Captain Graham from time to time with apprehension. Father Kingslake she had accepted, as the representative of a religion which she had never attempted to understand. But this young military man, who looked just the same as other young military men, talking of casting out devils! What did it mean? What was the world coming to?

Lily sat in a big armchair close beside her, with Eve hovering about, bathing her forehead with eau de cologne and fanning her, and keeping up a running conversation with Mr. Keane, whose healthy personality seemed to keep her spirits from flagging in the midst of the uncanny conditions which prevailed. Mr. Keane had to bring cushions, and fetch cold water, and find a fan—all of which he did at Eve’s bidding with the greatest alacrity, although his mind was in a state

of hopeless confusion as the effect of what he had seen and heard.

The two doctors were for some time upstairs, and then they came down together and consulted in the seclusion of the library. Presently Thomas was sent to ask Mrs. Williams if she would join them. She rose from the place she had clung to, by the friendly tea-tray, and went reluctantly.

“I will come, too,” said Lily, rising quickly.

“No, dear,” said Mrs. Williams, “you had better not. I will tell you what they say.”

It was not much—for the situation had developed into something quite different from what Dr. Ash had expected when he sent for a colleague. All that the other doctor could say to a relation was that the patient seemed very weak and that Dr. Ash’s treatment appeared to be perfectly correct. He had had some curious conversation with Dr. Ash and took his departure with solemnity, which hid complete mystification.

“Now,” said Mrs. Williams, “I shall stay here to-night, so you need not be anxious, Miss Lexington. I know you are needed, and Captain Graham will take you back to Fallowfield. How grateful we are to you neither Lily nor I will ever be able to say.”

“I must go,” said Dr. Ash; “the patient is quite quiet now and I shall not be needed for a while. I will call again later in the evening. I

think I had better bring up a nurse for the night. Even if Mr. Leafdene did not like to have her in his room you might find it a comfort to know she was at hand."

"Oh, yes, doctor!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, "please do. It would be the greatest comfort!"

So it was settled, and Dr. Ash drove away; soon after Captain Graham and Eve went off in the Fallowfield car. Captain Graham would have dearly liked to stay, but he saw no reasonable excuse for doing so, and his mother's words of warning made him afraid. So he reluctantly departed.

"I expect mother and I will both be over early to-morrow morning," were his last words as the car swung off.

Then Mr. Keane went, begging them to send for him if he could be the slightest use in any way.

Aunt and niece stood side by side, clinging together, in the doorway of the hall, as their friends left them. The harvest moon poured its beautiful soft light over the garden.

"What a glorious night!" said Lily, almost awestruck by the beauty of the magical scene. The unearthly effect of moonlight impressed her as it had never done before. Life seemed to her at that moment strangely mysterious. But greater mysteries than she had yet dreamed of were still to be laid before her.

Thomas came to them from the stairs.

“Master is awake, Miss Lily,” he said, “and wants to speak to you. And to you too, ma’am,” he added, addressing Mrs. Williams.

“To me !” she exclaimed in amazement.

CHAPTER X

THE moonlight poured in at the great wide-opened window of the room in which James Leafdene lay. The scents of the flowers came in upon the night air. The heavy smell of cigar smoke had gone from it. There seemed a new atmosphere, something with a quality of purification in it. A faint perfume, as of incense, came to Lily as she entered softly.

“Isabella,” said a low, weak voice from the great bed.

“Yes—oh, James!” stammered his sister. How long was it since he had spoken to her like this? Were they back in the old bedroom where he had slept when he was a little boy? She had often fancied she heard him call to her just like this. She hurried to the bedside, a hand was put out to her—she clasped it and fell on her knees, holding it tight.

“Is Lily there?” said the weak voice.

“Yes—yes—father. I am here!”

“Come close, both of you. I have a great deal I want to say to you. I want to explain things. I seem to understand them myself now better than

I have done for years. What long years they have been lately !”

He paused ; the two listeners waited, hardly breathing.

“ Lily,” he said suddenly, “ remember one thing always—I loved your mother ; I loved her truly. I love her now, as much as ever.”

There was a long pause ; and then he went on in a changed voice.

“ I was ambitious—I wanted money—and power ; I hated being a nobody—and a poor man—a tutor ! I always hated our sordid poverty even when I was a mere child. I hated it more when I went out into the world and saw how all doors are closed against the poor man. I hated it most of all when I came to this house and was treated like—like a servant ; and when I began to love the beautiful young heiress—God ! how I loved her—and how I wished it was she that was poor and I that was rich ! But I could not hide my love, though I knew well it was little short of a crime for a man in my position to love a girl in hers. No, I could not hide it—that was beyond me—especially when I saw that she leaned towards me—liked me. Of course, she was lonely. Her father was not fair to her. Lily, I have not been fair to you !”

A little exclamation as of love and forgiveness came from Lily ; and then there was a long

silence. The man lay still, gazing straight before him, yet clearly not seeing that which was present but looking upon that which was past.

His next words startled them both inexpressibly.

“I was not responsible for the boy’s death, though his father always believed I was. No, I was not responsible! But I am guilty of his death—yes, I am guilty of his death!” he repeated in an awful whisper. He drew his hands away from the two women, who were listening awestruck.

“You may not care to touch me when you have heard all,” he said. “The devil made me let that child die. I had never known till then that there was a devil—but I knew then. When the boy cried out I could have saved him, but a shape suddenly stood between us—a strange and unimaginable shape—startling and confusing me, and a voice said: ‘Let him die and the girl you love will bring you riches and power!’ Oh, God! the surge of desire that rose in me—for money and power! I sprang to the child right through this awful shape, believing I had closed my ears to the horrible temptation. But had I? Could I have been quicker? Could I have saved him if I had not stayed to listen? I shall have to answer that question after I am dead, before my Judge. I cannot, I will not, answer it now. From

that moment I was a lost soul, in the power of a tormenting devil who never ceased to taunt me. And he ruled me—he ruled this house—he made it the hell it has been these last days—this beautiful house, in the beauty of the summer ! For his place is hell, and he brought it with him here, when he came to live in me and on me. I could not escape him—I could not defy him ; I was in his power—dominated by him. Your poor mother saw him as she lay dying ; she was afraid to die because she believed he had come to take her soul to hell—poor angel ! she is in heaven—I know it ; I feel it. Her spirit did not linger here—it was that devil who dwelled in the locked room and built up his power in it. He it was who simulated her voice and imitated her thoughts—and even filled the air with her favourite scent. I understand it all now that my reason has returned to me. They are powerful, these inhuman devils ; they know well how to deceive human beings. And so, ignorant of what I was doing, I was obeying *his* orders when I locked up that room. I thought I was keeping it sacred to her spirit, and in reality I was giving him a safe place to weave his spells and form his power. Ah ! the devil that he is ! How he has deceived me, and ruined my life ! And then at last, when he had got power enough, he seized upon me myself and drove me out of my body, and I know not what

he did with it while I wandered homeless and in darkness in dim unintelligible places ! ”

The voice had become almost inaudible and the listeners had to give the most strained attention to hear the words. Complete silence fell for a while ; a great cloud obscured the moon, and the two trembling women knelt in the dimness, horror-struck by what they had heard.

“ Lily,” the voice was only a whisper now, “ give me brandy—I have something more to say.”

Mercifully, as Lily felt, the cloud passed away from the moon just then, and she was able to see as she rose and reached with trembling hands to the table where the medicines stood. She found the brandy ; when she came to try and give it her aunt whispered, “ In a spoon. I do not think he can lift his head.” So it proved to be. With difficulty, he took a few teaspoonsful of brandy and water.

“ I am so tired,” he said, “ so very tired, I must go to sleep. I shall be better in the morning after I have slept. I want to give an order, Lily—see that it is carried out. Send for workmen early to-morrow—have the door and window of the locked room set wide open, and then have everything in it carried out and burned on a bonfire. Don’t leave a single thing—and then have the room pulled down and the bricks carted away.

It will leave a dreadful gap on that side of the house, but nothing else must be built there for years till the rain has rained on the space, and the sun shone on it many hundred times. Give the order now, Lily, so that the work may be begun early—and then the devil will find his place gone, and we shall be at peace here again—peace—peace.”

He fell asleep while he was speaking. The two women moved softly away from the bedside, completely overcome.

“Let us go downstairs awhile,” said Mrs. Williams; “Thomas will come and watch for a little. Come, dear.”

She led Lily out of the room. The girl was trembling very much and seemed bewildered. Thomas was on the landing, and Mrs. Williams said to him in passing, “He has fallen asleep. Will you listen in case he should wake?” They went down into the little drawing-room, which looked cheerful and natural, Thomas having lit the lamps and put the room in order. They sat down on a couch side by side, saying a few words now and again, yet not able to speak coherently.

“I will send the order by Dr. Ash,” said Lily, and, after a pause, she went on, “I had better try and write it down before he comes”; but she did not attempt to do it—she only sat staring before her like one too confused for thought.

Suddenly they heard a sound upstairs—a loud voice—and looked at each other in dismay. In a few moments Thomas, white and scared, appeared at the door.

“The master woke up suddenly and said you wasn’t to send that order he’d told you of, miss. And that I was to say it was all nonsense and he’d been dreaming. And as I came in a hurry I heard the master jump out of bed and lock the door of his room!”

“Oh, that Dr. Ash would come!” exclaimed Mrs. Williams.

“I wish we had never let him go!” cried Lily. “He said father was not to be left—I must go to him.”

She ran from the room followed by the others, and hurried upstairs. She found the door of her father’s room securely locked on the inside. It was a heavy old oak door, with a firm Queen Anne lock on it, and would defy any interference save from skilled workmen with tools, as she well knew. She came back to Mrs. Williams, who had paused at the head of the stairs.

“He is moving about,” she said, “and in such a strange way. It sounds as if there were two people in there struggling—oh!”

There was a crash as of a chair thrown down within the room.

“What *can* be happening!” she cried. The

servants came one by one into the hall, having heard the startling sound, and stood looking up with scared faces and staring eyes. There was another crash within the room, and the servants fled back to their own quarters. Lily crept to the door of the room, listened for an awful moment, and returned with a look of terror on her face.

“There is some one besides father,” she said. “I can hear them struggling. Thomas, the long ladder—go quick and get the stablemen to bring it round and put it up against the window.”

Thomas fled.

“Who will dare to go into the room?” asked Mrs. Williams.

There was a pause, and then—

“I will,” said Lily.

“You?”

“Yes, I. There is no one else. Perhaps the men will follow me. I can’t leave father to be killed in there!”

When Dr. Ash came driving up from the lodge a little later he saw the amazing sight of Lily Leafdene climbing a ladder which was put up against the front of the house.

“What on earth is going on?” he cried, flinging himself out of his gig. The men who were grouped round the ladder explained as well as they could.

“And you’re letting her go alone, you

cowards !” cried the little doctor, and instantly started up the ladder. Lily had just reached the window and was climbing over the sill, but he was standing beside her when she had reached the floor of the room. They looked round in amazement. The room was in the wildest disorder, chairs and tables overturned, papers strewn broadcast, the bedclothes and pillows dragged off the bed and flung about in different directions. At first it seemed as if no human figure was there at all. But suddenly Dr. Ash caught sight of something which guided him, and, dashing across the room, flung aside a silken coverlet from a prostrate body. It was that of James Leafdene on his back, his arms outspread, his eyes turned up and staring horribly. Dr. Ash bent over him for some seconds, and then looked closely at his throat, drawing aside the soft collar of the silk nightgown he wore.

He raised himself stiffly, and as if with difficulty, and turned an appalled face on the girl who stood watching him.

“He is dead,” he said, “*and he has been strangled. Who is in this room besides ourselves ?*”

He stared round him fearfully.

“No one,” said Lily. “There can be no one.”

He paid no heed to her but commenced to search the room, and left no corner, no cupboard,

no crevice, unprobed. Then he stood still, pressing his forehead like one whose brain refused to act. Suddenly he roused himself.

“It is the very devil!” he said. “Well—this must be kept secret.” With hasty, confused movements, he began to put the room in some sort of order. Lily, hardly knowing what she was doing, set to work to help him. Together they put the furniture straight and lifted the piles of bedclothes and pillows on to the bed. Dr. Ash put one pillow under the dead man’s head and drew the silk coverlet over him. He knew he could not lift him alone, and he would not have Lily’s help. Then he went to the door, unlocked it and opened it.

Mrs. Williams and Thomas were standing on the landing.

“He is dead,” said Dr. Ash. “He has had a fit and must have knocked a chair over in trying to get to the door.”

Lily sank down into a chair, her limbs had suddenly given way and she could support herself no longer. When she was taken from the room she had to be carried.

CHAPTER XI

JIM KEANE was out on Black Lily early the next morning, intending to reach Leafdene Hall at a reasonable hour for inquiries. As he rode up the quiet road on his way there from a farm, where he had been to visit one of his patients, he noticed the figure of a young woman walking quickly towards the town. She carried a small bag. He knew all the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood by sight, and was puzzled not to be able to identify her. Yet it seemed to him that there was something familiar about the figure and the walk. Suddenly he recognised Sarah Langley; she turned her head a little and he knew the profile of the pale face—frightened, anxious, weary.

“She’s off!” he said to himself. “Going to the station just in time to catch the next train to London. What has happened?”

He urged his horse and galloped towards Leafdene. The hoot of a motor came behind him and he drew aside to let the white car from Fallowfield pass by.

“They must have been wired for to be so early!” he thought, as he answered nods from Lady Janet and Eve Lexington.

He could scarcely see who was in the car, it dashed by at such speed. But he was sure of those two. He urged Black Lily on in spite of the dust from the motor. It slowed down at the lodge and went quietly up towards the house ; at the same moment that he noticed this he saw that the blinds were all down in the windows of the Hall.

Dr. Ash stood in the doorway and Thomas beside him, both looking haggard.

“How is Lily ?” asked Lady Janet as they stopped at the steps. Dr. Ash came down and stood on the path by the car before he replied.

“It has been a terrible night,” he said ; “she is delirious.”

“Oh, poor child !” said Lady Janet. They all gathered round him on the sunlit gravel space in front of the silent, darkened house ; Mr. Keane dismounted and came near, too, Black Lily quietly forming one of the group. There was no chauffeur, Captain Graham had driven the car, and stood now gazing at the doctor with angry, accusing eyes.

“She ought not to have been in the house last night,” he said ; “she ought to have gone away with us.”

“Her father was quite himself when you left,” said Dr. Ash, “and he needed her. She could not have left him. Then later he had a fit—and

his death was rather dreadful—it gave her a shock.”

Captain Graham was looking so intently at him while he spoke that the doctor felt compelled to return his gaze ; he did so for a moment and then his eyes fell. Captain Graham turned away, certain that what they were being told was only a part of the truth if it was the truth at all. Lady Janet went up the steps into the house and disappeared into the dark interior. Dr. Ash followed with Captain Graham close behind him. The other two remained where they were for a moment or two.

“ I am thankful it is over,” said Eve in a very low voice, “ if only she recovers from these shocks.”

“ I think she surely will,” said Mr. Keane ; “ she is full of life and vitality. When she can be moved, and can be in quite new surroundings she will get well. I know something about human beings, though I limit my practice to the animals.”

“ Yes, I know,” said Eve, a faint smile lighting up her face. “ You really are a doctor. Do you prefer being an animals’ doctor ? ”

“ Yes, I understand animals, and I love out-of-door life.”

“ I had a message for you from Mrs. Lexington,” said Eve, in a matter-of-fact way ; she was accustomed to be her rich aunt’s messenger.

“Aunt Lexington is very anxious about some of her choice Alderneys, and told me to ask you whether Fallowfield is too far, or whether you could ride over and see them.”

“Black Lily will think nothing of the distance,” said Keane, whose heart leaped at the chance given him. He had feared that with the close of the dark tragedy of the Hall, and the certain absence of its young chatelaine, he would lose sight of all her friends.

“Can you come to-morrow morning, then?” said Eve, as she moved to go up the steps.

“I wonder if I can be of any use here?” he said doubtfully. “I would so gladly do anything I could. Otherwise I am only an intruder.”

“I will go in and see,” said Eve, “and come back and tell you.”

He stood by Black Lily, whose blue-black coat gleamed in the sunshine. Very soon Eve came out again, holding some papers in her hands.

“It is dreadful inside!” she said. “I have been to the door of Lily’s room and she is talking all the time. She is delirious. Dr. Ash says it will pass off in a little while. He says, like you, that she only needs a chance to recover and that her vitality will bring her through. Her aunt and Lady Janet are with her now. The servants have disappeared; I really don’t know if there are any in the house or if they have all run away, except

the old butler. There are all these orders written ready for tradesmen in the town, and Mrs. Williams is anxious for them to go at once——”

He took them from her and quickly mounted.

“I will take them immediately,” he said, and rode off. They smiled a little in spite of the sadness about them; both felt the pleasure of this quick comradeship.

Eve went slowly back into the house. She sat down in the shadows and thought. Captain Graham was pacing up and down the little drawing-room, watching the stairs, waiting for news of the girl in whom he manifestly took so intense an interest.

“She will recover—she is strong and young, and very beautiful and very rich,” ran Eve’s thoughts; “she has the world before her, and a wonderful life. I wonder if I envy her very much? No, I don’t think so. I don’t want to be very rich. I have always been so poor I should not understand it——” her thoughts became hazy and unformed, but she saw, as in a vision, a black horse riding down the white road, and a handsome, manly rider—and then she saw the quaint, quiet, old-world parlour in which his mother had received his visitors. And it seemed to her more homely and friendly than the beauty of the interior of Leafdene Hall or the splendour of Fallowfield.

CHAPTER XII

As soon as Lily was sufficiently recovered to be moved her friends took her to Fallowfield, where, for the first time in her life, she found herself in natural and cheerful surroundings. The stately funeral took place while she still lay weary and exhausted.

The summer was still in its splendour, and Captain Graham saw to it that she passed most of her time in a big, white-fringed hammock he had brought a thousand miles back to England, hung in a shady spot, from which she saw vistas of roses and masses of lilies, and could hear the gentle perpetual falling of the water in a fountain. They surrounded her here with kindness and bright chatter and merry laughter. The colour came back to her face, the light to her eyes, and the spring to her step. She was recovering with magical swiftness. When her thoughts turned to her father's awful death, she told herself it was merciful, because he was released from his prison of flesh and no longer in the power of the devil. For had he not expiated and repented? And she had her own life to live, away from the gloom of her youth. She saw it opening before her. But there was a dark day for her yet.

Among the letters that lay by her plate at the breakfast table one morning was one which had the name printed on the envelope of a firm of builders in the town. She paused with it in her hand, remembering that the order had been sent to them to pull down the locked room at Leafdene Hall and demolish it. The thought brought a little cloud on her face, noticed at once by those who were caring for her.

At last she opened the letter, and, as she read it, uttered a faint exclamation of distress.

“What is it, Lily dear?” asked Lady Janet, while Captain Graham, from his place on the other side of the table, watched quietly.

Lily put the letter aside and smiled, rather sadly.

“I will show it you presently,” she said.

When the breakfast party broke up, Lady Janet and her son and Lily strolled out of the open French window into the garden together. Lily held her letters in her hand, and when they had gone out of hearing of the others, she took this letter from the builders and gave it to Lady Janet to read. She read it through twice and then said to Lily:

“May I show this to Alec?” she asked her.

“Yes,” said Lily; so Captain Graham took the letter and read it.

It was to say that the firm had found an unex-

pected difficulty in carrying out the order given to them, as they discovered that none of the men in their employ would undertake to open the locked room. The firm apologised to Miss Leafdene for having to convey to her this disagreeable circumstance, but explained they had refrained from doing so until they had tried all the available workmen in the town. Was Miss Leafdene willing to incur the additional expense of bringing workmen from a distance ?

“ I’ll open it,” said Captain Graham. “ I’ll drive over this morning and do it.”

“ I will come, too,” said Lily quickly. “ It is my duty,” she added, with a little faint blush at thus recognising her new position.

Lady Janet and Captain Graham looked at each other and at Lily.

“ I think you are strong enough now,” said Lady Janet. She turned to talk to Mrs. Lexington and Eve about it ; they were coming across the lawn.

“ You are not afraid ? ” asked Captain Graham, in a low voice.

“ No——,” she said, and then added almost in a whisper, “ not with you.”

“ I will go and get the car ready at once,” he said.

She made no answer but went quickly back to the house, and reappeared in a few minutes wearing a hat and carrying a parasol. The others

gathered about her, but they did not speak of the task she had undertaken, talking instead of the news in the papers and of what they themselves were going to do during the morning. They had talked it over and decided it was best to let her go and do what she felt to be her duty, and to put confidence in Captain Graham's ability to take care of her.

So the two went off in the great white car, receiving nods and smiles from their friends, who were now going in groups in different directions. Lady Janet waved her hand to her son. He knew very well that it conveyed, "I trust you."

To him the task and responsibility he was undertaking seemed more formidable than it did to any of the others, for he knew more about it; and he was thinking over the possibility of inducing Lily to wait for him in the car, or, at all events, downstairs.

They said very little on the way, for both had much to think of. The rush through the fragrant summer air was exhilarating, and Lily felt she had been right to come, and that she was strong enough to meet all the old darkness and gloom, now that it was in her power to put an end to them.

As the car swung up the drive to the Hall Captain Graham said abruptly:

"I suppose you have the key, or it is here?"

“Thomas has it,” she said.

The old servant saw the car coming and had the door open before they reached it. They went in and for a moment only spoke greetings and commonplaces. Then suddenly Lily said, “Give me the key of the locked room, Thomas. I am going to open it!”

“Oh, Miss Lily!” began the old man—it was the first protest that had been made. She put up her hand to silence him.

“Give it me!” she said. “Captain Graham is going with me to open door and windows—then the builders will take charge and begin their work. We will shut up the rest of the house and you must go for a holiday. I am determined you shall! You refused before and now you look quite ill. I have been away and am quite strong, so I decide for you, and you must obey.”

She took the key, on its long chain, from his unwilling hand, and went up the stairs, followed close by Captain Graham. Thomas sank on a chair in the wall to wait for what might happen.

She led the way down a corridor to the door of the room, and quickly put the key into the lock. She did not even allow herself to look at her companion, but she knew he was close beside her. As she turned the key he thrust something in front of her.

“Take it!” he said. “Hold it up as you go in; it is the cross!”

She took it, pushed open the door, and advanced a step, holding it in front of her. Captain Graham, following close, threw the light of an electric torch round the room. It was a large oak-panelled room, with heavy oak furniture, a huge carved oak bedstead, and a dressing-table on which silver combs and brushes lay. A small round table in the centre of the room was quite out of keeping with the rest. Lily gave it a glance of aversion—it had been taken in for the use of the professional spiritualists.

The room was airless, close, and smelled of the dust that lay on the white, rose-patterned carpet and chintzes, with which Lily’s mother had sought to brighten its sombre beauty.

Guided by the light of his torch, Captain Graham crossed the room quickly to the window and began to draw the curtains back. These were not of the bright chintz, but dark, heavy serge, introduced at the same time as the little round table, for the purpose of keeping out every ray of daylight. As he touched them a wind suddenly rose in the room, a hot, dry wind, blowing the dust about.

“*Something* is moving,” whispered Lily.
“There is *something* here!”

Captain Graham dashed the curtains back, saw

with the help of his torch where the bar that closed the shutters was fastened. He had to put the torch in his pocket, for he needed both hands to raise the bar. For a moment they were in darkness and he heard a muffled cry from Lily. *Something* was between them—he too felt it. He flung the shutters open—threw open the window—and as he did so that something rushed past him and the wind in the room suddenly dropped. The sun and outer air streamed in—but there was no breeze—outside all was still, basking in the summer sunshine.

“Thank God!” said Lily solemnly; “it is gone!”

“Driven out by the cross,” said Captain Graham. “Come out now,” he went on, “we will leave the door wide open. Shall we drive round by the town and tell them it is all ready to go on with?”

“Yes—and let us take Thomas with us,” said Lily, as they went downstairs. “I cannot leave him here. I believe all the others have run away. He has friends in the town where he can stay—and, later, I will get him to go to other friends further away. Let us lock up all the other rooms and take the keys, and then the workmen can come in.”

Quickly this determined young mistress carried out her plans, and compelled Thomas to do as she

wished. He had been getting the house prepared for the workmen, so it did not take very long to carry out her plans. When Thomas turned the key of the great front door outside, it was with a sigh of relief that he brought it to Lily where she sat in the car waiting for him. They all looked back at the wide open window. It looked strange after so long a familiarity with its unutterable darkness and gloom. Gone for ever—now—that gloom!

“The whole thing will have to come down,” said Captain Graham.

“Yes,” answered Lily. “I have told them that. It is part of the very old side of the house, built long before the rest.”

CHAPTER XIII

LILY was really tired after this was all accomplished, and she lay in the white hammock among the roses in the afternoon. She seemed inclined to be quiet so they left her to rest. The afternoon post brought some letters for her, which gave Captain Graham an excuse to break in upon her seclusion. He gave them to her and turned to go. She lifted herself and called him back.

“ I want to ask you something,” she said. She looked pale and worn.

“ Will it tire you ? ” he asked.

“ No ; it will be a relief to me.”

He drew up a chair near the hammock and sat down.

“ I want to know how it was that you did not drive away that evil spirit altogether ? ”

“ I ought to have stayed,” he said, flushing under the tan on his face, “ but I had a reason for not doing so.” She still regarded him inquiringly so he went on : “ It is really only the spirit of the man himself who can forbid an evil spirit to return to a body of which it has had possession. I ought to have stayed beside your father till he

was strong enough to hold the cross himself and tell the demon to go away for good."

"And you did not!" she said, a faint tone of reproach in her voice.

"I *could* not," he said, embarrassed. "Perhaps some day I may be able to tell you why."

She leaned back, seeming a little disappointed. "Am I still to be among mysteries?" she said; then, seeing he did not wish to speak on that point, she turned to something else.

"Can you tell me how you learned what you know of these mysteries?" she asked.

He paused a moment, apparently a little puzzled how to begin. Then he said: "I have travelled in the East, which is full of mystery. I have been both in India and Egypt. In India my good luck brought me into contact with a high-caste Brahmin, who was very learned. He was quite a young man, and he himself, talking of mysterious things in the quaint, quiet way that surprises Westerns, accounted for his knowledge by saying he had brought it with him from a past incarnation. He gave me books to read, and he told me a good deal. He was a bitter opponent of spiritualism, which was just beginning to be a sort of craze, and he explained to me how elemental beings come to séances and pretend to be the spirits of dead people. It seems they can read our thoughts, so it is easy for them to make up

messages that please the seekers. And he told me how they like to get possession of a human body, and manage to do so very often at a séance, and how dangerous dark séances are, and how light is always good. So much he told me! I have books of notes of what he said—perhaps some day you would like me to read some of them to you—but do you care for such studies? Your experience might well give you a horror of anything but everyday life——” he paused.

“My experience,” she answered gravely, in a low, tense voice, “has given me a great desire to know the truth.”

Captain Graham gave a sigh that seemed like one of relief.

“You are safe then!” he said; “the desire to know the truth is the great safeguard of the soul.”

After a moment’s silence he went on. “My friend explained to me about the various states of consciousness and how to attain them. I was absorbed in a very busy life then and could not make any of the efforts he prescribed, but I went to Egypt soon after and was very differently placed. It was under the Egyptian sky, alone in the desert, that I got my first experience of an inner consciousness. I had a clear vision—in which I saw you.”

“Saw me!” exclaimed Lily in blank amazement.

“Yes! saw you—held as you were held the other day. I thought it was fetters that bound your wrists. I knew it was shown me because it was given to me to help you—to save you.”

“You have helped me! You have saved me!” said Lily in a broken voice. “He would soon have killed me, that cruel being, as he killed my father. I felt that was what he intended to do.”

She grew so pale at the memory that he was alarmed. “Do not let us talk any more now,” he said. “I shall get into trouble if I tire you. I see my mother approaching, and I shall get into trouble as it is if she sees you look so white.”

She rose with a laugh. “Come,” she said, “let us go and meet her.”

Later in the afternoon, when the sunset was turning the fountain into a living flame, they found themselves alone again among the roses. Suddenly she said: “I do hate mysteries! Can’t you tell me why you could not stay with my father?”

He looked earnestly at her—hesitated—considered—and then spoke.

“I, too, hate mysteries. My mother had made me promise to stay only a short time. She was afraid I should be taken for a fortune-hunter—because——”

“Because?” repeated Lily, a little bewildered.

“Because she knew I loved you—had loved

you from the moment I saw the vision and knew I was destined to meet you. She put me on my honour because she said you had not seen the world of men and knew nothing of life——”

He paused, unable to find words to continue.

“Life!” repeated Lily softly. “I know you saved my life—and it belongs to you—it is yours!”

EPILOGUE

IN this story I have gathered together episodes from real life, which reveal some of the dangers that lie in the path of those who practise what is called "spiritualism." During the war this mode of intercourse with the invisible has so greatly increased that it seems to be time for those who know what the dangers are to tell what they know. In some of my books I have expressed my conviction that the practice is dangerous, and I am often asked why I think so ; I now relate some of the events which cause me to be so convinced. If disembodied spirits of men and women were all that visited the séance room, the seeker for communication with them might only incur the danger of being selfish in calling upon them to come into the earth sphere. But any form of selfishness is the first step in black magic, and this form of it opens the way to elemental beings, man's enemies. These beings are described in Bulwer Lytton's novels and Benson's "The Image in the Sand." They are non-human, not the spirits of men, but spirits arising from the forces which surround men, from earth, air, fire, water. The salamanders work best, in the

physical world, in dark and closed rooms. They are inimical to man. We know well that while fire is a good and necessary servant, it is a most cruel master. Some of the elemental beings are friendly to man, and protect him; others are definitely his enemies. They delight in getting possession of a human body, evicting its rightful tenant. Mad-houses contain many of them; a family is made utterly wretched when one gets possession, wholly or partly, of a member of it. They are without human feelings or human sympathies, and entirely disregard human laws. It is quite possible that some of the inhumanity shown in the war may have come from their influence.

Only for entirely selfless ends is it permissible or safe to enter into communication with the inhabitants of the invisible worlds, and then only as "spirit to spirit"—"ghost to ghost"—by rising to those worlds, not endeavouring to draw down the spirits that dwell in them to the limitation of the earth life. Seldom do they come! Most often are they personated by elementals, who have the power to read human thoughts and to gratify desires.

MABEL COLLINS.

February, 1920.

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